

# **NATIONAL GUIDELINES ON WOMEN'S AND GIRLS' EMPOWERMENT FOR OPTIMAL NUTRITION**



**FEDERAL MINISTRY OF  
WOMEN AFFAIRS,  
NIGERIA**



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF ACRONYMS/ABBREVIATIONS .....	6
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	11
FOREWORD .....	12
PART 1 .....	13
1.0 INTRODUCTION .....	13
1.1 Background of the Guidelines .....	13
1.1.1 Global context.....	15
1.1.2 National sectoral efforts .....	17
1.2 Purpose, Goal, and Objectives .....	22
1.2.1 Purpose of the guidelines .....	22
1.2.2 Goal .....	22
1.2.3 Objectives of the guidelines.....	22
1.3 Women's and Girls' Nutrition Situation in Nigeria .....	24
1.4 Importance of Women and Girls' Empowerment for Optimal Nutrition.....	27
1.5 Link between Empowerment and Improved Nutrition Outcomes .....	28
PART 2 .....	31
2.0 KEY PRINCIPLES THAT UNDERPIN WOMEN AND GIRLS' EMPOWERMENT .....	31
2.1 Gender Equality and Women's Rights .....	31
2.2 Participation and Inclusion .....	33
2.2.1 Guiding principles for women and girls' participation and inclusion .....	34
2.2.2 Implementation strategies for women and girls' participation and inclusion .....	35
2.3 Access to Resources .....	36
2.3.1 Guiding principles for women and girls' access to resources .....	36
2.3.2 Implementation strategies for women and girls' access to resources .....	37
2.4 Capacity Building and Skills Development for Women and Girls' Empowerment in Nutrition .....	38
2.5 Social Behavioral Change (SBC) .....	39
2.6 Collaboration and Coordination.....	40
2.7 Nature of Guidelines and Intended Users .....	43
2.7.1 Nature of the guidelines.....	43
PART 3 .....	48



<b>3.0 ISSUES, CHALLENGES AND PROGRAM INITIATIVES</b> .....	48
3.1 Issues and Challenges.....	48
3.1.1 Climate change, food security, and nutrition .....	48
3.1.2 Participation, voice, and leadership in policy and decision-making.....	49
3.1.3 Economic and social empowerment.....	51
3.1.4 Access to financial services and social capital .....	52
3.1.5 Access to education, capacity building, training, knowledge and information services .....	53
3.1.6 Social protection and food and nutrition assistance .....	55
3.1.7 Establishment and strengthening of food system supply chain for smallholder farmers .....	57
3.1.8 Nutrition during conflicts, humanitarian crises, and emergencies .....	58
3.1.9 Eliminating all forms of violence against women and girls .....	61
3.1.10 Access to healthcare for women and girls.....	64
3.1.11 Social and cultural norms inhibiting women and girls' nutrition .....	65
3.2 Programme Initiatives .....	68
3.2.1 Available documentation evidence and experience .....	69
3.2.2 Initiatives and pilot programmes on women and girls' nutrition .....	70
3.2.3 Best practices from existing initiatives.....	72
3.2.4 Replication and scale-up .....	73
<b>PART 4</b> .....	76
<b>4.0 POLICIES AND STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES</b> .....	76
4.1 Policy and Advocacy .....	76
4.1.1 Policy gap analysis of women and girls nutrition.....	76
4.1.2 Develop and implement policies that promote women's and girls' empowerment for optimal nutrition .....	79
4.1.3 Advocate for gender-responsive nutrition programmes at national, state, local government and community levels.....	80
4.1.4 Strengthen legal frameworks for women's rights and nutrition .....	83
4.2 Education and Awareness .....	84
4.2.1 Promote nutrition education targeting women and girls .....	85
4.2.2 Train healthcare providers and community workers in gender-responsive nutrition counseling .....	86
4.2.3 Promote issues on water, sanitation and hygiene practices.....	86



4.3 Economic and Financial Empowerment:.....	87
4.3.1 Promote women's access to income-generating activities and financial services with a focus on initiatives that worked.....	87
4.3.2 Provide vocational training and skills development opportunities for economic empowerment.....	89
4.3.3 Support women's entrepreneurship and access to grants and, microcredit facilities, self-help approach .....	90
4.4 Social and Political Empowerment.....	92
4.4.1 Encourage community and traditional leaders to support women's empowerment initiatives.....	92
4.4.2 Promote women's participation in leadership and decision-making processes.....	94
4.4.3 Raise awareness about women's voting rights and political representation .....	96
4.4.4 Religious Institutions/leaders.....	98
4.4.5 Youth organizations/n etworks .....	99
4.5.1 Prevention and control of basic health challenges .....	100
4.5.2 Provide nutrition assessment, counseling, and support at health facilities and community .....	105
4.5.3 Implement programmes to address specific nutritional needs during critical life stages (pregnancy, lactation, adolescence).....	108
4.5.4 Reporting and documentation .....	110
4.6 Monitoring and Evaluation.....	111
4.6.1 Monitoring and evaluation framework.....	111
4.6.2 Research needs .....	112
4.7.1 Advocate for increased funding for women and girls' empowerment programs.....	114
4.7.2 Partnerships with philanthropic organizations and private sector entities for resource mobilization.....	116
<b>PART 5 .....</b>	<b>117</b>
<b>5.0 COORDINATION, PARTNERSHIP, ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES .....</b>	<b>117</b>
5.2 Key Actors and Activities on Implementation of Guidelines with Responsibilities.....	118
5.2.1 Government.....	119
5.2.2 Civil society.....	119
5.2.3 Development partners .....	120
5.2.4 Private sector.....	120
5.2.5 Academia/Research institutions .....	121
<b>PART 6 .....</b>	<b>123</b>



<b>6.0 PROMOTION, IMPLEMENTATION AND MONITORING OF THE USE AND APPLICATION OF THE GUIDELINES</b> .....	123
6.1 Implementation of the Guidelines.....	123
6.2 Building and Strengthening Capacity for Implementation .....	125
6.4 Adaptation and Domestication of the Guidelines by States .....	128
<b>7.0 CONCLUSION</b> .....	132
7.1 Summary of the Importance of Women and Girls' Empowerment for Optimal Nutrition .	132
7.2 Commitment and Action from Stakeholders to implement the Guidelines .....	132
7.3 Call for States to domesticate the Guidelines .....	133
<b>REFERENCES</b> .....	134



## LIST OF ACRONYMS/ABBREVIATIONS

AFSNS	Nigerian Agricultural Sector Food Security and Nutrition Strategy
AIDS	Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
ANC	Antenatal care
ANI	Adolescent Nutrition Initiative
ART	Antiretroviral therapy
CCT	Conditional Cash Transfer
CCTHN	Conditional Cash Transfer for Health and Nutrition
CHA	Cadre Harmonize Analysis
CARE	Cooperative Assistance for Relief Every
CSA	Climate-smart agriculture
CSO	Civil Society Organizations
CSOs	Civil Society Organizations
DHIS	District Health Information System
DPG	Development Partners Group
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
FBOs	Faith-Based Organizations
FCT	Federal Capital Territory
FMA&FS	Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security



FMARD	Federal Ministry of Agriculture & Rural Development
GAIN	Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
GEWGE	Gender Equality, Women's, and Girls' Empowerment
GNP	Gross National Product
GNR	Global Nutrition Report
HGSFP	Homegrown School Feeding Program
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
HPV	Human Papillomavirus
ICTs	Information and Communication Technologies
IFA	Iron Folic Acid
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
IFAS	Iron and Folic Acid Supplementation
IMNCH	Integrated Maternal, Newborn, and Child Health
IPTp	Intermittent preventive treatment of malaria during pregnancy
LGAs	Local Government Areas
LGAs	Local Government Authorities
LLITN	Long-Lasting Insecticide Treated Net
LMICs	Low and Middle Income Countries
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MCH	Maternal and Child Health



MDAs	Ministries, Departments and Agencies
MHPSS	Mental health and psychosocial support
MI	Micronutrient Initiative
MICS	Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys
MIYCN	Maternal, Infant, and Young Child Nutrition
MMS	Multiple Micronutrient Supplement
MOV	Means of Verification
MSS	Midwives Service Scheme
MUAC	Mid-Upper Arm Circumference
NCDs	Non-Communicable Diseases
NDHS	Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey
NFCMS	National Food Consumption and Micronutrient Survey
NGF	Nigeria Governors Forum
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
NMPFAN	National Multisectoral Strategic Plan of Action for Food and Nutrition
NNHS	National Nutrition and Health Survey
NNHS	Nigeria National Nutrition and Health Survey
NPFN	National Policy on Food and Nutrition
NSIP	National Social Investment Program
PLW	Pregnant and Lactating Women
RDA	Recommended Dietary Allowance





SBC	Social Behavioural Change
SBCC	Social and Behaviour Change Communication
SBCC	Social Behavioural Change Communication
SCFN	State Committees on Food and Nutrition
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SHN	School Health and Nutrition
SMEs	Small Medium Enterprises
SOFI	State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World
SOML PforR	Saving One Million Lives Programme for Results
SP	Sulfadoxine–pyrimethamine
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics
STIs	Sexually Transmitted Infections
SUN	Scaling Up Nutrition
TS	Testing Services
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
WEAI	Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index
WEE	Women's Economic Empowerment
WEEP	Women Economic Empowerment Program
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organization
WOFEE	Women's Fund for Economic Empowerment



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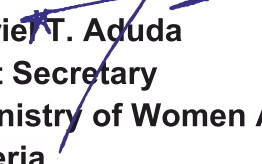
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## FOREWORD

Malnutrition presents a multifaceted threat to the health and well-being of women and girls, manifesting in various detrimental outcomes such as increased maternal mortality rates, heightened susceptibility to infectious diseases, and compromised immune response to illnesses. Of particular concern is the vulnerability of girls, whose rapid growth and development after infancy make them more prone to malnutrition-related complications, especially in the context of pregnancy.

Numerous obstacles impede women and girls from attaining optimal nutrition, stemming from gender disparities and entrenched cultural norms that perpetuate unequal access to food and nutrition resources. Discrimination, limited decision-making authority, and social marginalization further exacerbate these challenges, hindering the ability of women and girls to meet their nutritional needs. Thus, empowering women and girls is pivotal in dismantling these barriers and enabling them to pursue and achieve their nutritional goals effectively.

The critical role of nutrition in growth, development, and disease prevention cannot be overstated, underscoring the necessity of ensuring adequate intake of essential nutrients for maintaining overall health and mitigating the risk of chronic illnesses. Addressing malnutrition among women and girls yields a multitude of benefits, including improved health outcomes, enhanced productivity, and the capacity to fulfil diverse societal roles such as income generation and caretaking responsibilities, thereby contributing to the socioeconomic advancement of nations.

Despite the longstanding recognition of malnutrition's adverse effects, progress in addressing the specific nutritional needs of women and girls has remained inadequate. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) underscore the imperative of advancing gender equality, eradicating hunger and malnutrition, and promoting good health for women and girls as integral components of sustainable development efforts.

This Guideline serves as a comprehensive framework to guide the development and implementation of coordinated, multisectoral national policies, laws, programs, and investment plans aimed at fostering gender equality and empowering women and girls in the context of food security and nutrition. Achieving the objectives outlined in this guideline necessitates collaborative efforts across sectors and stakeholders, underscoring the indispensable role of multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder coordination in realizing meaningful progress and tangible results.

**Barr. Uju Kennedy-Ohanenye**  
**Honourable Minister**  
**Federal Ministry of Women Affairs**  
**Abuja-Nigeria**



## **PART 1**

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.1 Background of Guidelines**

The total population of Nigeria by gender in 2021 indicated that Nigeria's female population amounted to approximately 105.57 million, while the male population was about 107.83 million (Statista, 2024). Girls and women are distinguished by their age, physical, reproductive, emotional, and psychological maturity. A girl is a female under the age of 18, while a woman is a female over the age of 18. A girl is still dependent on her parents for basic needs and guidance in everything and her body is not yet fully developed and may already be in her teens and reached puberty. Adolescents are young individuals in a period of transition from childhood to adulthood and in a critical phase of physical growth and development. Women's economic empowerment is a critical driver of national economic growth and for Nigeria to achieve its full productive and economic potential, it must intentionally empower its women and girls. There is a need to work with communities and key stakeholders to provide the economic access and productive tools that women and girls require meaningfully contribute and compete in the economy.

Empowerment is a process of ongoing change through which women and girls expand their aspirations, strengthen their voices, and exercise more choices across different areas of their lives—in their homes, families, workplaces, and communities. The empowerment of women and girls concerns their gaining power and control over their own lives. Gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment (GEWGE) are fundamental



to human rights and integral to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). Investing in the empowerment of women and girls can lead to better health and development outcomes. A large and growing body of evidence shows that empowered women and girls acting as agents of change in their communities can bring about better health and development outcomes for all.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) highlight the importance of improving gender equality and empowering women (SDG 5), ending hunger and malnutrition (SDG 2), and achieving good health for women and children (SDG 3). Nutrition plays a vital role in growth and development; hence, adequate intake of essential nutrients is necessary for maintaining good health and preventing chronic diseases.

However, nutrient requirements vary based on age, sex, and physical activity levels. When puberty begins, women start to develop unique nutritional requirements and as the body ages it goes through more physical and hormonal changes, nutritional needs continue to evolve, making it important that diets evolve to meet these changing needs. Women tend to need fewer calories than men, with requirements for certain vitamins and minerals much higher except during pregnancy. Hormonal changes associated with menstruation, childbearing, and menopause mean that women have a higher risk of anaemia, weakened bones, and osteoporosis, requiring a higher intake of nutrients such as iron, calcium, magnesium, vitamin D, and vitamin B9 (folate).



### 1.1.1 Global context

The right to adequate food and nutrition is a fundamental pillar of the right to life and one of the most frequently violated human rights around the world. The right to food and nutrition deals with the availability, affordability, and adequacy, along with physical, economic, social, and stable access to food, as it relates to respect for human dignity. The right also highlights the importance of institutional and legal accountability to protect citizens from violations and guarantee food security and nutrition. Therefore, the right to food and nutrition encompasses not only matters of food security but also addresses the inequalities people experience and food systems.

It is increasingly recognized that incorporating gender perspectives in different areas of development ensures the effective achievement of social and economic development goals. This will require changes in objectives, strategies, and actions to ensure that both women and men can influence, participate in, and benefit from development processes. This may lead to changes in organizations – structures, procedures, and cultures – to create organizational environments, which are conducive to the promotion of gender equality as it relates to access, affordability, and availability of nutrition.

The multiple aspects of identity and status are crucial to understanding a woman's or girl's relative empowerment or disempowerment. Within any given context, women and girls face diverse challenges and disadvantages including negative socio-cultural norms and practices that prevent them from exercising their choice and voice with shifting power dynamics that militate against their ability to thrive. This results in the underrepresentation



of women and girls in economic and political decision-making, facing barriers to equal participation in the formal economy, earning less, and having unequal access to assets and property.

There are several challenges that affect women and girls' ability to achieve optimum nutrition. Gender disparities and cultural norms often result in women and girls facing unequal access to food and nutrition. Discrimination, limited decision-making power, and lower social status can negatively affect their nutritional status. According to FAO (2011), if women had the same access to productive resources as men, they could increase yields on their farms by 20–30 percent. This could raise total agricultural output in developing countries by 2.5–4 percent, which could in turn reduce the number of hungry people in the world by 12–17 percent. Access to better diets is among other factors, obtained through nutritionally improved crops, as productivity gains are key to food security for households that have poor access to food markets. Specifically, a 10 percent growth in agricultural productivity decreases the likelihood of relying on less preferred foods by 37 percent, limits the variety of food eaten by 3.9 percent, and limits the portion size at mealtimes by 1.9 percent (Villacis *et al.*, 2022). In addition, an increase in agricultural productivity can positively affect food security circumstances for rural households in Nigeria.

