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# SOCIAL PROTECTION AND THE GAP IN ADDRESSING GENDER BASED VIOLENCE AND THE IMPACT OF CLIMATE CHANGE IN NIGERIA

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**Abstract**
*The increasing socio-economic issues in Nigeria have raised concerns on the failure of the different social protection measures and policies introduced by the various governments. There is increasing poverty, unemployment, displacement, gender inequality, violent conflict and of course climate change which has not received the needed attention of the leaders of the country. The recent food, fuel and financial crises exacerbated many of the existing vulnerabilities facing the poor. Apart from very few such as Care of the People (COPE), most social protection programmes are implemented in an ad hoc manner by various government ministries, departments and agencies at state level and some are funded by international donors. The various governments have not adequately addressed gender issues in their implementation of social protection programmes. The aftermath of the impact of climate change has indicated that women are at the forefront of caring for the ill, family and minding children who are unable to attend school or day care. The women are limited in their access to water, sanitation, hygiene, livelihood, etc. According to World Bank, 35% of women worldwide have experienced either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence. The work explored secondary and primary data. The paper aimed at identifying the gap in Social Protection in addressing Gender Based Violence and the Impact of Climate Change in Nigeria. The Human Rights principles and social welfare theory were used to explain this work. The paper recommended adequate policy on gender-based violence with a more gender-sensitive and sustainable social protection measures.*
**Keywords:** Social Protection, Gender Based Violence, Gap, Impact and Climate Change

## Introduction

The Nigeria state practices a federal system of government where the federal government makes national policies while the state and the local governments implement the policies. However, the states are largely autonomous in terms of interpreting economic and social policies and setting up budget regimes and expenditure patterns. In line with this, states and local government areas vary in size, population, resources and capacity, which results to significant difference in poverty level, gender inequality, impact of disaster such as climate change and post-conflict re-integration and reconstruction. These socio-economic factors are strongly influenced by limited economic opportunities, spatial inequities and ethnicity in a disease country such as Nigeria.

Social protection policy has been on the agenda since 2004, when the National Planning Commission, supported by the international community, drafted a social protection strategy. More recently, the National Social Insurance Trust Fund (NSITF) drafted a social security strategy (Holmes, R and Akinrimisi, B with Morgan, J and Buck, R., 2011).

However, neither strategy has generated sufficient political traction to progress past the draft stage, despite a chapter committed to social protection in Nigeria's most recent national policy implementation plan – the Vision 20: 2020. The draft social protection policy

approached social protection using a life-cycle and gender lens, recognizing both economic and social risks, including, for example, job discrimination and harmful traditional practices (Holmes et al, 2011).

The current social protection landscape in Nigeria shows that there are some partners that fund and implement social protection including the government, donors, INGOs, CSO, etc. The government carries out conditional cash transfer through Care of the People (COPE). This was funded through the Debt Relief Gain. The resources from the fund have been allocated to government-led conditional cash transfer programmes (focusing on health, education and economic productivity) and a maternal and child health fee-waiver programme, alongside supply-side interventions in health, education and water and sanitation which are peculiar to women and girls. It was also targeted at households with specific social categories (those with children of school-going age that are female-headed, health fee waiver for pregnant women and children under five (financed through the DRG fund); and other community-based designs (Holmes et al, 2011). Other social assistance programmes are implemented in an ad hoc manner by various government ministries, departments and agencies at state level, and some are funded by international donors. Nigeria has ratified a number of key international social equity legislation instruments which form part of the transformative social protection agenda, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW, 1981) which is meant to address gender based violence in all its kinds.

Nigeria became part and signatory to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in 1992, the Kyoto Protocol in 2004, and has since given prominence to addressing climate change issues (Federal Ministry of Environment, Nigeria, National Action Plan on Gender and Climate Change for Nigeria, 2020). Women are most vulnerable to the negative impacts of climate change and gender inequality has further exacerbated these impacts through socio-cultural factors that limit women participation in governance, policy formulation, development and decision making. Policies and programmes must give due recognition to the unique contributions and skills of all members of our society. The impact of climate change on women and the gap in social protection in Nigeria is overwhelming. Deliberate effort must be made to address these effects through political will, stakeholders' commitment and effective policies that mainstream gender for national development.

