**NATIONAL GENDER POLICY [2021-2026]**

**Introduction/Background**

The National Gender Policy provides guidelines for mainstreaming gender in various sectors of the economy with the overall goal of reducing gender inequalities and enhancing participation of women, men, girls and boys in socio-economic and political development.

The 2021-2026 policy draws from the 2006 National Gender Policy whose overall goal was to provide ‘strategic policy guidance for mainstreaming gender at all levels as well as address the inequalities that exist in the socio-economic sphere’, and combat all forms of violence against women and girls, among other things. It further draws from regional and international instruments to which Nigeria is a party. The persistence of gender inequalities and under representation of women in decision making positions at all levels continue to provide the need for a gender policy to provide the policy framework for addressing them. The overall goal of the policy is “to build a just society devoid of discrimination, where bthe needs and concerns of women, men, girls, and boys are mainstreamed equitably into all sectors of national development”.[[1]](#footnote-2)

The National Gender Policy is linked to relevant regional and international instruments and protocols. At the national level, among others, the Policy has strong linkages to several policies and and instruments such as the Nigerian Constitution, education policy, reproduction health policy, the agriculture policy, the environmental policy, national youth policy.

Several international conferences and United Nations conventions raised the tempo for Governments and State Parties to promote gender equity and equality. Showing its political will and commitment to gender equality and empowerment of women, the Government of Nigeria ratified and is a signatory to several regional and international instruments and committments. The most notable instruments and committments are: the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Convention on the Rights of the Cahild (CRC), the Vienna Conference on Human Rights, and the Beijing Platform for Action (BpfA), New P[artnership for African Development (NEPAD), AU Solemn Declaration for Gender Equality, African Protocol on People’s Rights, and the Rights of Women (APPRRW), International Conference on Population Development Plan of Action (ICPD PoA), the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and importantly, the Nigerian Economic Recovery and Growth Plan (2017-2020).[[2]](#footnote-3) All these are human rights instruments for the advancement of women and children. The international and regional instruments provide useful reference material for the development of national instruments particularly the Nigerian Constitution which upholds the principle of gender equality and women’s rights related national laws on gender equality.

**RATIONALE OF THE POLICY**

The Nigerian revised National Gender Policy (2021-2026) commits Nigeria to a bolder and more ambitious vision for gender equality and the empowerment of all children, adolescents, and women. Unlike the 2006 National Gender Policy that was conceptualised on institutional engagement, the 2021-2026 revised National Gender Policy places practical and strategic gender needs at the heart of both the policy and Nigeria’s common objective of achieving social inclusion and promoting shared values regardless of ethnicity, sex, or other differences. Alongside equity and empowerment, these have become the vanguards of national life and pro-poor development aspirations.

Furthermore, the reasoning/grounds for the revised National Gender Policy is that it affirms the importance of gender equality, not only as a fundamental human right but also as essential to poverty reduction and improved living standards, sustainable economic growth, effective and accountable governance. Gender equality is crucial for socio-economic development as well as the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals, including the Agenda 2063.[[3]](#footnote-4)

**OBJECTIVES OF THE POLICY**

The broad objectives of the revised policy are developed based on the overall goal, the guiding principles, lessons from achievements, and challenges faced over the period by women and men, boys and girls which culminated by the revision of the 2006 Ntional Gender Policy. Therefore, the policy seeks to achieve the following broad objectives:

1. Bridge gender/social inclusion gaps and achieve parity in all spheres of life.
2. Protect women’s human rights and mitigate sexual and gender-based violence through approprioate buffers and related services.
3. Explore and fully harness women’s human capital assets as a growth driver for national development through women’s economic empowerment.
4. Advance women’s participation and representation in leadership and governance.
5. Support women and girls’ education, lifelong health, survival, and sustainable development.
6. Ensure that gender equity concerns are integrated into social protection, and complex humanitarian actions, legislations, and policies
7. Ensure that the socially excluded groups (e.g. persons with disabilities, the elderly, and the poor) are mainstreamed in development practice.[[4]](#footnote-5)

The overarching goal of the policy flowing from above is thus: to mainstream gender equality and women’s empowerment concerns into the national development process in order to improve the social, legal, civic, political, economic, and cultural conditions of the people of Nigeria; particularly women and men, boys and girls, elderly, poor and pesons with disabilities in an appreciable manner as required by national and international frameworks.

**STRUCTURE OF THE POLICY**

The revised policy seeks to address the systemic nature of gender mainstreaming and the need for both traditional and non-traditional gender sectors to embrace gender transformation and the changes which accompany this. The National Gender Policy aims to institute a paradigm shift in national policy-making and implementation from a gender –sensitive position that presumes gender equality and equity, to a gender-aware position which acknowledges that barriers exist which prevent equal access and thus creates inequality.

Structurally, the revised policy is premised on the following key underpinning principles, values and philosophies:

* The promotion and protection of of women’s rights, provision of social buffers and safety nets, social justice, and equity are critical to national cohesion, growth, and stability;
* The uniqeness of the needs of women and girls, compared to those of men and boys, are not homogeneous, originate from varying circumstances, and therefore demand tailored policy responses at sector and sub-sector levels;
* The gender policyis central to the achievement of overall national development goals, objectives, and targets on many fronts and from both the macro to the micro-economic levels as gender equality is a driver of growth and good governance;
* The cooperative interaction of all stakeholders, including government, private sector, civil society organizations, traditional and religious leaders, community-based organizations, and development partners at all levels is required to drive effective implementation of the policy;
* The implementation of the policy shall build on existing structures, and draw on international policy frameworks, protocols, experiences, and practices including affirmative action interventions focused on women, recognising them as a corrective measure to bridge gaps in opprtunities and access to resources; and
* Gender analysis is an integral part and essential component of all policy articulation, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation.[[5]](#footnote-6)
* Gender mainstreaming shall be the core strategy for achieving the policy objectives and targets.