Climate-smart agriculture (CSA) can sustainably increase productivity, enhance resilience (adaptation), decrease greenhouse gas emissions and enhance the achievement of national food security and development goals. This can be an approach to guide actions needed to transform and reorient agricultural systems to effectively support development and ensure food security in a changing climate (Campbell *et al.*, 2014). This provides



opportunities for increased employment along the food value chains and improvements in the variety of nutritious foods (FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO, 2023).

Furthermore, failing to invest in women's education can lower the gross national product (GNP) by 25 percent in countries where there is less gender disparity in education. Gender inequality also reduces the productivity of the next generation, as the probability of children being enrolled in school increases with their mothers' educational level. Extra income to mothers has a more positive impact on household nutrition, health, and education of children than extra income to fathers.

Women's time burdens are an important constraint on growth and development – women are a much over-utilized resource, not an underutilized resource. The benefits of reducing this gender-based constraint can be considerable and reducing such constraints increases household cash incomes by 10 percent, labour productivity by 15 percent, and capital productivity by 44 percent (UN, 2002).

### **1.1.2 National sectoral efforts**

The National Policy on Food and Nutrition (NPFN, 2016) provides the framework for addressing the problems of food and nutrition insecurity across the country. It serves as a guide for the identification, design and implementation of intervention activities across the various sectors to ensure adequate nutrition and health of Nigerians. The goal of the policy is to attain optimal nutritional status for all Nigerians, with particular emphasis on the most vulnerable groups such as children, adolescents, women, elderly, physically challenged and groups with special nutritional needs.





The National Multisectoral Strategic Plan of Action for Food and Nutrition (NMPFAN 2021–2025) was developed in line with the National Policy on Food and Nutrition to guide the response to the challenges of nutrition in Nigeria. This is specially to inform action plans that will direct all interventions, programme, and activities to be implemented to reduce malnutrition and hunger among the vulnerable and generality of Nigerians leading to increased productivity and national development. The NMPFAN aims to make Nigeria a country where the people are equitably food and nutrition secure with a high quality of life and socioeconomic development contributing to human capital development. NMPFAN is to contribute significantly towards eliminating all forms of malnutrition as a public health problem in Nigeria and contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) target by 2030.

There is an ongoing effort to transform the agricultural sector in Nigeria, especially prioritizing improved food security and nutrition as a fundamental outcome. The Nigerian Agricultural Sector Food Security and Nutrition Strategy 2016 – 2025 (AFSNS) has been developed to guide the activities of the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security (FMA&FS) and the wider agricultural sector in Nigeria for improved nutrition. The strategy is to ensure effective advocacy for mobilizing necessary human, material, and financial resources and encourage sustained commitment to agricultural development for improved nutrition.

The National Guidelines on Maternal, Infant, and Young Child Nutrition (MIYCN, 2022) is the guide on how to improve the nutritional status of mothers, infants, and young children, including those in exceptionally difficult circumstances. The specific objectives are to protect, promote, and



support exclusive breastfeeding in the first 6 months of life; improve timely introduction of appropriate and adequate complementary foods; provide specific feeding recommendations for infants, and young children with special needs and specific disease conditions; and provide appropriate nutrition information and guidelines for caregivers

The policy review for the Women's Nutrition Project in Nigeria was part of a formative research for the development of the Nigeria Women's Nutrition Agenda, which took place in September 2022. The policy review was to help inform advocacy work for the Women's Nutrition Project in Nigeria. The review looks at national policies, strategies, and programmes and the sectors reviewed include nutrition, food systems, health, gender equality, climate, and social protection.

There exists the National Gender Policy Strategic Implementation Framework/Plan 2021-2026, which was a product of the reviewed 2006 National Gender Policy. Notably, the framework took into cognizance key learning points from the 2006 National Gender Policy, and important emerging issues that must be addressed within the next 5 years, with the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs taking the lead in the implementation process. This Strategic Framework/Implementation Plan hinges on the policy priorities highlighted within the revised National Gender Policy (2021). The policy is to help strengthen and operationalize strategies such as the implementation of minimum nutrition standards for low-income families, like through the school feeding programme and integration of gender issues into the existing National Water Policy to enhance meeting women's practical gender needs of sourcing for water.



The National Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) Policy and Action Plan 2023 is a holistic and robust plan that leverages diverse approaches and perspectives across the Federation to refine the Federal Government of Nigeria's approach to women's economic empowerment for achieving national growth and socioeconomic development in both the public and private sectors.

The National Gender Policy and the Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) policy have several gaps regarding women's and girl's nutrition agenda, but these provided the opportunities to leverage for the promotion of gender-responsive and nutrition-sensitive interventions.

Some of the **gaps and opportunities** observed are:

- **Lack of specific focus on nutrition:** Both policies did not explicitly prioritize addressing nutrition issues for women and girls. Nutrition was not adequately highlighted as a crucial component of the overall gender equality or women's economic empowerment.
- **Limited integration with health policies:** There were insufficient integrations between the National Gender Policy, the WEE policy, and existing health policies that address nutrition concerns. This results in inadequate coordination and implementation of nutrition-related interventions for women and girls.
- **Inadequate attention to specific vulnerabilities:** The policies could not effectively address the specific vulnerabilities that women and girls face regarding nutrition. This includes marginalized groups, such as women in rural areas, those from low-income households, or those living in conflict or disaster-affected areas.



**The opportunities provided through these guidelines to address the gaps are as follows:**

- **Gender mainstreaming in nutrition programmes:** The National Gender Policy and the WEE policy provide an opportunity to integrate gender considerations into existing nutrition programmes. This can help address the unique needs and challenges faced by women and girls.
- **Empowerment through nutrition interventions:** Both policies can serve as a platform to promote women's empowerment through nutrition interventions. By focusing on women's access to nutritious food, education on healthy eating, and capacity building for income generation in the agriculture or food sectors, women can be empowered economically and socially.
- **Strengthening gender-sensitive data collection and research:** The policies emphasize the importance of collecting gender-disaggregated data. This provides an opportunity leverage for data collection on nutrition indicators, which will give a better understanding of the specific challenges women and girls face and inform evidence-based interventions.
- **Collaboration and cross-sectoral coordination:** The National Gender Policy and the WEE policy offer opportunities for collaboration and coordination between different sectors, such as health, agriculture, and women's empowerment. This can facilitate a comprehensive and integrated approach to addressing women and girls' nutrition concerns, drawing on the strengths of various stakeholders.



## **1.2 Purpose, Goal, and Objectives**

### **1.2.1 Purpose of the guidelines**

The National Guidelines on Women and Girls' Empowerment for Optimal Nutrition is intended to create a convergence of different interventions across sectors/policies addressing specifically the empowerment needs of women and girls, such as enhancing their access to optimal nutrition. This is to guide interventions and actions for a coordinated and comprehensive approach to address women's and girls' empowerment for optimal nutrition. The document will be the guide to priority strategies, which the country will focus on for a period of five years (2024 – 2028). This guidelines will be used by policymakers and stakeholders, including government, civil society and private sectors/corporate implementers, academia and development partners, all of whom are involved in designing, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating women and girls' empowerment programmes at the national, state, and community levels.

### **1.2.2 Goal**

The overall goal of the Guidelines is to promote women's and girls' empowerment to achieve optimal nutrition outcomes in Nigeria through a multi-sectoral approach.

### **1.2.3 Objectives of the guidelines**

- i. To provide a framework for policy coherence on gender and nutrition interventions in Nigeria.
- ii. To promote innovative partnerships and increased investments in promoting women's and girls' empowerment for optimal nutrition.



- iii. To advocate for increased nutrition financing of actions and programmes that enhance women's and girl's nutrition at the community level.
- iv. To raise awareness towards changing discriminatory social norms on optimal nutrition for women and girls.
- v. To enhance collaboration of partners in the country for the planning, coordination, implementation and monitoring of girls' and women's empowerment for nutrition.
- vi. To improve access to and control over financial resources and assets that can provide pathways out of poverty for women and girls thereby improving their nutritional status.
- vii. To monitor the use and application of the guidelines to track progress for accountability and learning.
- viii. To provide the relevant support structures needed in communities and the workplace (i.e., paid leave, childcare, women's economic collectives) to enable Nigerian women and girls to participate fully in the economy.
- ix. To promote advocacy to policymakers at all levels, stakeholders and community gatekeepers on the implementation of the Guidelines.
- x. To create awareness, sensitize and promote women's and girl's nutrition to gatekeepers, policymakers and relevant stakeholders.
- xi. To drive financial inclusion and other economic empowering platforms that will increase the economic agency of women and girls to improve their access to nutritious foods.



### 1.3 Women's and Girls' Nutrition Situation in Nigeria

Malnutrition is a pervasive global health problem with consequences for survival, healthy development, and the economic productivity of individuals and societies. Women of reproductive age (15–49 years), especially in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), carry a disproportionate and inequitable burden of malnutrition due to physiological, sociocultural, and economic mechanisms (Global Nutrition Report, 2020). Malnutrition among women has serious repercussions for the health and cognitive development of infants and children. The rise in overweight, obesity, and non-communicable diseases points to the need to consider the importance of women's nutrition beyond their reproductive role. Maternal undernutrition remains a leading cause of morbidity and mortality in Nigeria.

The report of the Nigeria National Nutrition and Health Survey (NNHS, 2018) indicated that 6.9 percent of Nigerian women, aged 15–49 years were acutely malnourished and 3.8 percent were severely malnourished. The number of adolescent girls and women aged 15–49 years who are undernourished soared from 5.6 million in 2018 to 7.3 million in 2021 in Nigeria, which is among the 12 hardest hit countries by the global food and nutrition crisis (UNICEF, 2023). In Nigeria, 55 percent of adolescent girls and women suffer from anaemia while nearly half of Nigerian women of reproductive age do not consume the recommended diet of at least 5 out of 10 food groups. Meanwhile, adolescent girls and women from the poorest households are twice as likely to suffer from underweight, compared to those from the wealthiest households (UNICEF, 2023).



Women of reproductive age are especially vulnerable to chronic energy deficiency and malnutrition due to low dietary intakes, inequitable distribution of food within the household, improper food storage and preparation, dietary taboos, infectious diseases, and inadequate care practices.

In Nigeria, NDHS (2018) results on nutritional status among women aged 15-49 showed that 60 percent of women have a normal BMI, while 12 percent are thin; 28 percent are overweight or obese, the mean BMI among women is 23.3, and one percent of women are of short stature. Disaggregation by geopolitical zones indicates women in the southern zones (South East, South South, and South West) are more likely to be overweight or obese than women in the northern zones (North Central, North East, and North West). 40 percent, 43 percent, and 38 percent of women in the South East, South South, and South West zones, respectively, are overweight or obese, as compared with 26, 15, and 16 percent of women in the North Central, North East, and North West zones respectively.

The findings of the National Food Consumption and Micronutrient Survey (2021) also reported that the prevalence of obesity is in double digits among women of reproductive age in certain zones, which shows that obesity is a critical and emerging problem in Nigeria. In addition, the report shows a high prevalence of folate deficiency in adolescent girls, pregnant and non-pregnant women of reproductive age.

Dietary diversity is still too low to ensure an adequate supply of micronutrients in women. The contribution of animal protein is low, and at





least >30 percent of women have not met protein intake requirements. The mean minimum dietary diversity score of women in Nigeria is 3.6 out of a possible score of 10, while only a fifth of non-pregnant and a third of pregnant women achieved minimum dietary diversity (consumed at least 5 from 10 food groups) (NFCMS, 2021).

Dietary micronutrient deficiencies remain a problem and are even more serious in women (especially pregnant and breastfeeding women). Anaemia is a major concern among women, leading to increased maternal mortality and poor birth outcomes, as well as reductions in work productivity. Above 50 percent inadequacy in women's intake of Calcium, vitamin C, B1, B2, Folate, and Vitamin B12 and inadequacy of between 25 percent - 50 percent in intake of Iron, Zinc, and vitamin A. Over half (58 percent) of women aged 15-49 have some degree of anaemia. Twenty-eight percent each are mildly anaemic and moderately anaemic, and 2 percent are severely anaemic. The prevalence of anaemia decreases with increasing education (from 64 percent among women with no education to 47 percent among women with more than a secondary education) and increasing wealth (from 66 percent among women in the lowest wealth quantile to 50 percent among women in the highest quantile) (NFCMS, 2021).

The 2022 Cadre Harmonize Analysis (CHA) published by the government shows that 17 million Nigerians are suffering from acute food insecurity, and this is likely to increase to 25 million in the lean season (FMARD, 2022). Nigeria has shown limited progress towards achieving the diet-related non-communicable diseases (NCD) targets, with 15.7 percent of adult (aged 18 years and over) women and 5.9 percent of adult men living



with obesity. At the same time, diabetes is estimated to affect 6.8 percent of adult women and 7.5 percent of adult men (GNR, 2022).

In Nigeria, gender roles often dictate the access to and control over resources, decision-making power, and division of labour within households. These roles vary across the six geopolitical zones due to cultural diversity and historical factors. Understanding the nutrition situation in Nigeria requires considering the interaction between gender roles and the specific challenges faced in each zone. Therefore, comprehensive plans need to be developed to address both under and over-nutrition across age groups and geopolitical zones. The government and stakeholders need to prioritize investment in agriculture, nutrition and food systems with girls and women as major target beneficiaries through the formulation of evidence-based policies and programs such as this guidelines and monitor change over time (NFCMS, 2021).

Considering the diversity of gender roles and their influence on nutrition outcomes across the six geopolitical zones is crucial for implementing targeted interventions and policies to address disparities and improve the overall nutrition situation in Nigeria.

#### **1.4 Importance of Women's and Girls' Empowerment for Optimal Nutrition**

Good nutrition helps in poverty reduction, and improved national economic performance and nutrition. When women are economically empowered, it advances the health, education, and economic security of their families, and women and girls live a life free from violence. Women empowerment benefits the nation, especially in the nutritional status of all Nigerians.