**Definition of Terms**

The negative impacts of climate change on women's employment, care responsibilities, access to services and mental health (Kabeer N, Razavi S, Van D. Meulen,R 2021). These gaps have motivated an unprecedented level of advocacy for immediate action around gender (Cook and Staab, 2022). In Nigeria, there is increasing devastating state of flooding, displacement, water and sanitation issues, unavailability of farmlands etc across the country. Among the global loudest demands is for investment in strengthening national social protection systems from a gender perspective (UN Women, 2020). These calls emanate in spite of the few responses in social assistance mechanisms (mostly cash transfers) made by governments around the world including those that lead to gender inequalities (UNDP and UN Women, 2021). Sustainable Development Goal 1.3 calls for governments to 'Implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all'; in 2019, United Nations Members States agreed at the 63rd Commission on the Status of Women to 'work towards establishing or strengthening inclusive and gender-responsive social protection systems, including floors, to ensure full access to social protection for all without discrimination of any kind' (UN Women, 2019).

**Social Protection:**

A national social protection refers to the total set of social protection instruments in a particular country, as well as the various administrative mechanisms required to coordinate, implement and evaluate them (Loewe and Schüring, 2021). In recent years, weak social protection systems have been associated with persistent coverage gaps in social protection programmes, as well as inefficiencies and ineffectiveness in programme delivery (Holmes and Jones, 2013; Loewe and Schüring, 2021). Such gaps and inefficiencies have strong gendered dimensions: for example, only 44.9% of women with newborn babies receive a cash maternity benefit, and in old age, only 8.1% of women in low- and middle-income countries are covered by a pension scheme, compared to 20.8% of men (International Labour Organization, 2021).

According to the UN Women Policy Brief 2021 No.24, social protection has become an increasingly important part of the social development agenda in sub-Saharan Africa. While there has been much-needed recent work to synthesize knowledge on social protection systems generally (Loewe and Schüring, 2021), to our knowledge, no such endeavour has been undertaken from a gender perspective. Comprehensive social protection systems can contribute to poverty eradication and reduced inequalities, stimulate productive activity and economic growth, and create resilience in the face of multiple and recurrent crises - particularly if they work together with other social and labour market policies. Recently, countries in the African region have made extensive use of social protection instruments to confront the economic and social fallout of disaster such as climate change**.** The number and coverage of social protection programmes in Africa has grown steadily over the past two decades. Some countries, such as Mauritius, have achieved universal coverage of specific social protection instruments, such as old-age pensions, through a mix of contributory and non-contributory programmes. However, the overall social protection coverage remains low. In the African region, only 3.9 per cent of women enjoy comprehensive legal coverage compared to 10.8 percent of men. A reflection of vast informal labour markets show that women concentrated in the most vulnerable forms of informal employment. The government of Nigeria faces an enormous challenge- the increase in GDP has not served substantially to reduce poverty, inequality or instability, as few are still extremely rich and the poverty gap is between the rich and very poor without any average in-between (Holmes, R and Akinrimisi, B with Morgan, J and Rhiannon, B., 2011). The poverty rate doubled in the past 20 years. The Gini coefficient is high (43.8 as of 2005) and 54% of the population live in poverty – approximately 75 million people (Todaro and Smith 2012). In recent years, government and its development partners have sought to develop social protection instruments to tackle the country's high rates of poverty and vulnerability. However, there is lack of effectiveness of social protection in addressing poverty and inequality in the country. It argues that social protection in Nigeria is falling short as a response to the needs of the poor and puts forward a number of policy recommendations for consideration by government and development to strengthen the social protection agenda in the country. Poverty, inequality and instability are strongly influenced by limited economic opportunities, spatial inequities and ethnicity, age, and gender inequalities. Almost half of the Nigeria population works in the agriculture sector, which has poverty rate of 62.7% (Ojowu et al., 2007). Over 60% of the population is below 18 and children are represented disproportionately in poor households. Nigeria has a low ranking according to the Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI) which reflects inequalities in human capital, political representation and economic participation between women and men. Nigeria's under-five mortality rate is among the highest in the world (ranking 18th out of 193 countries) with rates varying from 87 deaths per 1,000 live births for children in the highest wealth quintile compared to 219 in the lowest. High rates of trafficking, prostitution and abuse mean that child protection is also a key concern. The lack of an overarching social protection policy or strategy at federal level is a key constraint to the