The policy adopts the gender mainstreaming strategy to draw attention to how women, men, girls, and boys are influenced and affected by policy decisions and programme executions and the need for a two-pronged approached to redressing gender inequalities. Gender mainstreaming is the globally recognized strategy for successfully advancing gender equality and equity in society.[[6]](#footnote-7)

The policy has an estimated life span of five years, 2021-2026 with a review at the expiry of the NGP.

**CONTENTS OF THE POLICY**

The National Gender Policy contain the following standard componrnts: a purpose statement, outlining why the organization issued the policy, and what its desired effect of the policy should be; an applicability and scope statement; effective date which indicates when the policy comes into force; policy statements indicating the specific regulations, requirements, or modifications to organizational behaviour that the policy is creating; background, indicating history, and interest that led to the creation of the policy and definition section. All these and more are contained in the follwing sections: (1) Objectives, (2) Policy Statement (3) Procedures that explain its implementation and operation, (4) Stakeholders and (5) Additional Information. These comprise the following sections of the Policy:

1. Section 1: Context and Rationale
2. Section 2: Policy Framework, Guiding Principles, Goals and Objectives
3. Section 3: Policy Priorities, Objectives, Targets & Strategic Actions
4. Section 4: Institutional And Implementation Frameworks & Delivery Strategies for the Policy
5. Section 5: Conclusion

The National Gender Policy has an Appendix that deals with operational definitions. It provides clear and unambiguous definitions for terms and concepts found in the policy document. Concepts such as gender, CEDAW, empowerment, gender awareness, gender and development (GAD), etc. are included in the definition section.

**COVERAGE /SCOPE OF APPLICATION OF THE POLICY[[7]](#footnote-8)**

The NGP will apply its gender policy throughout its activities. The NGP objectives[[8]](#footnote-9) apply across four (4) interconnected levels:

(a). **At the institutional level:** The policy addresses gender issues in its day-day governance, operations and procedures, and its performance measurement frameworks as reflected in the targets and strategic actions while committing the necessary resources, financial and human, to make this approach robust and effective;

(b) **At the portfolio/project level:**

To address and reduce gender inequality, deepen stakeholder engagement and deliver better accountability to both men and women to generate sustainable livelihood opportunities, health and well-being, and resilience against discrimination;

(c) **At the National Level:**

To support and sustain an enabling environment the various stakeholders-including MDAs, partners-that build on existing policy commitments, social standards, and redress mechanisms to achieve gender equality in accordance with the policy document.

(**d) At the Sector Level**

To contribute to high quality, more comprehensive, systematic and participatory data collection, qualitative and quantifiable gender analysis and action plans, and knowledge base that support gender-related learning outcomes.

Hence, in this way, NGP will support an institutional culture and enabling environment that integrates gender equality, vertically and horizontally across diverse stakeholders and frameworks through the course of the policy life cycle (2021-2026)

In addition, the National Gender Policy is anchored within the framework of the Constitution of Nigeria 1999 (as amended), which guarantees equality and right to freedom from discrimination; and the various global, regional, and national policy commitments to gender equality and human rights (including CEDAW; the Beijing Platform of Action; the MDGs; the African Charter and its Protocols for Gender Equality, etc).

The policy framework revolves around four (4) pillars that cover the practical and strategic needs of women and the poor, viz: (1) Policies and Legislations; (2) Systems and Structures; (3) Processes, Procedures and Mechanisms, and (4) Services, Goods and Products.[[9]](#footnote-10)

The policy is targeting the following areas: gender in education and training; health; agriculture, food security and nutrition; natural resources; environment, economic devrelopment; governance and human rights. The policy also prioritizes gender perspective in gender based violence and capacity of the national gender machinery.

The NGP is pushing vigorously for a level playing field in terms of gender equity and social inclusion in all spheres of life, thereby promoting the Gender Equality, Empowerment of Women, and Social Inclusion Agenda (GEESI)[[10]](#footnote-11)

**CONCLUSION**

With the new and revised policy in place, the Nigerian government can learn from the previous policies and ensure that there is clear tracking and monitoring of the impact of each of the objectives so as to fully do away with gender inequality in the country. Thus, the major challenge will be how to move from policy prescription projected in this policy document to the actualization of the policy frameworks. Hence, to achieve the policy goals, the following elements must be considered and adhered to: political will, gender as a core value for transforming the Nigerian society, confronting patriarchy and coordination, networking, and monitoring.

1. See section 2.3 of the Policy [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. See Forward to the National Gender Policy by Dame Pauline K.Tallen, Honourable Minister, Federal Ministry of Women Affairs, 2021 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. See section 2.1 of the Revised National Gender Policy (2021-2026) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. See 2.4 of the National Gender Policy, 2021-2026: Policy Strategic Objectives [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. Further see section 2.2 of the Revised National Gender Policy, 2021-2026 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. See section 4.2.2 of the Policy. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. Sections 3 and 4 of the Policy respectively. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. See section 2.4 of the Policy [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. For more, see section 2 of the Policy. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. Ibid, section 2.1 [↑](#footnote-ref-11)