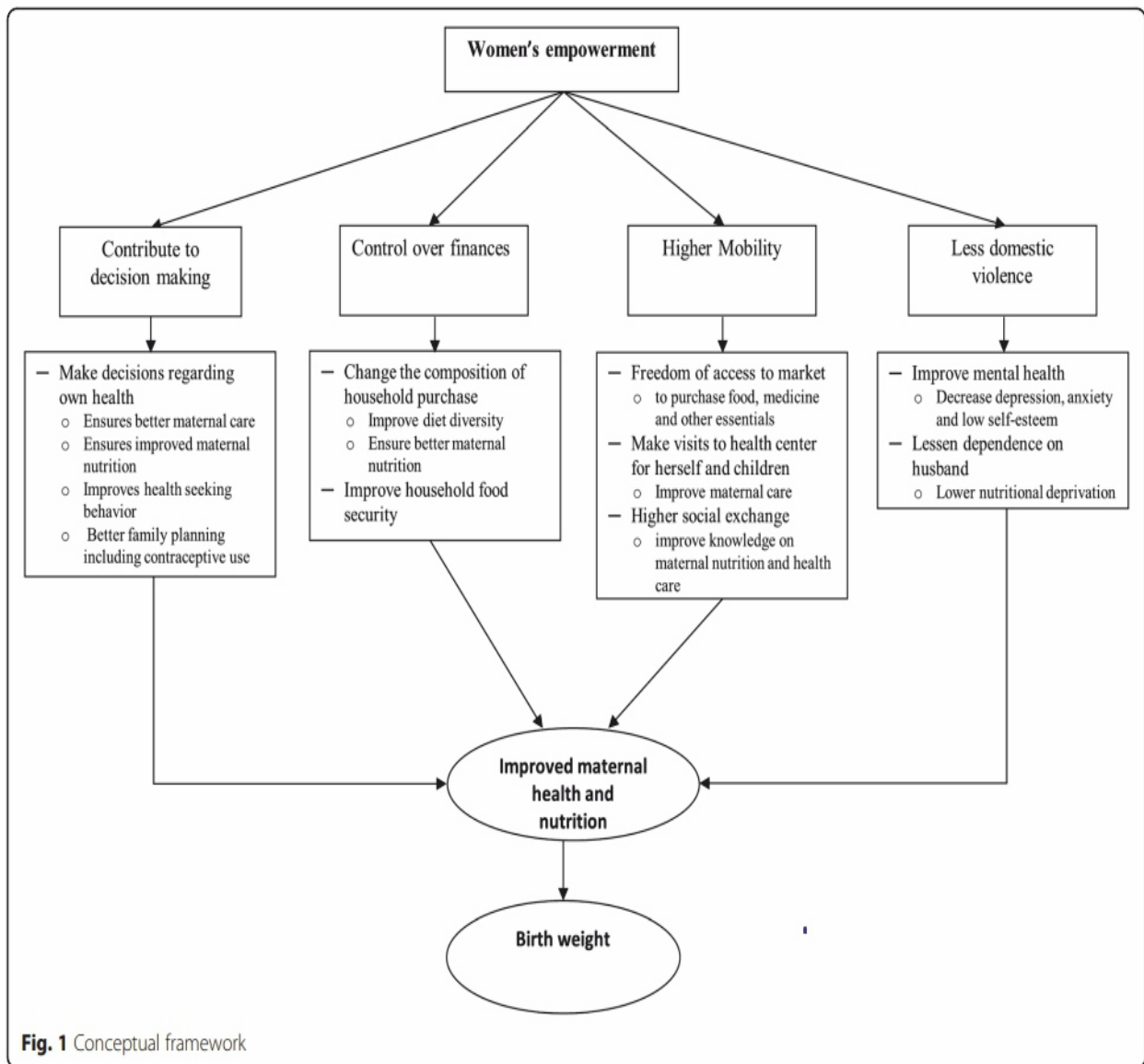
Nutritional status and growth are influenced not only by the adequacy of food intake, but also by the utilization of health services, both preventive and curative. Sex and gender-related disparities in nutrition are a consequence of physiological and sociocultural factors. Iron deficiency anaemia affects both sexes, but adolescent girls carry the greatest burden due to the additional iron requirements that come with the onset of menarche. The drivers of malnutrition among adolescents are multifactorial. Individual behaviours such as food choice, dietary intake, and physical activity are influenced by the food environment, which is shaped by household and community dietary and activity patterns, economic development, urbanization, and food and agriculture systems. Gender inequality and restrictive gender norms play an important role in shaping these socio-ecological systems and disproportionately contribute to women's and girls' poor health.

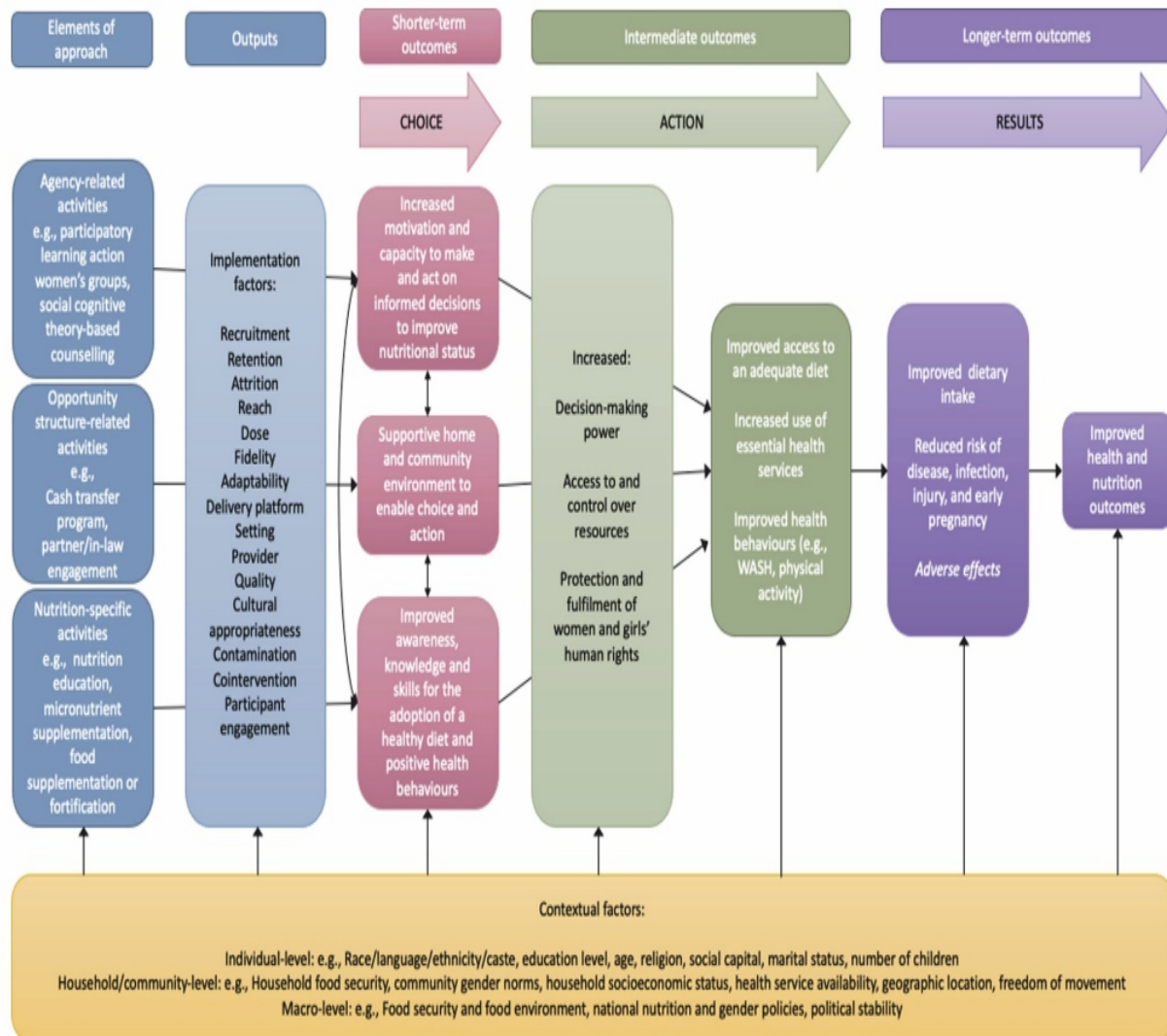
### **1.5 Link between Empowerment and Improved Nutrition Outcomes**

Empowerment is a complex construct that is multidimensional and context-specific. The understanding of the different pathways to adequate nutrition among women of childbearing age is of utmost importance. The empowerment of women and girls is associated with improved health and nutrition outcomes for women and their children (Pratley, 2016).

There is evidence that women's and girls' empowerment is a pathway to improved nutrition and well-being for the entire household, in both rural and urban areas, and evidence of positive links between women's empowerment and child and maternal health (SOFI, 2021). The pathway to women's empowerment to improve nutrition is influenced by several factors

including social and cultural norms, knowledge, skills, and how decision-making power is shared within households. Riddle *et al.*, (2019) and Kabir *et al.*, (2020), describe the pathway of how the empowerment of women affects maternal nutritional status.





**FIGURE 1** Logic model: Empowerment-based nutrition interventions to improve women's nutritional status (adapted from Riddle et al., 2019)



## PART 2

### 2.0 KEY PRINCIPLES THAT UNDERPIN WOMEN'S AND GIRLS' EMPOWERMENT

#### 2.1 Gender Equality and Women's Rights

Gender equality and the fulfilment of women's rights are crucial foundations for achieving optimal nutrition for women and girls. Gender equality refers to equal rights, responsibilities, and opportunities for women and men, girls and boys, in all spheres of life. Despite advancements, significant gender disparities persist globally, affecting women's and girls' access to nutritious food, healthcare, education, and decision-making power.

Diverse factors contribute to these inequalities, including social and cultural norms, discriminatory laws and policies, traditional gender roles, and unequal power dynamics within households and society. Discrimination, violence, lack of control over resources, limited access to education and health services, and restricted mobility are prominent challenges faced by women and girls, hindering their ability to attain optimal nutrition and well-being.

Ensuring women and girls have power and equal opportunities for financial independence, education, and personal development is crucial for their empowerment and well-being as stated below:

- **Financial Independence:** Women should have equal opportunities to earn income, control resources, and have access to credit and financial services.



This economic empowerment enables women to make decisions regarding nutrition and healthcare, contributing to their well-being and that of their families.

- **Education:** Access to quality education is a fundamental right that empowers girls and women, enabling them to acquire knowledge, skills, and critical thinking abilities. Educated women are more likely to make informed choices about their nutrition, health, and the well-being of their families.
- **Personal Development:** Women and girls should have opportunities for personal growth, leadership development, and participation in decision-making processes at all levels. By actively engaging in such activities, they can enhance their self-confidence, and contribute to the development of their communities.

Women's empowerment refers to the process of enabling women to exercise control over their lives, participate fully in decision-making, and have equal access to opportunities and resources.

Strategies for women's empowerment should focus on addressing the root causes of gender inequality, such as discriminatory norms and practices, gender-based violence, and limited access to resources. These strategies should include comprehensive measures aimed at creating an enabling environment through legal reforms, enhancing women's representation and participation in decision-making processes, providing educational and economic opportunities, and promoting positive gender norms and attitudes.



Efforts to promote women's empowerment must be guided by a rights-based approach, ensuring that women's and girls' human rights are respected, protected, and fulfilled. Governments, policymakers, civil society organizations, and other stakeholders should collaborate to enact policies, implement programmes, and allocate resources that promote women's empowerment and gender equality, thereby contributing to optimal nutrition for women and girls.

***Women's rights are integral to achieving optimal nutrition for women and girls. By addressing the main issues of gender equality, empowering women through equal opportunities for financial independence, education, and personal development, we can create an environment conducive to achieving optimal nutrition outcomes for all women and girls.***

## **2.2 Participation and Inclusion**

In Nigeria, a significant gap exists for women and girls when it comes to accessing nutrition, primarily due to prevalent forms of exclusion. Women and girls face multiple barriers and discrimination that limit their ability to obtain adequate and nutritious food. They often have restricted access to productive resources, such as land and credit, and are marginalized from decision-making processes regarding household food distribution. Cultural traditions including food taboos impeding optimal nutrition outcomes and gender norms further reinforce the exclusion, as women are expected to prioritize the needs of others over their own, leading to their own nutrition needs being neglected. This exclusion perpetuates a cycle of malnutrition





and ill-health among women and girls in Nigeria, hindering their overall well-being and contributing to persistent gender gaps in nutrition.

### **2.2.1 Guiding Principles for Women's and Girls' Participation and Inclusion**

**a) Inclusivity:** All women and girls, regardless of their socioeconomic status, culture, religion, ethnicity, age, disability, or geographic location, should have equal opportunities to participate in decision-making processes.

**b) Representation:** Efforts should be made to ensure the representation of marginalized and vulnerable groups of women and girls, including persons living with disabilities, rural areas, communities, and conflict-affected regions.

**c) Capacity Building:** Adequate support, education, and training should be provided to enhance the skills and knowledge of women and girls, enabling them to engage effectively in decision-making processes.

**d) Intersectional Approach:** An intersectional analysis of women's and girls' participation and inclusion will expose how various personal, social, and environmental factors influence the achievement of broader well-being, and ensure that interventions do not marginalize them.

This will allow for critical analysis of barriers, challenges, and social norms that prevent the meaningful participation of women. The intersectional approach will lead to the understanding of the deep structural barriers, norms, and practices that contribute to the marginalization of women's experiences and needs.



Also, the use of human-centred design approach can accelerate results for gender equality and girls' empowerment to develop solutions to problems by involving the human perspective in all steps of the problem-solving process.

### **2.2.2 Implementation Strategies for Women's and Girls' Participation and Inclusion**

**a) Strengthening leadership and advocacy:** Advocate for the active involvement of women and girls in leadership positions, both at the community to the national level through awareness campaigns and training initiatives to nurture their leadership capabilities.

**b) Establishing platforms for dialogue:** The creation of forums, such as women's groups, networks, or committees, provides a space for women and girls to share their experiences, concerns, and recommendations. These platforms should foster open and inclusive discussions and ensure their voices are heard and considered in decision-making.

**c) Ensuring accessible information:** Make information related to nutrition and health, easily accessible and comprehensible to women and girls, including those with low literacy levels or disabilities, through various channels such as local languages, audio-visual aids, and community radio.

**d) Identifying male champions in support of women's and girls' nutrition:** Male champions may be leaders, influencers, or community members that recognize the importance of women's and girls' nutrition and actively take steps to address the underlying social norms and barriers that hinder their well-being. They can advocate for equal access to resources, challenge harmful practices, and engage in dialogue with other men and



the community to create a supportive environment for women and girls' nutrition. Mobilizing these male champions can significantly enhance the implementation and sustainability of programmes aimed at improving the well-being and nutrition of women and girls across Nigeria. In addition, addressing gender and social norms that may pose as barriers to women's and Girls' participation can also be done through engaging men and boys as custodians of norms, including leaders and other cultural and social gatekeepers.

## **2.3 Access to Resources**

Access to economic resources and opportunities is a critical factor in women's and girls' empowerment for optimal nutrition. Ensuring their economic independence and equal access to resources, such as jobs, financial services, property, and other productive assets, is instrumental in fostering their overall well-being and nutritional status.

### **2.3.1 Guiding Principles for Women's and Girls' Access to Resources**

**a) Gender-responsive policies:** Governments and stakeholders should adopt policies and programmes that promote gender equality, eliminate gender-based discrimination, and provide equal opportunities for women and girls to access economic resources and opportunities.

**b) Gender-responsive financial inclusion:** Public and private initiatives to designed and implemented to reduce the barriers that women face in accessing and using financial products and services (credit and savings accounts, investments, insurance, guarantees, payment services, among



others) and use them to gain financial autonomy and manage crises that impact their lives and businesses.

**c) Skills development:** Invest in training and capacity-building programmes that enhance women and girls' skills, knowledge, and abilities to seize economic opportunities and engage in income-generating activities.

**d) Girl child education:** Building girls' agency through education, life skills, enhancement of capacities, self-esteem enhances self-actualization, better opportunities and informed decisions for effective contribution in all spheres of human endeavour.

### **2.3.2 Implementation Strategies for Women's and Girls' Access to Resources**

**a) Promoting entrepreneurship:** Establishment of women-led businesses and enterprises by providing financial support, incubation programs, and business development services and an enabling environment that supports women's entrepreneurship and encourages their participation in value chains and market systems.

**b) Financial inclusion:** Ensure equal access to financial services, such as savings accounts, credit, insurance and mobile banking; and cooperative/affinity groups to facilitate loans, grants and other facilities from financial institutions and, by prioritizing the needs and preferences of women and girls.

**c) Market information:** Establish mechanisms to provide women and girls with relevant market information, including price trends, value-addition



techniques, and market opportunities. Enhance their access to market linkages, trade fairs, and platforms that facilitate their participation in local and international markets.

**d) Property rights and land ownership:** Promote and protect women's rights to own and inherit property, including land, by implementing legal and policy frameworks that confer, recognize and enforce their land tenure rights. Raise awareness among communities and support women and girls in asserting their land rights, including ancestral lands.

## **2.4 Capacity Building and Skills Development for Women's and Girls' Empowerment in Nutrition**

Empowering women and girls is crucial for achieving optimal nutrition outcomes at the individual, household, community, subnational and national levels. Developing and strengthening their capacity and skills is essential for enabling them to contribute actively to their well-being and that of their families.

Livelihood skills are an essential aspect of women's and girls' empowerment, as they enable them to generate income, improve their financial stability, and contribute to economic growth. To enhance women's and girls' livelihood skills, it is necessary to promote girl child education while discouraging early marriage and other practices that are inimical to the development of the girl child, provide comprehensive training programmes that address various areas of economic activity, such as agriculture, livestock rearing, food processing, and small business management. These programmes should be tailored to their specific needs, considering their existing knowledge and experience.



Capacity-building programmes for women entrepreneurs should focus on various aspects of business development, including but not limited to marketing, financial management, product development, customer relations, and quality control. These programmes should be designed to enhance their problem-solving abilities and decision-making skills, resulting in improved business performance and increased profitability.