implementation of social protection at state level. Moreover, in practice, programmes to date have been based on a narrow conceptualization of social protection (focused largely on conditional cash transfers and two health financing mechanisms driven by the federal government) and have taken the form of ad hoc, small-scale and state-led programmes, with little inter-sectoral or state-federal coordination.

**Gender Based Violence (GBV):** Gender refers to socially constructed characteristics of women and men. It is the society's perception of what one should do or shouldn't, how one should behave or what one's roles should be, for being a man or a woman. Simply put, it is what is expected of you because you are a man or a woman in a society. These socially constructed characteristics vary from society to society based on historical and cultural background, education and other factors (Hawkesworth, 2019*)*. According to UNHCR, Gender-Based Violence (GBV) refers to harmful acts directed at an individual based on their gender. Gender-based violence can be sexual, physical, verbal, psychological (emotional) or social-economic and it can take many forms; from verbal violence and hate speech on the internet to rape or murder. From a gender equality perspective, evidence shows that social protection can narrow gender gaps in poverty rates, enhance women's access to personal income, and provide a lifeline for poor women, especially female headed households (Holmes, R and Akinrimisi, B with Morgan, J and Rhiannon, B, 2011). To do so effectively, social protection systems must be designed with gender and other inequalities in mind. In Nigeria, it seems difficult to integrate gender concerns at the strategic planning level, however, more gender responsive or transformative social protection programmes is expected to promote gender balance and prevent gender based violence. Gender-responsive social protection systems provide social assistance and ensure sustainable infrastructure. Social protection strategies typically express a country's commitment to social development and set out a vision for how to achieve it through the various components of a social protection system (Ojowu, O., Bulus, H. and Omonona, B., 2007). Resolving what constitutes a gender-responsive or transformative social protection *system* is in part a matter of having the requisite evidence or 'gender data'. Yet the lack of definitional clarity is also indicative of a political dilemma that hinges on beliefs about what is right and gender just. With the discursive emphasis on responding and/or transforming, advocacy would appear to move beyond the utilitarian 'gender aware' approach placing mothers 'at the service of the state' (Molyneux, 2006). A 'gender-transformative' approach goes further, to tackle and ultimately change the social relations and economic and political structures and systems (e.g. social norms, patterning of care and productive economies, legal and regulatory frameworks) that produce and sustain gendered inequalities in the first place (Holmes and Jones, 2013). The UN Women (2021) Policy Brief No. 24: Towards Gender-Responsive Social Protection Strategies: A Four-Step Checklist, suggested the following indicators for assessing gender considerations in social protection policies in Nigeria:

1. Inclusive framework: This included alignment with international standards, stakeholder participation in articulating and formulating the policy.
2. Recognition of gendered risks and vulnerabilities: This entails the recognition of gender-specific risks and vulnerabilities as well as structural gender inequalities.
3. Measures to address the risks for women, girls and children.
4. Monitoring and accountability: This involves both the actors that were involved in the development of the strategy and the mechanisms created to monitor its implementation. Gender-specific risks and vulnerabilities are exacerbated by structural gender inequalities that cut across and accumulate over the life course, including women's lesser access to and control over resources and exposure to gender-based violence. Social protection strategies must

recognize these inequalities and aim to address them in and through social protection policies and programmes. Women in the informal economy such as small scale business women, food crop sellers, and rural women often miss out on contributory social protection benefits. More than 70 percent of women in Nigeria are in informal employment compared to 86.4 per cent of men. Shocks such as climate change and disaster can hit workers in the informal sector particularly hard. Their means of livelihood will be affected. It is important to extend social protection to informal workers, especially women as it will help to recognize the challenges related to low levels of contributions and donor dependency.

