

Introduction:

The forth coming United Nations Commission on the Status of Women<sup>59</sup> session will discuss reviews and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995) and the outcomes of the twenty- third special session of the General Assembly (2000) on world women and girls from March 9-20, 2015. World Igbo Congress welcomes this session with a review and appraisal on the theme **“Picturing the 20 years of Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action on Igbo Women and Girls”**

**World Igbo Congress through its Women and Family Affairs Committee (WFAC) in noting the Economic and Social Council resolutions 1987/24, 1990/15, 1996/6, 2001/4, 2006/9 and 2009/15, decided at its 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Convention in August 2014 to appraise the 20 years of Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action on Igbo women and girls with significant focus on the twelve critical areas of the Beijing Declaration.**

### **20 Years REVIEW and ACHIEVEMENTS OF BEIJING PLATFORM FOR ACTION on Igbo Women and Girls**

The Igbo Race has its ancestral history of protection, care and overall responsibility on the Igbo women and girls and all efforts towards communal growth and development have significant responsibilities for community men and boys on women and girls. The action to assess, appreciate and improve lives of women across the world dating back to December 8, 1972 when the United Nations adopted a resolution to declare 1975 to 1985 International Decade, along with the issues raised at the Nairobi World Conference held in 1985 strengthened the communal responsibilities of men and boys and guided strategies to help improve the lives of Igbo women and girls. The twelve critical issues of Beijing Declaration and platform for Action were rooted from the guided strategies.

Considering the critical issues in the past 20 years Women and Family Affairs Committee through their grassroots, national and global work on **Better Woman Better Family Initiative, The Future Women Want and Turn the Wheel in ending Violence against Igbo Women and Girls, WidowCare and UNSUNG-Widower Global Outreach** note the following review on Igbo women and girls;

- i. **Eradication of Poverty on Women:** Igbo women in spite of the acclaimed progress report on poverty eradication still live in ardent poverty with committed toils and struggle to overcome poverty. In the rural area where over 80% of the women reside, majority are peasant farmers or petty traders who are unable to sustain their trades for meaningful earnings.
- ii. **Unequal and Inadequate Access to Education and Training:** the recent global campaign on education has compelled Igbo women to see education as a tool for self-acquisition and poverty eradication. Igbo leaders, organizations and groups have established schools in market places to encourage education in various areas and careers
- iii. **Inadequate and Unequal Access to Healthcare and Related Services:** Igbo women’s health especially reproductive health is yet to be adequately put in place. Most women still die during pregnancy and maternal mortality rate remains of greater percentage
- iv. **Violence Against Women:** Violence has reared its ugly head in different forms- physical, psychological, neglect, rape, culture-induced especially against widows. What is more, the abused most often refuse to go public for fear of marginalization and stigmatization. The definition is

- given different connotations according to religion, culture or society thereby giving violence continued relevance in the community
- v. **The Effects of Armed or other kinds of conflict on women, including those living under foreign occupation:** Majority of Igbo women and girls are victims of communal, cultural and religious wars
  - vi. **Inequality in Economic Structures and Policies in all Forms of Productive Activities and in access to Resources:** Igbo women and girls are very limited to global knowledge and resources for trade partnerships and this restricts the realization of their full potentials in business and trade
  - vii. **Inequality between Men and Women in the sharing of power and decision-making at all levels:** Under the democratic dispensation, culture inhibits the full participation of Igbo women in politics and community decision making processes. Culture has continued to posit that women stay home to cater for the family irrespective of their education
  - viii. **Insufficient Mechanisms at all levels to promote the advancement of women:** The policy framework that needs to boost this sector is often not in place. For example, CEDAW seeks to ensure that all forms of discrimination against women is removed, the Child Rights Act caters for the interest of children but these laws are yet to be ratified or domesticated in any of the seven Igbo speaking states for the interest of Igbo women and girls
  - ix. **Lack of respect for, inadequate promotion and protection of the Human Rights of Igbo women and girls:** Women's rights are human rights but in the area under review, Igbo women's issues are undermined and their rights trampled upon. However, in spite of the work of civil society groups on education and advocacy with women on their rights, Igbo women are yet to utilize their human rights adequately. The case of Chekwube Mbaka, a 16-year old girl gang-raped to death in Igbo land is a documented case in this regard by Women and Family Affairs Committee
  - x. **Stereotyping of Women and Inequality in women's access to and participation in all communication systems, especially in the media:** Igbo women in their efforts to take part in national development experience stereotypes inefficiencies thereby hindering their capabilities and potentials
  - xi. **Gender Inequalities in the management of natural resources and safeguarding of the environment:** Igbo women are expected to protect and conserve natural resources but instead they are forced to fetch firewood to do their cooking thereby hindering them from knowledge of alternative and affordable energy and this degrades the environment
  - xii. **Persistent discrimination against and violation of the rights of the Igbo girl:** The lot on the Igbo girl-child seems to be greatly improved with the high level of literacy achieved over the years; yet a good number of Igbo girls are still faced with cultural policy and family economic syndrome and are therefore married out either to aged men or rich men to help in the family economic situations

In spite of these reviews, Women and Family Affairs Committee of World Igbo Congress joins women across the world to note that more is yet to be achieved in the twenty years on the Beijing Declaration and platform for action especially on Igbo Women and Girls.

#### **World Igbo Congress Emerging Priorities from Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action:**

In the next three to five years, World Igbo Congress through the Women and Family Affairs Committee programs will;

- i. Establish Better Woman Better Family Advocacy Taskforce to reach various Stakeholders and leaders of Ala Igbo on the outcome document on CSW59 session and implementation of all of the Beijing Declaration critical issues
- ii. World Igbo Congress will launch **My Sisters Health Watch** for Igbo Women to be used as a HealthCare Scheme for Igbo women and girls in **WIC Medical Center of Excellence** now in development at Owerri, Imo State Nigeria
- iii. Women and Family Affairs Committee will Launch **One Million Igbo Women Support Group** on approval of **World Igbo Congress Women (WIC-WOMEN)** by the WIC Board of Governors. This Support Group will provide various empowerment support to Igbo women in poor and needy situations and address each of the existing challenges from the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action
- iv. Women and Family Affairs Committee will continue its Community and Global empowerment programs through conference, trainings and workshops on United Nations policies for women and girls and the advancement of Igbo Women and girls

### **World Igbo Congress Sustainable Development Goals and the Post-2015 Development Agenda for Igbo Women and Girls:**

The recent United Nations agreed 17 Sustainable Development Goals and 169 targets all focused on global concerns on women and girls. World Igbo Congress will through its Committees establish **Sustainable Development Goals Taskforce** to work on Ideal Sustainable Development Goals Operating Manual that will ensure effective implementation of the goals on critical concerns of Igbo Women and girls. Through the Operating Manual adequate provision for data and statistics on each of the twelve critical issues from the Beijing Declaration will be included to allow effective implementation of the goals and Commission on Status of Women Sessions outcome in various Igbo States and the Diaspora. The Special Consultative Status of World Igbo Congress since 2012 will strengthen the mission of World Igbo Congress standalone action in the Leave No One Behind of the Sustainable Goals in working to the actualization of the Sustainable goals in Ala Igbo. The clarion call of action rests on World Igbo Congress committed work to ensure the implementation of all of the Sustainable Goals on Igbo women and girls by bringing to the minds of Igbo Stakeholders, Government, Legislators, Council of Elders and Traditional Council to existing challenges that could impinge on the potentials of Igbo women and girls on development of the goals for Ala Igbo and achieving the successes of the Post 2015 Development Agenda.