To foster women's and girls' empowerment as entrepreneurs, it is essential to provide networking and mentorship opportunities. Networks can facilitate knowledge sharing, collaboration, and access to market information and opportunities. Mentorship programmes can connect women entrepreneurs with experienced professionals who provide guidance, support, and insights, ultimately enhancing their business acumen and success.

## **2.5 Social Behavioural Change (SBC)**

Social Behavioural Change (SBC) plays a significant role in promoting good nutrition, hygiene practices, and prevention of malnutrition. It is a powerful tool for creating awareness, achieving behavioural change, and motivating individuals and communities to adopt healthier practices.

SBC interventions should prioritize the promotion of good nutrition practices, including breastfeeding, diverse and adequate diets, appropriate meal frequency, and dietary diversity. Simultaneously, they should address hygiene practices, such as hand washing with soap, safe food preparation, and proper storage and handling of food. These efforts should be culturally sensitive, context-specific, and participatory, involving women, girls, and their communities in the design and implementation of SBC activities.



SBC should provide individuals with the necessary information and skills to make informed decisions on healthier choices regarding nutrition. Messaging and communication strategies should be clear, simple, and culturally appropriate, addressing common misconceptions, barriers, and motivators. By enhancing individual behaviours, SBC can contribute to improved dietary practices, optimal nutrition outcomes, and overall well-being.

***Capacity building and skills development, along with social behavioural change, are fundamental principles that underpin women's and girls' empowerment for optimal nutrition. By equipping them with livelihood skills, enhancing their business acumen, and promoting healthier behaviours, we can unlock the potential of women and girls for optimal nutrition.***

## **2.6 Collaboration and Coordination**

Collaboration and coordination are crucial in achieving women's and girls' empowerment for optimal nutrition. It requires institutional roles, strong partnerships and commitment from stakeholders, and accountability structures at both national and sub-national levels.

To ensure effective collaboration and coordination, it is essential to have clear institutional roles for coordinating multisectoral women and girls' nutrition efforts. This involves a central coordinating body or authority responsible for overseeing and guiding policies, strategies, and programmes related to women's and girls' nutrition. The lead MDA for implementing this guidelines (Federal Ministry of Women Affairs) should



operate at the national level and be equipped with the necessary authority, resources, and expertise to foster collaboration among various sectors.

The success of women's and girls' empowerment programmes depends on building strong partnerships with various stakeholders, including governmental and non-governmental organizations, development and donor partners, civil society organizations, faith-based organizations, academia, private sector entities, and local communities. These partnerships should be fostered through regular consultation, dialogues, and joint planning processes, which are obtained in the State Committees on Food and Nutrition (SCFN) and the Local Government Committees on Food and Nutrition (LGCFN). Therefore, the SCFN and LGCFN, which the Ministry of Women Affairs the lead ministry belongs, should serve as the platform for bringing all stakeholders together at the state and local government levels.

To promote women's and girls' nutrition, stakeholders must collaborate and share responsibilities to address the multifaceted determinants of malnutrition. Each stakeholder should bring their respective expertise, resources, and influence to the table to effectively tackle the underlying causes of poor nutrition outcomes.

All organizations and stakeholders involved in women's and girls' nutrition should demonstrate a genuine commitment and willingness to support nutrition interventions. This involves allocating adequate financial resources, human resources, and infrastructure to nutrition programmes targeted at women and girls. Furthermore, organizations should have policies and strategies in place that prioritize and mainstream gender





equality, women empowerment, and nutrition in their agendas and align with the already existing national policies and strategies on nutrition. The existing key policies for nutrition include National Policy on Food and Nutrition (2016), National Multisectoral Plan of Action for Food and Nutrition (NMPFAN 2021–2025), National Guidelines on Maternal, Infant, and Young Child Nutrition (MIYCN, 2022) and existing programmes and initiatives for women empowerment such as Women Economic Empowerment Programme (WEE), Women's Fund for Economic Empowerment (WOFEE), etc.

Building and strengthening the capacity of organizations and stakeholders is essential to ensure their effectiveness in promoting women and girls' nutrition. This includes providing training, technical support, and knowledge-sharing platforms to enhance their understanding of nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive interventions.

Vertical and horizontal accountability structures play a critical role in ensuring the effective implementation of women and girls' empowerment programs.

At the sub-national level, local government bodies should be involved in the planning, implementation, and monitoring of women's and girls' empowerment programmes. This ensures that initiatives are tailored to local needs and that accountability is maintained throughout the implementation process.

***Effective collaboration and coordination are critical for achieving women's and girls' empowerment for optimal nutrition. Institutional roles, strong partnerships, stakeholder commitment, and***



***accountability structures are vital components of a comprehensive approach to promoting the nutrition of women and girls. By adhering to these key principles, Nigeria can strengthen its efforts in addressing the underlying causes of malnutrition and ensure sustainable progress towards the empowerment of women and girls.***

## **2.7 Nature of Guidelines and Intended Users**

### **2.7.1 Nature of the Guidelines**

The national guidelines for women's and girls' empowerment for optimal nutrition is a comprehensive framework that aims to improve the nutritional status of women and girls in the country. It is design to be implemented at all levels of governance, including the federal, state, and local government areas (LGAs).

The guidelines's implementation framework encourages collaboration and coordination among different levels of government to promote effective and efficient implementation. The federal government plays a leading role in providing policy guidance and setting the overall direction for implementation. This includes designing and adapting the guidelines to suit the specific context and needs of different states and LGAs.

Guidelines design and adaptation involve tailoring the guidelines to align with the local contexts and conditions of different states and LGAs. This may include considering socioeconomic factors, cultural practices, and demographic characteristics. The aim is to ensure that the guidelines's strategies and interventions are relevant and applicable to the specific needs and challenges faced by women and girls in each area.



Dissemination is a critical aspect of the implementation framework, as it ensures that the guidelines reaches its intended users. This includes disseminating the guidelines to relevant stakeholders at the federal, state, and LGA levels, such as government officials, health workers, community leaders, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and women and girls themselves. Various communication channels, such as workshops, trainings, publications, and online platforms, could be used to ensure widespread dissemination.

Coordination and resource mobilization are essential for successful implementation. The guidelines emphasizes the need for effective collaboration and coordination among different stakeholders to harmonize efforts and pool resources. This includes establishing coordination mechanisms at the federal, state, and LGA levels, and mobilizing resources from various sources, including government budgets, donor funding, and private sector partnerships.

Consultation processes and domestication ensure that the guidelines is owned and embraced by the relevant stakeholders. This involves engaging key actors in the consultation processes during the guidelines's development and adaptation, as well as involving them in decision-making and implementation. The domestication is the process of aligning the guidelines with local contexts, and conditions of different states and LGAs to ensure that the guidelines's strategies and interventions are relevant and applicable to the specific needs and challenges faced by women and girls in the specific states. In addition, it is the integration of the guidelines's strategies and interventions into existing policies, programmes, and structures at the state and LGA levels.



Implementation and scale-up are crucial for translating the guidelines into actions on the ground. This involves ensuring that the guidelines's strategies and interventions are effectively implemented at all levels of governance. The federal government, in collaboration with state and LGA authorities, supports the implementation and scale-up through capacity-building, technical assistance, and monitoring.

Reporting and documentation play a significant role in the implementation framework, as they help track progress and provide accountability. The guidelines emphasizes the importance of regular reporting and documentation of activities, outputs, outcomes, and impact. This includes developing standardized reporting formats and establishing mechanisms for data collection, analysis, and reporting.

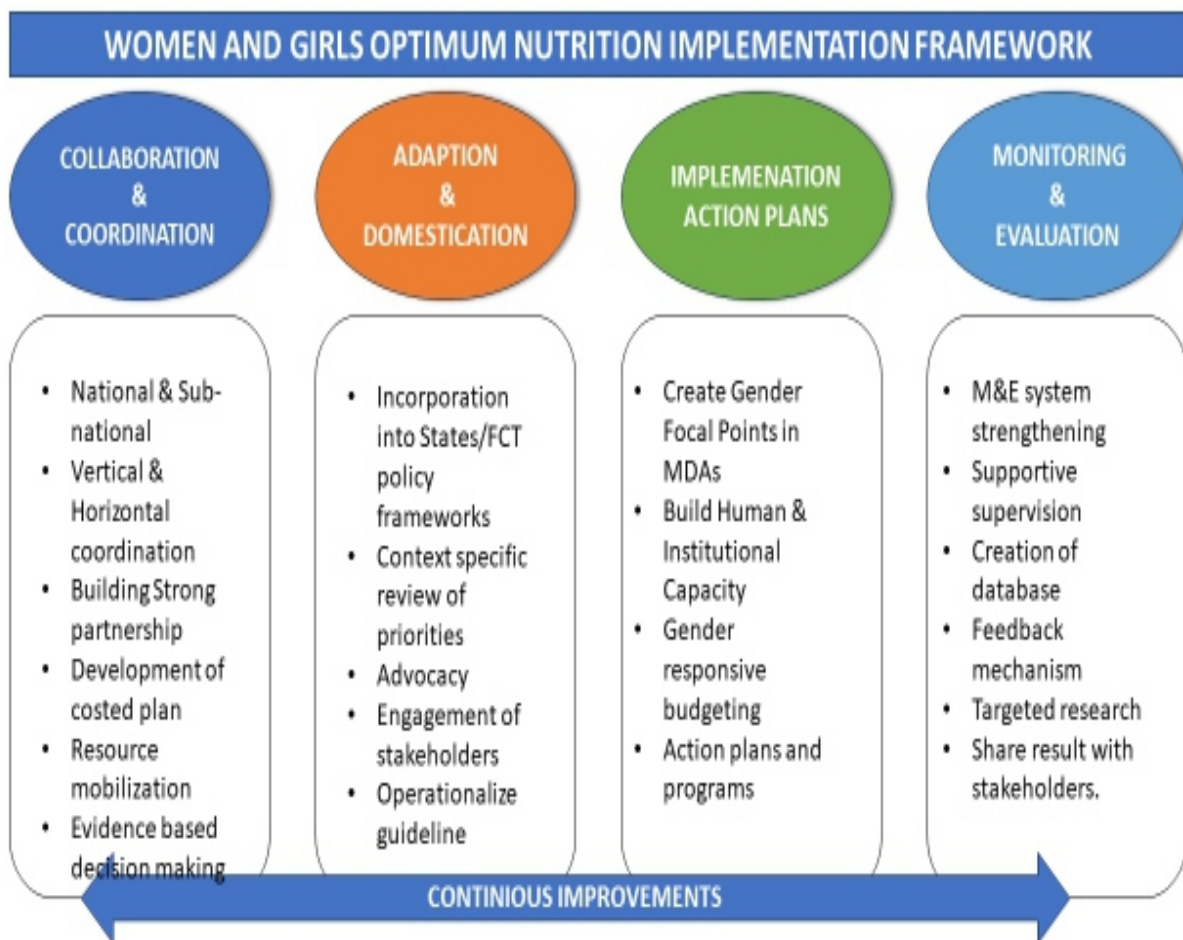
Monitoring and evaluation are essential components of the implementation framework, as they enable the assessment of progress and the identification of challenges and opportunities for improvement. The guidelines encourages the establishment of robust monitoring and evaluation systems at all levels of governance, including the federal, state, and LGA levels. This includes conducting regular monitoring and evaluation exercises, using both quantitative and qualitative methods, to assess the implementation effectiveness and impact of the guidelines's strategies and interventions.

Overall, the nature of the national guidelines and the intended users emphasize a comprehensive and multi-level approach to women's and girls' empowerment for optimal nutrition. It underscores the importance of

collaboration, consultation, coordination, and effective implementation mechanisms to achieve the desired outcomes.

### 2.7.2 Implementation Framework

The proposed framework for the guidelines implementation is shown below:



### 2.7.3 Intended Users

The intended users of this national guidelines are listed as follows;

- i. Policymakers



- ii. Government agencies
- iii. CSOs
- iv. Healthcare professionals
- v. Development Partners
- vi. Private sectors
- vii. Academia and Researchers
- viii. Other stakeholders involved in women's and girls' empowerment and nutrition.

These users are expected to use the guidelines to inform the development and implementation of policies, programmes, and interventions that promote women's and girls' empowerment and improve their nutrition outcomes. The guidelines provides a framework and evidence-based recommendations to guide their actions and decisions.



## **PART 3**

### **3.0 ISSUES, CHALLENGES AND PROGRAMME INITIATIVES**

#### **3.1 Issues and Challenges**

##### **3.1.1 Climate Change, Food Security, and Nutrition**

Adverse effects of climate change poses significant threats to food security and nutrition for women and girls. Increasing extreme weather events, changing rainfall patterns, and temperature variations can disrupt food production systems, leading to reduced availability and quality of food, thereby exacerbating malnutrition.

Women and girls often face barriers in accessing, demanding, and consuming healthy diets. Limited availability, affordability, and accessibility of diverse nutritious foods, along with inadequate nutrition knowledge, can hinder efforts to achieve optimal nutrition.

One of the key challenges faced by women and girls in achieving optimal nutrition is the unequal access to and distribution of nutritious and healthy food. Gender disparities, including cultural and social norms, limit women's access to resources, education, and employment opportunities that would improve their access to nutritious food. Furthermore, limited control over household income and decision-making power often exacerbates this issue, resulting in women and girls being disproportionately affected by food insecurity.

Addressing the issues and challenges related to climate change, food security, and nutrition requires a holistic and gender-responsive approach.



By empowering women and girls, promoting gender equality, and implementing targeted programmes, Nigeria can ensure adequate access to nutritious food, promote optimal nutrition, and build resilience to climate change.

### **3.1.2 Participation, Voice and Leadership in Policy and Decision-Making**

One of the significant challenges hindering women's and girls' empowerment is violence and discrimination. Gender-based violence, including physical, sexual, and psychological abuse, restricts their ability to participate actively in decision-making processes. Discrimination based on gender stereotypes also marginalizes women and girls, limiting their voice and influence in policymaking.

The challenges arising from the above are:

- i. **Lack of legal protection:** Nigeria does not have robust legislation to protect women and girls from violence and discrimination, making it difficult to address these issues effectively and where such policies and laws exist, they largely remain unimplemented.
- ii. **Cultural norms and traditions:** Deep-rooted cultural beliefs and practices perpetuate gender inequality, often tolerating violence and discrimination against women and girls. These norms present challenges in altering attitudes and behaviours within societies.
- iii. **Limited access to justice:** Women and girls often face barriers in accessing justice due to inadequate legal resources, fear of retaliation, insufficient awareness, and limited support services.





More so, women and girls face persistent challenges due to historical and structural unequal power relations. Discriminatory practices and unequal access to resources limit their participation, voice, and leadership in policy- and decision-making processes.

Challenges due to historical and structural unequal power relations are:

- i. Patriarchal norms and attitudes: Societal norms that assign women and girls subordinate roles perpetuate inequality and hinder their meaningful participation and leadership roles.
- ii. Limited economic opportunities: Unequal access to resources, such as land, finance, and technology, prevents women from fully participating in economic decision-making processes.
- iii. Gender pay gap: Disparity in wages between men and women in some areas restricts women's financial independence and undermines their decision-making power.

Another crucial issue is women's decision-making power regarding household spending for optimal nutrition as it affects food choices, nutrition education and access to health services. This is because societal and cultural norms often restrict women's ability to exercise decision-making authority in areas related to nutrition and health.

Challenges due to women's decision-making power regarding household spending for optimal nutrition includes unequal distribution of household resources: in many societies, men control financial resources, limiting women's authority in decision-making related to nutrition and health expenditure.



- i. Lack of awareness and education: Limited knowledge and awareness about optimal nutrition and health practices may hinder women's ability to make informed decisions regarding household spending.
- ii. Limited access to information and services: Lack of access to information resources and healthcare facilities can limit women's capacity to make decisions that positively affect their nutrition and that of the household.