**Climate Change:** Climate change (CC) is an inter-governmental complex challenge globally with its influence over various components of the ecological, environmental, socio-political, and socio-economic disciplines (Filho et al. 2021). Climate change is characterized based on the comprehensive long-haul temperature and precipitation trends and other components such as pressure and humidity level in the surrounding environment. Besides, the irregular weather patterns, retreating of global ice sheets, and the corresponding elevated sea level rise are among the most renowned international and domestic effects of climate change (Lipczynska-Kochany 2018). Before the industrial revolution, natural sources, including volcanoes, forest fires, and seismic activities, were regarded as the distinct sources of greenhouse gases (GHGs) such as $CO_2$, $CH_4$, $N_2O$, and $H_2O$ into the atmosphere (Abbass 2022). United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) struck a major agreement to tackle climate change and accelerate and intensify the actions and investments required for a sustainable low-carbon future at Conference of the Parties (COP-21) in Paris on December 12, 2015. The Paris Agreement expands on the Convention by bringing all nations together for the first time in a single cause to undertake ambitious measures to prevent climate change and adapt to its impacts, with increased funding to assist developing countries in doing so. As so, it marks a turning point in the global climate fight. The core goal of the Paris Agreement is to improve the global response to the threat of climate change by keeping the global temperature rise this century well below 2 °C, over pre-industrial levels and to pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5° C (Sharma et al. 2020). Furthermore, the agreement aspires to strengthen nations' ability to deal with the effects of climate change and align financing flows with low GHG emissions and climate-resilient paths (Abbass 2020). To achieve these lofty goals, adequate financial resources must be mobilized and provided, as well as a new technology framework and expanded capacity building, allowing developing countries and the most vulnerable countries to act under their respective national objectives. The agreement also establishes a more transparent action and support mechanism. All Parties are required by the Paris Agreement to do their best through "nationally determined contributions" (NDCs) and to strengthen these efforts in the coming years (Balsalobre-Lorente et al. 2020). It includes obligations that all Parties regularly report on their emissions and implementation activities. A global stock-take will be conducted every five years to review collective progress toward the agreement's goal and inform the Parties' future individual actions. However, anthropogenic activities are currently regarded as most accountable for CC (Murshed et al. 2022). Apart from the industrial revolution, other anthropogenic activities include excessive agricultural operations, which further involve the high use of fuel-based mechanization, burning of agricultural residues, burning fossil fuels, deforestation, national and domestic transportation sectors, etc. (Huang et al. 2016). Consequently, these anthropogenic activities lead to climatic catastrophes, damaging local and global infrastructure, human health, and total productivity. Energy consumption has mounted GHGs levels concerning warming temperatures as most of the energy production in developing countries such as Nigeria comes from fossil fuels (Balsalobre-Lorente et al. 2022; Abbass et al. 2021a). Observed changes in the climate systems underlie predictions on its future dynamics both in social and ecological terms. Evans (2013)