Addressing violence and discrimination, historical and structural unequal power relations, and women's decision-making power concerning household spending are critical for realizing women and girls' empowerment and achieving optimal nutrition outcomes. By implementing targeted interventions and empowering women, we can create an enabling environment for them to contribute actively to shaping policies and decisions that positively affect their nutrition

### **3.1.3 Economic and Social Empowerment**

Women and girls face numerous obstacles in accessing secure and decent work opportunities in conditions that ensure dignity and safety. These obstacles include limited access to education and training, gender-based violence, lower wages, and occupational segregation.

**Challenge:** Existing gender inequalities, lack of affordable childcare, and the persistence of harmful traditional practices contribute to the challenge of empowering women and girls economically.

Women and girls often face limited access to sustainable innovations and technologies that can enhance their productivity, reduce drudgery, and



improve nutrition outcomes. This includes access to improved agricultural techniques, renewable energy solutions, and digital technologies.

The challenge lies in promoting inclusive and affordable access to sustainable innovations and technologies that are designed with the specific needs of women and girls in mind. Bridging the digital gender gap and addressing financial constraints are vital in ensuring equitable access.

### **3.1.4 Access to Financial Services and Social Capital**

Access to financial services, such as credit and insurance, plays a crucial role in empowering women and girls to achieve optimal nutrition and overall well-being. However, structural constraints often hinder women's ability to benefit from these services. Addressing these constraints is crucial to promotion of gender equality and ensure that all women and girls can access the resources they need for good nutrition.

Structural constraints can include discriminatory laws and policies that limit women's access to financial services, as well as gender biases and social norms that prioritize men over women. These constraints can also include financial literacy among women, which may prevent them from effectively utilizing available financial services.

### **3.1.5 Access to Education, Capacity Building, Training, Knowledge and Information Services**

Ensuring equal access to formal education is crucial for promoting women's and girls' empowerment and optimal nutrition. Recognizing the right of women and girls to education is a fundamental step towards breaking the cycle of poverty, improving health outcomes, and enhancing economic



opportunities. This includes providing access to quality primary, secondary, and tertiary education, as well as lifelong learning opportunities.

Despite advancements in education, gender inequalities persist, leading to high dropout rates for girls. These disparities are often rooted in socio-cultural norms, discriminatory practices, poverty, and inadequate infrastructure. Addressing these challenges requires coordinated efforts to eliminate gender-based discrimination and promote equal opportunities for girls through targeted interventions, such as school feeding programmes, scholarships, gender-responsive Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) and safe transportation.

Numerous obstacles hinder the education of girls, including early marriage, teenage pregnancy, child labour, and harmful traditional practices. Concerted efforts are needed to remove these barriers and enable girls to fulfil their right to education. This can be achieved through legislative measures, community sensitization, and comprehensive sexual and reproductive health education and services. Collaboration between governments, civil society, and other stakeholders is crucial in creating an enabling environment for girls' education.

Access to market information is essential for women and girls to maximize their potential as producers, entrepreneurs, processors, and traders in the agricultural sector. Lack of information on market trends, prices, and demand can limit their ability to make informed decisions, reduce their bargaining power, and prevent them from accessing fair market opportunities. Efforts should be made to bridge this information gap, such



as establishing market information systems and ensuring women's participation in market-related trainings and capacity-building programmes.

Addressing barriers to participating in the agricultural sector is also key to have women and girls more wholesomely involved, as socio-cultural norms either exclude or relegate the role women play in the agricultural value chains to the processes that are less lucrative and pay less for more effort. Therefore, to empower women and girls in agriculture and related sectors, gender-responsive agricultural extension services and other forms of technical and vocational education are crucial. These initiatives should address the specific needs and challenges faced by women, provide practical training, and promote entrepreneurship. Collaboration with relevant stakeholders, including agricultural extension agencies, vocational training institutions, and women's organizations, is vital in designing and implementing gender-responsive programmes.

Access to Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) play an increasingly important role in empowering women and girls by providing access to information, knowledge, and resources. ICTs can enhance their educational opportunities, facilitate income-generation activities, and improve their access to healthcare and nutrition-related information. Efforts should be made to bridge the digital divide, promote digital literacy, and provide affordable and gender-responsive ICT infrastructure and services.

### **3.1.6 Social Protection and Food and Nutrition Assistance**

Discriminatory social norms, gender stereotypes, and unequal power relations between women and men are significant barriers to achieving women and girls' empowerment for optimal nutrition. These issues result in



limited access to resources, decision-making power, and control over income and assets for women and girls. To address these challenges, it is crucial to develop policies and programmes that challenge and transform these norms and stereotypes, promoting gender equality and women's empowerment.

Governments should prioritize the development and implementation of comprehensive gender equality policies that dismantle discriminatory norms and stereotypes. These policies should emphasize the importance of challenging harmful cultural practices, traditions, and beliefs that perpetuate gender inequality. Additionally, it is essential to establish robust legal frameworks that protect women's rights and ensure gender equality, both in the private and public spheres.

***To achieve optimal nutrition for women and girls, public policies must be gender-sensitive, recognizing the unique challenges faced by women and girls in relation to nutrition. Governments should establish nutrition policies and programmes that explicitly promote gender equality and women's empowerment, ensuring that they are responsive to the specific needs of women and girls.***

Furthermore, it is important to engage men and boys in discussions and programming related to nutrition, as they play a crucial role in shaping household dynamics and decision-making processes. Encouraging men to participate actively in prioritizing and supporting women's and girls' nutrition needs will further contribute to optimal nutrition outcomes.

The involvement of smallholder women farmers and food producers in school feeding programmes is a strategy that can enhance women's and



girls' empowerment for optimal nutrition. Including these women in the value chain of school feeding programmes not only strengthens their economic opportunities but also contributes to community-based solutions for improved nutrition.

Training and capacity building initiatives should be provided to enhance the skills and productivity of smallholder women farmers and food producers. This can include access to credit, agricultural extension services, and market information. Additionally, governments should collaborate with relevant stakeholders to facilitate the creation of supportive policies, such as land tenure security and access to productive resources that enable women's meaningful participation in food production and supply chains.

Universal social protection mechanisms are crucial for promoting women's and girls' empowerment for optimal nutrition. Social protection programmes that address the specific needs of women and girls contribute to reducing poverty, improving nutrition outcomes, and enhancing overall well-being. These programmes must be comprehensive, accessible, and responsive to the diverse needs of women and girls throughout their life cycle.

Governments should establish universal social protection systems that prioritize vulnerable groups, including women and girls. This includes the provision of cash transfers, conditional or unconditional, to households with women and girls to enhance their access to nutritious food, healthcare services, and education. Additionally, social assistance programmes that offer targeted support for pregnant women, lactating mothers, and adolescent girls can significantly contribute to improving their nutrition status.



To ensure the effectiveness of social protection programmes, comprehensive domestic legislation must be in place. This legislation should guarantee women and girls' rights to access social protection and ensure that their unique needs are reflected in programme design and implementation. Furthermore, national and sub-national governments should allocate adequate budgetary resources to the implementation of social protection mechanisms, ensuring sustainability and impact.

Addressing social protection and food and nutrition assistance in the context of women's and girls' empowerment for optimal nutrition requires the implementation of policies and programmes that challenge discriminatory norms, promote gender equality, and prioritize women's meaningful participation. Comprehensive approaches that integrate gender-sensitive nutrition programmes, engage smallholder women farmers and food producers, and establish universal social protection systems are essential for achieving the desired outcomes.

### **3.1.7 Establishment and Strengthening of Food System Supply Chain for Smallholder Farmers**

Smallholder farmers, notably women, play a crucial role in the agricultural sector, providing a significant portion of the world's food. They generate about 70% of world's food but generate <30% of resources. However, they face numerous challenges that limit their productivity and potential for growth.

Women smallholder farmers often face barriers to land ownership, control, and tenancy rights, which restrict their capacity to produce enough food for their households and generate income. This lack of land tenure security





prevents women from making long-term investments and hampers their ability to participate fully in agriculture.

Limited access to credit and financial services is also a major challenge faced by smallholder farmers, particularly women. Access to credit is vital for them to invest in inputs, technologies, and infrastructure, thereby improving productivity and resilience. However, the lack of collateral and financial literacy in addition to discriminatory practices prevent women from accessing credit and other financial services.

Smallholder farmers, especially women, often face difficulties in connecting to local and regional markets. Limited access to market information, inadequate market infrastructure, and challenges in complying with quality and safety standards prevent them from receiving fair prices for their produce. This hinders their potential for income generation and economic empowerment.

### **3.1.8 Nutrition during Conflicts, Humanitarian Crises, and Emergencies**

Conflicts, humanitarian crises, and emergencies pose significant challenges to achieving optimal nutrition for women and girls. These situations disrupt food security and access to essential nutrition services; exacerbate existing vulnerabilities, and disproportionately impact women and girls. This sub-section explores the issues, challenges, and program initiatives related to nutrition in these challenging contexts. It also emphasizes the importance of climate change adaptation, disaster risk reduction, and their implications for the nutrition and well-being of women and girls.



Conflicts often lead to the destruction of agricultural infrastructure, displacement of populations, and disruption of supply chains, resulting in reduced food availability and increased food prices. This leads to inadequate dietary diversity and an increased risk of malnutrition among women and girls. Women and girls are particularly vulnerable to physical and sexual violence during conflicts, which can have long-term physical and psychological consequences. These traumatic experiences make it challenging for them to access and utilize adequate nutrition resources, leading to poor nutrition outcomes.

### **Climate Change and Natural Disaster Impacts on Women and Girls**

**Heightened vulnerability:** Women and girls are disproportionately affected by climate change and natural disasters due to social, cultural, economic, and political barriers. They often face increased risks related to displacement, loss of livelihoods, and limited access to resources, which directly affect their nutritional status.

**Displacement and loss of livelihoods:** Climate-related disasters, such as droughts and floods, force communities to migrate or lose their means of livelihood. Displaced women and girls are at a heightened risk of malnutrition due to limited access to nutritious food, clean water, and sanitation facilities. Displacement, leading to exposure and vulnerability to gender-based violations, further slows down women's productivity and ability to participate in socioeconomic activities.



## **Effect on Local Communities and Vulnerable Women**

**Burden on local communities:** Conflicts and emergencies place a significant burden on local communities responsible for hosting displaced people. Limited resources and strained infrastructure compromise the availability and access to nutritious food, water, sanitation, and healthcare services for both host and displaced communities.

**Vulnerability of marginalized groups:** Vulnerable women and girls, including those from ethnic minority groups, disabled individuals, and elderly women, face additional barriers and discrimination in accessing nutrition support during conflicts and emergencies. These groups require targeted interventions to ensure their unique needs are addressed.

## **Climate Change Adaptation, Mitigation, and Disaster Risk Reduction in Communities**

**Strengthening resilience:** Building community resilience to climate change and disaster risks is crucial for ensuring the nutritional well-being of women and girls. This involves implementing programmes that enhance agricultural productivity, promote sustainable food systems, improve water and sanitation services, and strengthen community-based early warning systems.

**Empowering women and girls:** Engaging and empowering women and girls in climate change adaptation and risk reduction efforts can lead to more effective and sustainable solutions. Women's involvement in decision-making processes, capacity-building initiatives, and livelihood



diversification can contribute to improved nutrition outcomes for themselves and their families.

Nutrition during conflicts, humanitarian crises, and emergencies requires urgent attention and targeted interventions to address the unique challenges faced by women and girls. Strategies should include ensuring adequate food availability, access to healthcare services, protection from violence, and strengthening community resilience to climate change and disaster risks. By prioritizing women's and girls' empowerment and addressing their nutritional needs in these challenging contexts, we can contribute to their overall well-being, health, and sustainable development.

### **3.1.9 Eliminating all Forms of Violence against Women and Girls**

To achieve optimal nutrition for women and girls, it is crucial to address the issue of violence, particularly gender-based violence (GBV). Violence against women and girls not only poses immediate physical and psychological harm, but also has long-term consequences on their health and well-being. This chapter aims to explore the challenges and programme initiatives surrounding the elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls.

Gender-based violence refers to acts of violence that are primarily committed against individuals based on their gender. Women and girls are disproportionately affected by GBV, manifesting in various forms, including sexual assault, domestic violence, child marriage, female genital mutilation, and human trafficking.



## Challenges

**Deep-rooted Gender Inequality:** GBV thrives in societies that perpetuate gender inequality. Cultural norms, attitudes, and social norms contribute to the continuation of violence against women and girls.

**Stigma and Shame:** Women and girls often face stigmatization and shame when they speak out about their experiences of violence. This discourages them from seeking help and perpetuates a cycle of silence.

**Access to Justice:** Many cases of GBV go unreported or unpunished due to weak legal frameworks, corruption, or lack of resources to support survivors through the justice system. This lack of accountability perpetuates a culture of impunity.

## Gender-Based Violence and Harmful Practices in the Context of Food Security and Nutrition

### Links between GBV and Food Security

**Forced Marriage:** Girls who are forced into early marriages often experience adverse consequences of limited access to education, early pregnancies and, increased vulnerability to poverty and malnutrition.

**Sexual Exploitation:** Women and girls who experience sexual exploitation may resort to risky behaviours, such as transactional sex, to obtain food or economic resources. This increases their risk of contracting sexually transmitted infections, including HIV/AIDS.



**Child Labour:** Girls engaged in hazardous or exploitative labour, such as agricultural work or domestic servitude, have limited access to education and resources, which leads to increased vulnerability to malnutrition.

## Challenges

**Poverty and Inequality:** Poverty and gender inequalities contribute to the perpetuation of GBV, which in turn affects food security and nutrition outcomes.

**Limited Data:** There is a lack of comprehensive data on the prevalence of GBV linked to food security and nutrition, making it challenging to design targeted interventions.

Eliminating violence against women and girls is crucial for achieving optimal nutrition outcomes. By addressing the issues and challenges outlined in this sub-section, and implementing the recommended programme initiatives, governments, civil society organizations, and communities can work together towards a safer and empowering environment for women and girls, ensuring their right to live with dignity and access to optimal nutrition.

### 3.1.10 Access to Healthcare for Women and Girls

Access to healthcare services is crucial for promoting women's and girls' empowerment and ensuring optimal nutrition. This chapter focuses on addressing the issues, challenges, and programme initiatives related to access to healthcare, with a particular emphasis on essential health services and sexual and reproductive health.



## **Healthcare Demands of Women and Girls**

Women and girls have unique healthcare needs that require targeted interventions. Throughout their lifespan, women and girls experience various biological changes and health conditions, such as menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth, and menopause. These demands necessitate accessible, appropriate, and specialized healthcare services that address their specific needs.

## **Access to Essential Health Services**

To ensure optimal nutrition and empowerment, it is essential to prioritize the availability and accessibility of essential health services for women and girls. This includes, but is not limited to, primary healthcare, preventive health services, immunizations, skilled maternal and new-born care, family planning, and mental health services.

## **Challenges in Provision of Essential Health Services**

Despite the importance of essential health services, considerable gaps exist in their provision, particularly for women and girls. These challenges can include inadequate infrastructure, shortages of skilled healthcare professionals, limited availability and affordability of medicines and supplies, insufficient awareness and information, and cultural and social barriers that impede access.

## **Investment in Women's and Girls' Health**



Investing in women's and girls' health is essential for enabling them to live a healthy and productive life, thereby contributing to sustainable development. Governments, policymakers, and donors should allocate adequate resources and funding to strengthen healthcare systems, address healthcare workforce shortages, improve healthcare facilities, and ensure the availability and affordability of quality health services.

Ensuring access to essential health services, particularly those related to sexual and reproductive health is vital for promoting women's and girls' empowerment and optimal nutrition. Adequate investment, policy support, capacity building, and awareness campaigns are essential for addressing the challenges and improving healthcare access for women and girls. Prioritizing women's and girls' health, societies can achieve sustainable development and promote gender equality.

### **3.1.11 Social and Cultural Norms inhibiting Women's and Girls' Nutrition**

Social and cultural norms play a crucial role in shaping the behaviours and practices related to women's and girls' nutrition. These norms can either facilitate or hinder the progress towards achieving optimal nutrition for women and girls. This chapter explores the various social and cultural norms that contribute to the challenges faced in women's and girls' nutrition, as well as programme initiatives to address them.

**Social Norms that prevent women from developing and growing their enterprises and productivity:** Many societies have deeply ingrained social norms that limit women's access to resources, including financial capital, land, and education, which adversely affect their ability to create





and grow their enterprises. These norms restrict women's economic empowerment and ultimately influence their nutrition.

**Views about women and men traditional roles in society:** Traditional views about gender roles often reinforce inequities in accessing nutritious food. These views may restrict women's mobility, limit their control over household resources, and confine them to domestic responsibilities. A comprehensive approach to address this challenge should include awareness campaigns targeting both men and women, promoting gender equality and transforming traditional roles. Engaging community leaders, such as religious and traditional leaders, can be instrumental in challenging these norms and advocating for equal opportunities for women and girls.

**Food security and local knowledge:** Local knowledge and traditional systems play a significant role in ensuring food security. However, some traditional practices and beliefs may limit women's and girls' access to nutritious foods. Programme initiatives should strive to merge local knowledge with nutrition-sensitive practices. Community-level workshops and training can serve as platforms to discuss and validate traditional practices that enhance nutrition, while challenging harmful practices that hinder it. Involving local leaders and stakeholders in planning and implementation is crucial to ensure the adoption of these initiatives.

**Health beliefs and food taboos relating to women and girls:** Health beliefs and food taboos are prevalent in many societies, affecting women's and girls' nutritional status. These taboos often restrict the intake of nutrient-rich foods during certain periods or conditions such as menstruation, pregnancy, and lactation. Programme initiatives should focus



on providing accurate information and nutrition education to dispel myths surrounding these taboos. Engaging local health workers, community nutrition volunteers, and school health programmes can help disseminate accurate knowledge effectively.

**Age and gender-differentiated taboos:** Societies may have age and gender-differentiated taboos that limit specific groups' access to certain foods or nutrients. For example, adolescent girls may face restrictions on consuming protein-rich foods due to prevailing traditional beliefs. Programme initiatives should address these taboos by promoting age- and gender-specific dietary guidelines and developing culturally appropriate nutrition education materials. School-based nutrition programmes can play a crucial role in challenging and changing these norms by promoting healthy eating habits among adolescents.

**Food taboos among pregnant women and associated factors:** Pregnant women often face specific food taboos that may jeopardize their nutritional status. These taboos may stem from cultural beliefs, myths, or inadequate knowledge about nutrition during pregnancy. Programme initiatives should prioritize targeted interventions for pregnant women, involving healthcare providers, community leaders, and families. Antenatal care visits should include comprehensive nutrition counselling, addressing common misconceptions and monitoring the adequacy of nutrient intake among expectant mothers.

Social and cultural norms significantly influence women's and girls' nutrition. Understanding the various challenges posed by these norms is crucial for designing effective program initiatives. By addressing the issues



related to social norms and implementing evidence-based interventions, a multi-sectoral approach can be adopted to empower women and girls, ensuring optimal nutrition for enhanced well-being and development.

### **3.2 Programme Initiatives**

To ensure the effective implementation of the national guidelines on women's and girls' empowerment for optimal nutrition, it is essential to build upon existing initiatives that have demonstrated success in improving women's and girls' nutrition at both national and sub-national levels in Nigeria and globally. These initiatives have provided valuable documentation, evidence, experience, and results, which can inform future programme initiatives.

Addressing the structural constraints that limit women's access to financial services and social capital is vital for promoting women's and girls' empowerment for optimal nutrition. Implementing initiatives that address these challenges, we can strive towards a more equitable and inclusive society where all women and girls have the resources they need for their well-being and nutritional needs.

Efforts to establish and strengthen the food system supply chain for smallholder farmers, with a particular focus on women's empowerment, are crucial for ensuring optimal nutrition and sustainable livelihoods. By addressing the issues of land access, credit facilities, and market opportunities, women smallholder farmers can enhance their productivity, generate income, and contribute significantly to food security and nutrition. The implementation of comprehensive programme initiatives outlined in this



chapter will pave the way for transformative change and empower women in the agriculture sector.

### **3.2.1 Available Documentation Evidence and Experience**

Drawing from global experiences is crucial in understanding successful programme initiatives that can be adapted to the Nigerian context. This includes information available from international organizations such as the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), and the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement. Additionally, reports from other countries, especially those with similar socioeconomic and cultural contexts, can provide practical insights into designing effective interventions.

**National surveys and assessments:** These provide valuable information on the current situation of women's and girls' nutrition in Nigeria. Examples include the Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS), Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS), and the National Nutrition and Health Survey (NNHS).

**Policy documents and guidelines:** Examination of existing national policies and guidelines related to women's and girls' nutrition will help identify gaps, challenges, and opportunities for program initiatives. This includes the National Policy on Food and Nutrition, the National Strategic Plan of Action for Nutrition, and the National Gender Policy, among others.



**Research studies:** Studies conducted by local research institutions and academic organizations should be reviewed to gather evidence on effective interventions, behavioural change strategies, and best practices to ensure optimal nutrition for women and girls.

### **3.2.2 Initiatives and Pilot Programmes on Women's and Girls' Nutrition**

Assessing the outcomes and best practices from previous initiatives and pilot programmes is essential to inform the design of future interventions. This section will highlight successful initiatives carried out at the national and sub-national levels in Nigeria and globally, focusing on women's and girls' empowerment for optimal nutrition.

#### **3.2.2.1 Global Initiatives and Pilot Programmes**

**Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement:** Analyse experiences and best practices from countries that have successfully implemented the SUN Movement approach, focusing on the empowerment of women and girls for optimal nutrition.

**International nutrition programmes:** Study the outcomes and effectiveness of global initiatives such as the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN), the Adolescent Nutrition Initiative (ANI), and the Micronutrient Initiative (MI).

This part presents an overview of the available documentation, evidence, and experiences collected from national and global sources. The information gathered enables the formulation of programme initiatives, drawing upon best practices and successful pilot programmes implemented



at national and sub-national levels in Nigeria and globally. By building upon these existing foundations, the subsequent chapters will offer practical recommendations and guidelines for empowering women and girls towards achieving optimal nutrition.

### **3.2.2.2 Nigerian Initiatives and Pilot Programmes**

Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) programmes: Review the results and impact of programmes like the National Social Investment Programme (NSIP) and the Conditional Cash Transfer for Health and Nutrition (CCTHN) in addressing nutrition challenges among women and girls.

Maternal and Child Health (MCH) programmes: Assess the effectiveness of programmes such as the Midwives Service Scheme (MSS), Saving One Million Lives Programme for Results (SOML PforR), and the Integrated Maternal, Newborn, and Child Health (iMNCH) programme in improving nutrition outcomes among women and girls.

School-based nutrition interventions: Examine the impact and lessons learned from school feeding programmes, including the Home Grown School Feeding Programme (HGSFP) and the School Health and Nutrition (SHN) programme.

### **3.2.3 Best Practices from Existing Initiatives**

Based on the available documentation, evidence, experience, and results from initiatives and pilot programmes, the following best practices have been identified:



- **Multi-sectoral Approach:** Several successful initiatives have adopted a multi-sectoral approach, involving various stakeholders such as government departments, non-governmental organizations, community leaders, and private sector entities. These initiatives have recognized that nutrition is influenced by several factors beyond the health sector, including agriculture, education, water and sanitation, and social protection. Therefore, a coordinated effort and collaboration among different sectors are crucial.
- **Behaviour Change Communication:** Effective behaviour change communication strategies have been a key component of successful initiatives. These strategies have focused on improving knowledge, attitudes, and practices related to nutrition. They have utilized various communication channels, including mass media, community-based events, and interpersonal communication, to reach women, girls, and their families. Furthermore, cultural and social norms that impact nutrition behaviours have been addressed through targeted messaging and community dialogue.
- **Empowerment and Capacity Building:** Initiatives that have incorporated empowerment and capacity building components have shown promising results. They have aimed to improve women's and girls' decision-making power, resource control, and self-efficacy related to nutrition. This has been achieved through interventions such as women's group discussions, training programmes, income-generating activities, and skill-building initiatives. By enhancing women's and girls' capabilities, these initiatives have fostered sustainable changes in nutrition outcomes.



- **Integration and Convergence:** Successful initiatives have recognized the importance of integrating nutrition interventions within existing programmes to maximize impact. These initiatives have capitalized on existing platforms, such as maternal and child health services, education systems, and social safety nets, to deliver nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive interventions. Furthermore, convergence among different sectors, including health, agriculture, education, and women empowerment, has been encouraged to ensure comprehensive approaches to nutrition.
- **Strong Monitoring and Evaluation:** Initiatives that incorporated robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms have been better able to measure their impact, identify gaps, and make necessary adjustments. These initiatives have utilized relevant indicators to track changes in nutrition outcomes and have collected data at various stages, including baseline, midline, and endline. Moreover, regular reviews and assessments have been conducted to inform programme adaptation and continuous improvement.

### 3.2.4 Replication and Scale-up

The findings from existing initiatives and the identified best practices should serve as foundation, for future programme initiatives on women's and girls' empowerment for optimal nutrition. These initiatives need to be replicated and scaled up to reach a larger population and achieve sustainable impact.

The replication and scale-up process should involve close collaboration with relevant stakeholders, including government agencies, civil society organizations, academia, and international partners. Emphasis should be





placed on adapting the best practices to the local context, considering socio-cultural norms, geographical variations, and demographic characteristics. Continuous monitoring, evaluation, and learning should be integral parts of the replication and scale-up process to ensure the effectiveness and sustainability of the initiatives.

Building upon the available documentation, evidence, experience, and results from previous initiatives, future programme initiatives to be designed and implemented in a way that maximizes the potential to empower women and girls for optimal nutrition outcomes. These initiatives should incorporate the identified best practices and be responsive to the specific needs and priorities of women and girls in Nigeria.



## **PART 4**

### **4.0 POLICIES AND STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES**

Supporting the empowerment of women and girls is crucial for delivering on the promise of leaving no one behind in achieving Sustainable Development Goal 5 on gender equality. Cross-sectoral programmes and policies must address the formal and informal systems and social norms contributing to gender inequality and malnutrition, and empower women and girls to reach their full potential. Actions to address women and girls' nutrition must take a multi-system delivery approach guided by easy-to-access coherent guidance to target the nutritional gaps that are specific to women and girls.

When women's incomes rise they tend to invest more in the nutrition, education, and health of their families, causing a ripple effect that can benefit entire communities — higher female earnings and bargaining power translate into greater investment in children's education, health and nutrition, which leads to economic growth in the long term.

#### **4.1 Policy and Advocacy**

##### **4.1.1 Policy gap analysis of women and girls nutrition**

The challenge and opportunity remain that women's and girls' nutrition has been under-prioritized in implementation across diverse contexts. While the scope of action is varied, the commitment to women and girls must remain singular. Nigeria has made significant efforts to address gender inequality and promote food security and nutrition security; there are existing policy gaps that limit the focus on women's and girls' nutrition.



The analysis of existing policies, particularly the national gender policy, social protection policy, food and nutrition policy, and other relevant policies, identifies those gaps regarding women's and girls' nutrition in Nigeria, which revealed the following:

### **National Gender Policy**

The National Gender Policy in Nigeria aims to address gender inequalities and promote the socioeconomic and political empowerment of women. While the policy acknowledges the importance of promoting nutrition among women and girls, it predominantly focuses on gender mainstreaming and transformative approaches. However, the gender policy falls short in terms of specific provisions that directly address women's and girls' nutrition.

### **Social Protection Policy**

The Social Protection Policy in Nigeria is designed to reduce poverty and vulnerability among the most marginalized populations. Although the policy includes measures to support vulnerable women, it does not explicitly emphasize the unique nutritional needs and challenges faced by women and girls. Hence, by not addressing the nutritional aspect within the social protection framework, an important opportunity to enhance their overall well-being is missed.

### **Food and Nutrition Policy**

The Food and Nutrition Policy in Nigeria primarily focuses on addressing food security and nutrition for the entire population. However, there is a



nutritional needs of women and girls. The policy lacks specific measures to address the unique nutritional requirements of adolescent girls, which are crucial for their health and development.

### **Identification of Gaps**

Based on the analysis, the following gaps were identified in the policy landscape related to women's and girls' nutrition in Nigeria:

- a) Insufficient focus on addressing the unique nutritional needs of women.
- b) Limited provisions or strategies to address the nutritional challenges faced by adolescent girls during their critical growth period.
- c) Absence of specific targets and indicators to monitor progress related to women's and girls' nutrition within the policies.
- d) Inadequate integration of nutrition interventions within social protection programmes, missing an important opportunity to support vulnerable women and girls.
- e) Limited coordination and collaboration between various sectors involved in promoting women's and girls' nutrition, resulting in fragmented efforts.

This national guidelines therefore aims to bridge the identified gaps and improve policies related to women's and girls' nutrition in Nigeria.



#### **4.1.2 Develop and implement policies that promote women's and girls' empowerment for optimal nutrition**

Governments, with the support of all relevant stakeholders, including civil society, local communities, private sector and development partners, should:

- i. Put the right policies and structures in place to empower women and scale up nutrition through a multi-sectoral approach, which incorporates women's empowerment issues into existing policies and strategic plans
- ii. Improve the enabling environment for adolescent girls and women to strengthen gender-related legislation and women's political participation. To work with formal institutions (ministries, national assembly, and political structures) to increase the inclusion and participation of girls and women's issues in political and governance processes
- iii. Promote gender mainstreaming across different relevant sectors, including agriculture and food sectors, at all governmental levels as this supports women's and girls' participation and empowerment and creates the impetus to address inequality across a range of connected issues.
- iv. Design and implement policies and inter-sectoral programmes that acknowledge women's and girls' specific nutritional needs linked to their life course and circumstances (e.g. widows, divorced women, and single mothers, adolescents)
- v. Promote the full, equal, effective inclusive, and meaningful participation and engagement of women and girls and their



organizations in the process of policy design, implementation, oversight, and programmatic decisions for food security and nutrition

- vi. Formulate gender policies and action plans that address all forms of discrimination against women and girls, particularly discriminatory gender norms, biases, and attitudes, including among men leaders through awareness raising and training
- vii. Ensure there are policies in place to encourage young people to eat healthy food and exercise at school, by making services available for healthy food and sports facilities through the development and operationalization of policies to promote healthy diet and physical activity in school settings
- viii. Introduce and strengthen gender-responsive public policies and programmes across sectors with a transformative approach, to address the gender wage gap and to promote decent work.
- ix. Stakeholders engage to form coalitions at national and sub-national levels to strengthen efforts at addressing women's and girls' empowerment through community-based implementing structures

#### **4.1.3 Advocate for gender-responsive nutrition programmes at national, state, local government and community levels**

Governments, with the support of all relevant stakeholders, including civil society, local communities, private sector and development partners, should:

- i. Advocate for policies, strategies, and programmes that aim to improve the nutritional status of women and girls which includes supporting the review of existing policies and programme implementation that: strengthen food environments for women and



- their communities; create opportunities to reach women before pregnancy with nutrition counselling, multiple micronutrient supplementation (MMS) and social and behaviour change communication (SBCC)
- ii. Strengthening capacities of women and girls to successfully engage in food systems and the various components of the value chains, including the labour market.
  - iii. Advocate for adequate financial, technical, and human resources, supported by political commitment and public policies that promote an enabling environment to generate social, economic, and cultural changes with specific policies, programs, and institutions that address the symptoms and root causes of gender inequalities.
  - iv. Advocate to policymakers to provide women's equal access to loans and credits, and introduce temporary special measures when required, to enable women to gain access to land and other productive resources regardless of marital status.
  - v. Leverage existing momentum on the multisectoral approach to nutrition and food systems transformation with the potential to make nutritious diets more accessible, affordable and to improve micronutrient intake in households, leading to better nutrition outcomes.
  - vi. Improve education, research, and advocacy programmes to raise awareness on women's and girls' health issues including sexual and reproductive health and rights, HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted infections, non-communicable diseases (NCDs), and nutrition for women and girls.