notes that in addition to its geophysical impacts such as temperature increases, the changes will impact social and environmental systems through hazards such as excessive heat and the melting of glaciers, which will result in secondary impacts including desertification, coastal flooding, land degradation, reduced crop yield, low water availability and food insecurity, among others. According to Bello (2012)**,** Nigeria's climate has been witnessing a sizable shift in temperature, rainfall, storm and sea level rise. The COP28 targeted Global Goal on Adaptation (GGA) with a framework, which identify where the world needs to get to in order to be resilient to the impacts of a changing climate and to assess countries' efforts. The GGA framework reflects a global consensus on adaptation targets and the need for finance, technology and capacity-building support to achieve them. In 2020, the Department of Climate Change, Federal Ministry of Environment developed National Action Plan on Gender and Climate Change for Nigeria. The main goal of the action plan was "to ensure that national climate change efforts in Nigeria mainstream gender considerations so that women, men, youth and other vulnerable groups can have access to, participate in, contribute to and hence optimally benefit from climate change initiatives, programs, policies and funds" (Federal Ministry of Environment, Nigeria, 2020). Despite Nigeria's reliance on crude oil, a large percentage of the population (70%), especially women, are involved in agriculture and other economic activities. Agricultural practices, pastoral and nomadic animal husbandry activities all dependent on favourable climate conditions and vulnerable negative impact of climate change. As such, the impact of climate change on agriculture, water resources and pastures affecting livelihoods impedes development activities and impacts on men and especially women who are economically dependent on agricultural activities. Based on this, social protection policies need to take huge consideration on the welfare and empowerment of the women who are mostly into rural agriculture and family; they are the care givers in their families. Humanity has progressively come to recognize that females and males experience the impacts of climate change differently. Gender issues worsen the coping and adaptive capacities of vulnerable groups especially women and children. Linking climate change to human development and particularly gendering its impacts remains crucial as its social consequences are not gender neutral, due to social inequalities which make males and females affected differently by climate change.

**Gap:** Policy makers need to close the gaps by extending coverage and strengthening social protection floors, including as part of the 2015 Addis Ababa Declaration on Transforming Africa and the African Union's *Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want*. The climate change has added further momentum to the regional social protection agenda, with many countries rolling out or scaling up social protection mechanisms to protect people against the economic and social fallout of the crisis. It remains to be seen whether this trend will hold, and governments will continue to invest in social protection systems that make individuals and families more resilient to health, economic and climate-related shocks. From a gender equality perspective, it is paramount to take advantage of this momentum. Evidence shows that social protection can narrow gender gaps in poverty rates, enhance women's access to personal income, and provide a lifeline for poor women, especially female headed households, due to widowhood and other factors.

**Impact: This is a** forceful effect between two or more things, or the force of impression of one thing on another. It is the action of one object coming forcibly into contact with another and causing devastating injury. It is the situation where there is strong effect on someone or something. Climate change, poverty, and inequality are linked. The impact of climate change causes poverty, inequality, diseases, death, etc. Climate change contributes to fragility and the risk of conflict and disaster. Climate-fueled disasters were the number one driver of internal displacement over the last decade - forcing an estimated 32 million people from their homes in

2022 alone. Hunger is already increasing due to climate change. People are being forced from their livelihoods, homes and communities due to climate shocks and persistent climate stress indigenous peoples being among those at greatest risk of displacement. Climate change increases the need for life-saving assistance and protection for those facing humanitarian disasters (Oxfam 2023).

**Human Right Principles and Social Welfare Theory:** This UN Human Rights Commission stipulates that human rights are inherent to all human beings, whatever nationality, place or residence, sex, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, language or any other status. The principles are universal and inalienable, Interdependent and indivisible, equal and non-discriminatory and both rights and obligations. The social protection systems should align with human rights principle. The principles of equality and non-discrimination can be better utilized to overcome wide and persistent coverage gaps for women, including through application to various system components and mechanisms such as personal identification systems and targeting mechanisms. (Enweko, 2012). For instance in South Africa, the human rights perspective is applied to the conceptualization and implementation of the national social protection system as it interacts with labour applies a human rights perspective (Matthews, 2020). In explaining the human rights principles, Matthews mentioned that social welfare theory helps to emphasize the role of interest groups in defining welfare and why some groups remain marginalized to the welfare enterprise of a nation. Applying this principle in the case of Nigeria, the study observed that discrimination, masculinity, and patriarchy in decision making and socio-cultural benefits are the continuous attitudes that lead to the exclusion of women from accessing social protection as much since they are mostly vulnerable to the impact of climate change.