- vii. Advocate for the review and update of the home-grown school feeding menu to include fortified, more nutritious and nutrient-dense foods.
- viii. Advocate for implementation of policies that support gender equality in nutrition-specific action areas and embrace the campaign to help amplify it with success stories to inspire others to improve nutrition for women and girls.
- ix. Build on existing community structures for ownership, participation and uptake of services that are required for improving nutrition.
- x. Strengthen the role of relevant women's right organizations, and women's collective action in the context of food security and nutrition which recognizes the importance of self-association, the role of relevant civil society and social movements to promote gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment in decision-making at all levels of agriculture and food systems.
- xi. Advocate for the enforcement of the regulation of nutrition labelling on packaged food products to support social demand for nutritious foods.
- xii. Advocate for the scale-up of the provision of multiple micronutrient Supplement (MMS) to women of childbearing age.
- xiii. Advocate for the implementation and uptake of 6 months of paid maternity and 2 weeks of paid paternity leave to promote gender equity, improved father-baby bonding, and improving mothers' postpartum health.
- xiv. Advocate to stakeholders at all levels to ensure women and girls empowerment issues are prioritized in the country's development agenda.





- xv. Strengthen existing nutrition platform to educate women and girls on menstrual health and hygiene.

#### **4.1.4 Strengthen legal frameworks for women's rights and nutrition**

Governments, with the support of all relevant stakeholders, including civil society, local communities, private sector and development partners, should:

- i. Promote a coordinated and integrated policy approach to effectively reduce gender inequality, support the empowerment of women and girls, and improve their nutritional status in urban and rural settings.
- ii. Increase the capability of women and girls to exercise their basic and legal rights fully, determine their life outcomes, assume leadership roles, and influence decision-making in households, communities, and societies.
- iii. Design, strengthen, and implement legislation or introduce new legislation, as appropriate, to promote equal access to and control over natural resources (e.g. land) for all women including provisions and enforcement of laws that offer protection to women's access to resources and ownership of property.
- iv. Ensure equal access to justice and legal assistance so that all women and girls have their rights protected, including the right to adequate food in the context of national food security.
- v. Prioritize establishing and implementing inclusive legislative and policy frameworks for comprehensive maternity protection and work-family policies.



- vi. Ensure that women's rights, needs, and perspectives are considered in land and agricultural laws, policies, and programme development, including in assessment and analysis, program planning and design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, and that processes are participatory and transparent.
- vii. Ensure targeted health and universal social protection measures are in place to support all those in need, particularly women and girls during emergencies, shocks, risks and vulnerabilities.
- viii. Promote and fund innovation, technologies, and facilities for access to and sustainable management of water for household consumption, food production, sanitation, and hygiene with a focus on the rights and needs of women and girls.
- ix. Promote and support investments in gender-responsive climate change resilience, adaptation, and mitigation measures responsive to local needs, priorities, capacities, and circumstances.
- x. Promoting gender equality by supporting women's and girls' rights and empowerment and strengthening women's right organizations, social movements and associations, civil society, local communities, and community organizations working to prevent, mitigate, respond to, and eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls, in the context of food security and nutrition.
- xi. Address gender discriminatory socio-cultural norms at all levels of the food system that perpetuate gender inequality in the context of food security and nutrition, including engagement with all stakeholders and relevant leaders as allies in change processes.

## 4.2 Education and Awareness



#### **4.2.1 Promote nutrition education targeting women and girls**

Governments, with the support of all relevant stakeholders, including civil society, local communities, private sector and development partners, should:

- i. Reform school curriculum to promote education on gender equality, positive attitudes and behaviours that facilitate improved diet quality, adequate nutritional intake, and better dietary utilization by women and girls.
- ii. Promote and ensure adequate, culturally relevant, inclusive, quality education on healthy diets and nutrition for women and girls to strengthen their ability to make healthy choices.
- iii. Promote nutrition literacy programmes for women and girls.
- iv. Support schools to serve as important platforms for health promotion and services, such as nutrition education including multiple micronutrient supplementation.
- v. Invest in girls' access to information, digital skills/technology and mass/social media as important strategies for their empowerment and nutrition.
- vi. Support capacity building for educational administrators and teachers to deepen their understanding of gender equality, to provide education that addresses gender stereotypes, and to implement gender-sensitive policies and teaching techniques.
- vii. Extension of school feeding programmes which may encourage parents to send children to school, reducing absenteeism and attrition (particularly among girls), alleviating hunger, improving nutrition, and increasing school attendance.



#### **4.2.2 Train healthcare providers and community workers in gender-responsive nutrition counselling**

Governments, with the support of all relevant stakeholders, including civil society, local communities, private sector and development partners, should:

- i. Build the capacities of health care workers to provide gender sensitive nutrition counselling.
- ii. Implement health sector components of various nutrition policies designed to improve the nutrition of women and girls.

#### **4.2.3 Promote issues on water, sanitation and hygiene practices**

Governments, with the support of all relevant stakeholders, including civil society, local communities, private sector and development partners, should:

- i. Improve water and sanitation infrastructure in schools and communities, including providing separate toilet facilities for girls and boys, promoting hand washing and the hygienic preparation of food to reduce diarrhoea in girls and women.
- ii. Build capacities of local communities' on the management of water resources (e.g. water treatment) for optimal usage and consumption.
- iii. Encourage key household behaviours that reduce the incidence of childhood diarrhoea, namely: safe disposal of faeces, washing hands correctly at the right times, and storing and using safe water for drinking and cooking.
- iv. Increase demand and supply of hand hygiene through public education and behavioural change communication campaigns.



- v. Provide targeted hygiene education to improve hand hygiene knowledge and practice in schools and public settings.
- vi. Train teachers to support education on menstrual hygiene management at schools to prevent adverse health consequences.
- vii. Ensure safe, gender-transformative, and inclusive learning spaces, with water, sanitation and menstrual hygiene management facilities.

### **4.3 Economic and Financial Empowerment:**

#### **4.3.1 Promote women's access to income-generating activities and financial services with a focus on initiatives that worked**

Governments, with the support of all relevant stakeholders, including civil society, local communities, private sector and development partners, should:

- i. Address financial exclusion by expanding access to formal financial services and products that empower women economically and support platforms to facilitate women-led businesses and commerce.
- ii. Empower Women farmers' cooperatives/clusters for commercial production of food crops by Government and Private sector.
- iii. Support women for the production and diversification of fruits and vegetables around the homesteads, schools, orchards, and farms by providing starter packs for fruit and vegetable farming.
- iv. Incorporate economic empowerment strategies in adolescent nutrition interventions, such as income-generating activities, savings and loan programmes, and life skills training.



- v. Promote the production of nutritious foods and scale up capacity building of smallholder farmers (women) to cultivate nutritious crops, including bio-fortified crops.
- vi. Fund the provision and support dissemination and uptake of labour-saving technologies for domestic work as well as agricultural and aquatic food production and processing by women and girls, as appropriate.
- vii. Make technology accessible for women and girls and adapt to their needs and priorities.
- viii. Support and implement gender-sensitive and gender-responsive budgeting.
- ix. Promote capacity of women producers and entrepreneurs on financial literacy and disseminate information on financial services and products including e-commerce.
- x. Facilitate the participation of women as agents and actors in food systems investments, agriculture and territorial markets, in collaboration with other actors such as private enterprises, cooperatives and producer organizations.
- xi. Advocate to financial institutions and service providers, such as banks (e.g. Bank of Industry), rural micro, small and medium-scale producers and entrepreneurs, to create financial products and services tailored to the needs of women.
- xii. Support efforts to give women more control over social protection payments by transferring them to either digital wallets or zero-fee accounts
- xiii. Promote customs and practices that favour women's access to the use, and control of land and other productive resources, as well as



encourage customary and religious leaders to adopt and uphold these practices.

#### **4.3.2 Provide vocational training and skills development opportunities for economic empowerment**

Governments, with the support of all relevant stakeholders, including civil society, local communities, private sector and development partners, should:

- i. Support women's equal access to opportunities across food systems by strengthening their agency, building their collective power, facilitating their access to resources and service provision including training, enhancing their business capacities, mind-sets, skills, as well as supporting their effective engagement with agribusiness, food systems and other agricultural and value chains' actors.
- ii. Support diversifying household food production and consumption of fruits, vegetables, and animal foods at the household level by targeting women and increasing access to micronutrient-rich foods.
- iii. Ensure that land authorities are held accountable under laws, policies, and programmes, for their delivery of programmes related to the effective and equal enjoyment of women's rights to land and other productive resources.
- iv. Provide awareness campaigns (for example, via television, radio, print media, community radio, social media, CBOs and FBOs) to inform the public about women's rights to access, use, and control land and other productive resources, distributing such information in local languages.



- v. Ensure the ability of households and communities to mitigate, adapt to, and recover from shocks and stresses in a manner that reduces acute and chronic vulnerability and facilitates inclusive growth.
- vi. Close the gender gap in access to mobile phones, the Internet, and other vital technologies by addressing cultural, financial, educational, and motivational barriers.
- vii. Promote and support investments in gender-responsive climate change resilience, adaptation, and mitigation measures responsive to local needs, priorities, capacities and circumstances that lowers participation and learning achievement of girls in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) education.
- viii. Support women with digital skills to be better able to make their voices heard on local issues and influence the outcome of decisions that affect them and their communities.

#### **4.3.3 Support women's entrepreneurship and access to grants and, microcredit facilities, self-help approach**

Governments, with the support of all relevant stakeholders, including civil society, local communities, private sector and development partners, should:

- i. Provide grants and low to zero-interest loans for projects and programmes that boost economic growth, reduce poverty, and improve poor people's lives (women and girls).
- ii. Provide capacity building, training, and mentoring programmes to women and girls and equip them with market information, entrepreneurship opportunities, and the necessary skills to attain economic independence. Initiate local government internship





programmes, as well as long-term mentoring programmes, for young women and girls.

- iii. Support NGOs, industry associations, and corporations advocating for policy and programmatic solutions that enable women's economic participation, including reforming discriminatory laws and practices that hinder access to capital, land tenure, and inheritance rights, as well as encouraging a policy climate conducive to the growth of women-run Small Medium Enterprises (SMEs).
- iv. Promote and support initiatives, and design programmes aimed at empowering women and girls from disadvantaged groups to participate in local community governance.
- v. Create opportunities for young women and girls from disadvantaged groups to obtain the basic knowledge and professional skills necessary for their active public and political engagement in community life.
- vi. Strengthen women's vital role in advancing agricultural development and food security, and encourage policy and programmatic support for female farmers and agricultural businesses owned by women.
- vii. Promote investments in technologies, rural infrastructure, transport and specific activities (across food systems and along value chains) that support women producers including young women producers and entrepreneurs
- viii. Strengthen women's capacities to use and adopt technologies, including information and communication technologies (ICTs), and other methods that reduce their work burden and strengthen their productive and income-generating capacities/roles.



- ix. Use of digital technologies, innovations, and data to transform business models and practices across the agricultural value chain and address impediments in productivity, post-harvest handling, market access, finance, and supply chain management to achieve greater income for smallholder farmers, improve food and nutrition security, build climate resilience and expand inclusion of youth and women.
- x. Empower women groups and associations to enhance their role as change makers in food systems through deliberate programming of interventions that promote equality and equity across all aspects of food systems and promote sustainable food systems growth and transformation.

## **4.4 Social and Political Empowerment**

### **4.4.1 Encourage community and traditional leaders to support women's empowerment initiatives**

Governments, with the support of all relevant stakeholders, including civil society, local communities, private sector and development partners, should:

- i. Provide gender-responsive training for community and traditional leaders to support women's and girls' empowerment.
- ii. Promote initiatives, including nutrition education programmes, that recognize that unpaid care and domestic work should be shared more equitably between women, men, girls and boys, and that men must play a role in ensuring adequate nutrition for their families.



- iii. Ensure community-based awareness campaigns to secure the support of religious leaders and build the capacities of male and female religious leaders to advocate for family health and to successfully eradicate the accepted practice of female genital mutilation/cutting.
- iv. Address the historical and structural inequality in power relations between women and men, and gender stereotypes that may affect men's willingness to take on these shared roles.
- v. Increase women political representation at all levels of government and decision-making processes to address deeply rooted, systemic inequalities.
- vi. Address negative social norms and gender stereotypes that hinder women's involvement in agricultural investments, food systems and access to markets, thereby facilitating women's equal participation in and control over the various components of the agricultural value chains and food systems as well as their control over the benefits from their engagement.
- vii. Establish and implement strategies in food security and nutrition aimed at fulfilling the rights and strengthening capacities of women and girls to successfully engage in food systems and in the various components of the value chains, including for the labour market.
- viii. Foster inclusive behavioural change to accelerate the transition to non-discriminatory governance structures at the grassroots. Programming interventions must also sensitize boys and men on the challenges that undermine the empowerment of girls and women.
- ix. Support Adolescent Girls Initiative to provide mentorship services to girls through local internships and non-governmental organizations.



- x. Support peer mentoring as an effective mechanism to support girls by providing them access to positive role models, emotional support and encouragement, and individualized academic support using a spectrum of mentorship models including traditional peer mentorship models, peer mediation and peer counselling.
- xi. Deliver mentoring sessions in small groups, connecting young women to their peers and helping them to improve their health and wellbeing and make important life decisions.
- xii. Invest in women and girls to build resilient communities to mitigate crises and adapt to rising threats, such as climate change and fragility.
- xiii. Ensure that social protection programmes address women's and girls' specific life course transitions and risks, and the diversity of women's experiences, informed by relevant, disaggregated and up-to-date data.
- xiv. Enable women and men to participate equally in decision-making on social protection, including in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of programmes and policies.

#### **4.4.2 Promote women's participation in leadership and decision-making processes**

Governments, with the support of all relevant stakeholders, including civil society, local communities, private sector and development partners, should:

- i. Facilitate women's equal, full, effective and meaningful participation in social and economic networks, including formal and informal producer organizations and cooperatives.



- ii. Support local traditional financial systems as well as regional and multilateral financing, and attention to effective participation and leadership of women when in mixed networks which can contribute to real change towards financial autonomy of women.
- iii. Consider promoting, developing, adapting and implementing new and existing affirmative action measures as appropriate, such as gender parity in decision-making processes and positions at all levels and in all spheres related to agriculture, food security and nutrition.
- iv. Promote and strengthen women's equal representation in leadership and managerial positions, including in public and private sectors, and ensuring gender equality in access to inclusive, quality education and participation in relevant organizations.
- v. Increase the participation of women healthcare workers in leadership and decision-making roles.
- vi. Strengthen women's leadership and women's rights' – organizations, including indigenous women's and rural women's organization, such as by institutionalizing and funding awards systems for the recognition of women leaders and women's organizations.
- vii. Strengthen the role of relevant women's and women's rights' organizations, and women's collective action in the context of food security and nutrition, recognizing the importance of self-association and the role of relevant civil societies and social movements to promote gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment in decision-making at all levels.



#### **4.4.3 Raise awareness about women's voting rights and political representation**

Governments, with the support of all relevant stakeholders, including civil society, local communities, private sector and development partners, should:

- i. Address all forms of discrimination against women and girls, and particularly discriminatory gender norms, biases and attitudes, including among men leaders through awareness raising, training and introduction of gender policies and action plans.
- ii. Encourage the full, equal and meaningful participation of all women and their leadership including in civil service, government, scientific research, technological development, academia, businesses and local communities, among other areas.
- iii. Support more gender-balanced leadership to induce more women to become more competitive in nature and pursue similar positions gender-balanced composition of representatives.
- iv. Improve gender balance and the status of women through targeted organizational actions, which may include steps to increase gender awareness, enhance monitoring and accountability, and improve the work environment through appropriate human resource policies.
- v. Identify specific policies and practices that can be considered to improve organizational processes, procedures and culture, so that more women can take on and stay in leadership and decision-making positions.
- vi. Provide support to women employees to enable them to achieve leadership and decision-making goals.