**Challenges and Addressing Gender Based Violence and the Impact of Climate Change through Gender-Responsive Social Protection**

There are challenges facing efforts to promote more inclusive and gender-sensitive policies and programmes such as weakness of social protection institutional arrangements in many low-income countries' (Holmes and Jones, 2013: 191). The ability of social protection strategies to recognize and address gender-specific risks and vulnerabilities across Nigeria during disaster and climate change is important. These strategies can help address the following:

1. **Maternity-related economic insecurity:** This includes loss of income, before and/or after childbirth and the aftermath of climate change impact. It also impacts negatively on adolescent girls' educational or future economic opportunities.
2. **Common gender-specific life course:** For example, recognition of widowhood is a gap that needs to be addressed. This can be done through gender analysis where there are specifics to the vulnerability of groups that are categorized according to age, income, education, status, etc.
3. **Women experience heightened vulnerability and income insecurity in old age following a lifetime of economic disadvantage:** Gender-specific life risks and vulnerabilities intersect and are exacerbated by structural gender inequalities that cut across and accumulate over the life course, including women's lesser access to and control over resources and exposure to gender-based violence. To work for women, social protection strategies must recognize these inequalities and aim to address them in and through social protection policies and programmes
4. **The UN Women data from 2018:** This indicated that in sub-Saharan Africa, 21.5 per cent of ever-partnered women and girls aged 15 to 49 have been subjected to physical or sexual violence. Climate change and displacement exacerbate GBV both globally and in the Africa and Nigeria in particular. To be gender-responsive, social protection systems can and must address this issue. A growing body of evidence suggests cash transfers, a common non-contributory social protection instrument, may reduce the incidence of violence against women

in monogamous and polygamous families .It appears that cash transfers are the strongest when they are well-coordinated with specific GBV services, pointing to the importance of synergies between social protection and public services.

5. **Trafficking, commercial sex and conflict-related sexual violence:** Other violence against women goes beyond violence that occurs within intimate partnerships and families to also include trafficking and conflict-related sexual violence. A rights-based approach to social protection also requires robust accountability mechanisms, including participatory, monitoring and evaluation frameworks and grievance and redress mechanisms.

**Conclusion**

The gendered effect of climate change shows social and economic impact on women with little social protection to address such gender inequality in accessing the benefits of national resources (Smith 2022). Advocacy for social protection that addresses gender inequality from a systems perspective is a welcomed step. This because it does not only demonstrate a move beyond the erroneous assumption pervading development practice for over two decades – that cash (transfers) can solve all problems. Where the existing social protection systems have institutional features and benefit packages for all, it is observed that adequate actions are not taken to understand the basic needs of women and the context for implementation of social protection across Nigeria. No much identified studies and research in understanding the process, politics and outcomes, particularly through the perspective of existing and potential social protection beneficiaries. Such research could go a long way towards creating gender-responsive and nationally appropriate roadmaps for social protection systems.

**Recommendations**

In view of creating inclusive social protection systems, at least at the level of national strategy, further efforts are required to ensure that gender gaps, risks and biases are systematically recognized and addressed. For effective recovery from climate change and to establish future resilience in Nigeria, it is important for the government to invest in gender-responsive social protection systems and create synergies with other social policy efforts to stimulate labour force participation, support care and promote social cohesion. The government should develop an inclusive social protection policy framework to provide clear institutional roles and responsibilities, lay out numerous options for social protection in the country. A national dialogue and knowledge exchange on the different types of social protection interventions suitable in the Nigerian context, and promote inter-sectoral and federal-state coordination has become germane to achieve a robust and inclusive social protection for the citizens in the country. There must be political commitment to social protection at the federal, state and loval levels and this should be demonstrated through the allocation of adequate resources and finances for the scaling up of social protection programming; domestic resources that would promote future economic growth and human capital that are specifically targeted at social protection. Gender mainstreaming in policy development and implementation is key; to do so effectively, social protection systems must be designed with gender and other inequalities in mind. There should be monitoring committee on the national social protection and civil society organizations that target women and gender should be part of the core and steering committee. Stakeholders and implementing team should generate a gender data and analysis that will inform the design and implementation of social protection strategies and programmes, as well as monitor and evaluate their performance and outcomes.

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