- vii. Provide all decision-makers and leaders with gender equality training, which is crucial in helping to mitigate (unconscious) selection biases, but also contribute to awareness-raising and better understanding of the gender dynamics at play in interactions during meetings.
- viii. Address and promote changes in negative and discriminatory social norms and stereotypes that generate and perpetuate all forms of violence against women and girls in the context of food security and nutrition.
- ix. Address structural inequality in power relations between women and men– for example, challenging the normalization of violence as a manifestation of male behaviour - and elimination of harmful practices. Men and boys should be actively engaged in these processes.
- x. Put in place and enforce laws preventing violence in the workplace and domestic violence and raise the awareness of police, judiciary, healthcare and education professionals and social care workers and the public, particularly women in local communities, young and older women, women with disabilities, indigenous women, women in local communities and other vulnerable groups.
- xi. Ensure measures and services are in place for supporting and protecting victims and survivors of GBV against women and girls, including sexual violence, which considers specific manifestations within agriculture and food systems, as well as for supporting their needs within the context of legal proceedings, including criminal proceedings against perpetrators and investing in preventive measures.



- xii. Protect and advance all women's and girls' food security and nutrition by ensuring the security and safety of all women and girls from the onset of crises, with targeted approaches for survivors of violence and to the most disadvantaged, promoting their protection, dignity and integrity.
- xiii. Promote actions that will ensure the ability of households and communities to mitigate, adapt to, and recover from shocks and stresses in a manner that reduces acute and chronic vulnerability and facilitates inclusive growth.
- xiv. Establish management committees whose members are drawn from community-based associations and provide training to actors and community stakeholders involved in efforts to address malnutrition and elaborating an action plan as well as a monitoring and evaluation process.
- xv. Establish community structure that creates a safe environment of respect, attention, gratitude, sincerity, and empathy with good communication and listening skills and trained counsellors to support women and girls.

#### **4.4.4 Religious Institutions/leaders**

Governments, with the support of all relevant stakeholders, including civil society, local communities, private sector and development partners, should:

- i. Engage and train traditional leaders on all gender-related laws to mobilize their community members and households to support the





empowerment of women, campaign against gender based violence and child marriages, and support girls' education.

- ii. Integrate gender justice issues by religious and traditional leaders into their outreach practices (sermons, etc.) to inspire change, within their congregations and beyond.
- iii. Strengthen and provide platforms for religious and traditional leaders to come together periodically to share experiences on their own journeys of change and develop individual and collective action plans for promoting gender justice from a religious perspective, as part of a wider social movement for gender justice.
- iv. Support women leaders who are pushing for environmental policies, and climate action at local and national levels.

#### **4.4.5 Youth organizations/Networks**

Governments, with the support of all relevant stakeholders, including civil society, local communities, private sector and development partners, should:

- i. Inspire girls to ignite their power and use it to advocate for themselves and their communities through valuable friendships, fun activities, crafts, and games.
- ii. Galvanize their peers to engage in their own passions for positive social change.
- iii. Facilitate and coordinate the sharing of experiences, ideas, information, and strategies among women's and girl's organizations through networking, communication, capacity building, and advocacy at all levels.



- iv. Pursue proactive strategies to develop and empower young women and girls to take on leadership roles in their communities.
- v. Prepare and equip young women for transformational leadership, which requires providing space and opportunities for them to practice and grow as leaders with tools, knowledge and resources and encouraging them to be agents of social change.
- vi. Structure mentoring programme that provides strategic career advice, inspiration, guidance, and support to young career women to help unleash their potential, navigate career pathways, foster ambitions, and nurture dreams.

## **4.5 Health and Nutrition Services**

### **4.5.1 Prevention and control of basic health challenges**

Governments, with the support of all relevant stakeholders, including civil society, local communities, private sector and development partners, should:

- i. Develop a prevention strategy that incorporates gender perspective into infectious disease analysis and research to target policies and programmes.
- ii. Develop and implement models that address gender inequities in infectious diseases in an integrated manner with outreach activities that support using information, education, and communication strategies and materials for advocacy and training.
- iii. Target interventions to improve nutrient intakes, such as micronutrient supplements or specialized nutritious food for adolescent girls, pregnant and breastfeeding women due to their high



nutritional needs. Support large-scale food fortification to provide additional micronutrients for vulnerable households and individuals who cannot access diverse, nutrient-dense foods.

- iv. Leverage bio-fortification through the agriculture sector to improve the intake of essential micronutrients for households with limited access to centrally processed foods.
- v. Conduct Social and Behavioural Change Communication activities on MIYCN, and intra-household food distribution targeted at adolescents, pregnant women, and caregivers.
- vi. Support health systems to help women survivors of violence, and inform, advocate and strengthen violence prevention and care services to deliver concrete and transformative change for women and girls.
- vii. Support access to contraception, safe abortion fully allowed by law, prevention and treatment for sexually transmitted infections (STIs), care and support for violence survivors, and self-care interventions are prioritized including for adolescents, who face specific challenges to their sexual and reproductive health and rights.
- viii. Strengthen primary health care and advancing universal health coverage and gender equality.
- ix. Provide policies and programmes that prevent and respond to NCDs needs to consider the specific needs of women and girls as they are generally less active than men and boys due to harmful gender norms that limit both their mobility and equal participation in physical activities like sports.
- x. Support maternal health interventions to focus on less empowered women, specifically those with less decision-making autonomy and



no/low formal education, as they are less likely to achieve optimal uptake of intermittent preventive treatment of malaria during pregnancy Sulfadoxine--pyrimethamine (IPTp-SP) for intermittent preventive treatment of malaria during pregnancy.

- xi. Train and equip community health workers to tackle malaria and other communicable diseases to ensure women are consulted and represented which is a critical element of targeted beneficiaries and help to raise the social status of women by training female community health workers and increasing access to health services for many more women and their children.
- xii. Eliminate various barriers to healthcare, including setting up care at the community level, involving women in projects or facilitating access to appropriate healthcare for women at higher-level health centres.
- xiii. Encourage regular use of antenatal services prior to delivery to improve maternal and neonatal health outcomes.
- xiv. Support the development of education programmes that promote and facilitate HIV prevention strategies and reduce the prevalence of mother-to-child transmissions, targeting women in high-risk groups and areas.
- xv. Advocate for the sustainability of malaria reduction programmes and maximize capacity building by targeted investments, such as the distribution of insecticide-treated bed nets and effective medicines to impoverished rural areas.
- xvi. Support gender-sensitive environmental health policy to protect and maintain healthy life spaces for women, including increasing the provision of basic sanitation and clean drinking water



- xvii. Inform and educate health workers about the prevalence of gender-based violence and provide them with the tools to manage such cases appropriately.
- xviii. Engage community and traditional leaders, men and boys to support the development of programmes and messaging related to understanding the benefits of quick and equal access to effective malaria treatment and care.
- xix. Create holistic malaria programming and information by integrating malaria with other issues that affect adolescent girls, e.g., sexual and reproductive health, nutrition, vaccines and financial services, through intentionally engaging girls on their needs and realities.
- xx. Revise and disseminate food-based dietary guidelines for healthy living through collaboration among stakeholders targeted at maternal and adolescent nutrition.
- xxi. Support operation research on the cost-effectiveness of transitioning from iron-folic to multiple micronutrient supplements to provide evidence to accelerate implementation.
- xxii. Support the distribution of multiple micronutrient/IFA supplements to women including women of reproductive age, pregnant women, and adolescents (boys and girls) in schools and communities.
- xxiii. Support provision of multiple micronutrient supplements (MMS) to pregnant and lactating women (PLW) followed by advocacy to ensure scale-up.
- xxiv. Empower mothers for better maternal and child health outcomes, such as higher children immunization coverage, increased maternal health service utilization, and improvement in the nutritional status of children.



- xxv. Support efforts to overcome gender-related barriers to immunization, including the provision of vaccines that specifically benefit girls and women like the combined measles-rubella vaccine, which can protect girls and women against the risk of miscarriage, and human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine to prevent cervical cancer.
- xxvi. Provide HPV vaccine as an opportunity to strengthen health systems to reach adolescent girls with integrated health services for transformative benefits for them and their communities.
- xxvii. Ensure activities and services provided are culturally appropriate and tailored to the needs of the communities and include psychosocial support like support groups and individual counselling, recreational- and skills building activities, and gender based violence case-management.
- xxviii. Establish women and girls only spaces in emergency response helps to reduce and mitigate risks and prevent further harm, and promotes psychosocial well-being and protection for affected women and girls.
- xxix. Explore best practices for engaging communities in a culturally responsive manner, including understanding cultural beliefs related to health and nutrition, and developing culturally sensitive programmes.
- xxx. Support schools to have female-friendly facilities and incorporate information on menstruation into the curriculum for both girls and boys to reduce discriminatory social norms, cultural taboos and stigma, which will contribute to better education and health outcomes.
- xxxi. Promote menstrual health and hygiene as an important means for safeguarding women's dignity, privacy, bodily integrity, and their self-efficacy thereby building an enabling environment of non-discrimination and gender equality



- xxxii. Ensuring women and girls have access to sustainable and quality products, and improving the management of the disposal of menstrual products to the environment.

#### **4.5.2 Provide nutrition assessment, counselling, and support at health facilities and community**

Governments, with the support of all relevant stakeholders, including civil society, local communities, private sector and development partners, should:

- i. Ensure trained service providers counsel all pregnant women to increase energy intake, improve food variety, workload, monitoring weight gain in pregnancy, and promote adequate intake of iron-rich foods.
- ii. Counsel mothers on adequate weight gain during pregnancy and monitor the weight gain of all mothers attending antenatal care (ANC) throughout pregnancy.
- iii. Ensure trained service providers counsel on breastfeeding including early initiation, the importance of colostrum and feeding baby only breast milk with no water or other liquids for the first six months of life.
- iv. Provide support to ensure women obtain an adequate diet and minimize the discomfort experienced during pregnancy related issues including women with chronic hypertension and gestational diabetes.
- v. Conduct routine nutrition assessments through school-based and community-based health programmes.
- vi. Promote dietary diversification by encouraging consumption of varieties of locally available foods.



- vii. Integrate nutrition health promotion into primary health care services to encourage healthy lifestyles.
- viii. Provide counselling on obesity during pregnancy in a non-judgmental, respectful, and non-discriminatory manner to meet their nutrient needs through consumption of a variety of basic foods, participating in physical activities and maintaining appropriate rates of weight gain.
- ix. Improve the policymakers' ability to integrate and scale up nutrition services in a more timely and cost-effective way, and scale up nutrition services across health care systems.
- x. Scaling up of nutrition services across health care systems and other platforms alongside early detection and treatment across the food system, health, social protection, and WASH systems.
- xi. Provide basic equipment to assess nutrition status to ensure routine quality assessment for nutrition status of clients, including provision of weighing scales for both adults and children, height meters and mid-upper arm circumference (MUAC) tapes.
- xii. Strengthen healthcare service providers' knowledge and skills through training, on-site mentorships and coaching on the national guidelines.
- xiii. Sensitize communities with messages and training on healthy cooking to promote the consumption of diverse and nutritious food for improved health and nutrition.
- xiv. Support food demonstrations to caregivers and women in the community as an effective approach for communicating food and nutrition knowledge and motivating audiences to take positive steps toward healthy eating and promotion of dietary diversity.





- xv. Ensure meaningful engagement of women living with or affected by HIV in the development of national strategic plans and programmes.
- xvi. Encourage customary and religious leaders to raise awareness within their communities about women's rights, including specific needs and rights of women living with or affected by HIV to land and other productive resources.
- xvii. Provide HIV Testing Services (HTS) and ensure HIV positive women receive ART according to national guidelines and encourage them to deliver at a health facility with a baby given prophylaxis for HIV prevention, treatment and care.
- xviii. Support prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of reproductive system cancers and train community and primary healthcare workers to support women with cancer to improve diagnosis, care early treatment, and improve the management of greatly overburdened treatment facilities.
- xix. Diversify household food production and consumption, especially targeting women, and increase access to micronutrient-rich foods and the stability of food supply, as increased access to fruits and vegetables is one of the most sustainable ways to reduce and prevent micronutrient deficiencies in resource poor communities.
- xx. Integrate gender equality and nutrition actions that result in strong nutritional outcomes for all, especially women and girls.
- xxi. Encourage states to address food security through healthy eating habits, thereby preventing malnutrition, overconsumption, and unbalanced diets through inclusive land-use policies (particularly expanding land access for women), social safety nets (to assure economic accessibility), local and regional markets (through



transportation, storage, and distribution infrastructure), and sustainable agriculture (supporting farmers to diversify their crops based on nutritional content)

- xxii. Ensure successful and sustained nutrition education and behaviour change by combining educational and communication strategies delivered through multiple channels and accompanied by environmental support designed to facilitate the voluntary adoption of healthy food choices and other food and nutrition-related behaviours conducive to health and well-being.

#### **4.5.3 Implement programmes to address specific nutritional needs during critical life stages (pregnancy, lactation, adolescence)**

Governments, with the support of all relevant stakeholders, including civil society, local communities, private sector and development partners, should:

- i. Promote the provision and uptake of maternity, paternity and shared parental leave and other valuable social benefits linked to parenthood in all workplaces including informal economic sectors, as well as introducing supportive workplace policies for breastfeeding.
- ii. Design and implement policies and inter-sectoral programmes that acknowledge women and girls' specific nutritional needs linked to their life course and circumstances. Targeted measures for those that are in the most nutritionally vulnerable situations, for example pregnant and lactating women (particularly during the first 1000 days for mother and child) should be a priority.
- iii. Ensure social protection programmes are comprehensive and accessible by all who need them throughout their life course and



respond to shocks, paying attention to women's and girls' special needs, including their specific dietary and nutritional needs.

- iv. Promote improved food quantity and dietary quality of school meals.
- v. Enhance women's control of food acquisition, provision and distribution and nutrition assistance by ensuring that women can be household food entitlement holders, on an equal basis.
- vi. Encourage women to consume folate (and folic acid) rich foods as women of childbearing age need folic acid and pregnant women in addition to folic acid supplements should include foods that contain folate.
- vii. Consumption of calcium for healthy bones and teeth with adequate amount of vitamin D needed for calcium absorption and Iodine-rich foods for good cognitive development of child and prevention of goitre in women.
- viii. Balancing calories with activity is an important part of a woman's health hence regular physical activity helps with muscle strength, balance, flexibility, mental alertness and stress management.
- ix. Support women during the preconception period as they require intake of iron-folate supplement (RDA is 400mcg) and iron (RDA 18mg) with energy and nutrient requirements met through food intake determined by calorie and nutrient needs based on age, sex, height, weight and level of physical activity.
- x. Ensure all pregnant women receive iron/folic acid supplements throughout the period of pregnancy and be counselled on the importance, side effects, compliance and safety of IFA supplements.
- xi. When available, all pregnant women should take MMS daily throughout the period of pregnancy.



- xii. Support women through counselling to increase iron intake through the consumption of locally available food sources.
- xiii. Support pregnant women to receive IPT for malaria control and be promptly treated for clinical infections and counselled on the use of long-lasting Insecticide Treated Net (LLITN) during ANC.
- xiv. Breastfeeding women are to continue to receive IFA supplementation in the first three months postpartum and are encouraged to go for family planning for optimal nutrition of the mother and effective breastfeeding.
- xv. Provide special attention to support optimal care for women in exceptionally difficult circumstances like pregnant and lactating women at risk which include adolescents, women with low weights, HIV positive.

#### **4.5.4 Reporting and Documentation**

Governments, with the support of all relevant stakeholders, including civil society, local communities, private sector and development partners, should:

- i. Ensure that facilities meet high-quality standards for equipment, personnel, record keeping, and quality control and use data to ensure effective coverage of actions and impact on women and girls.
- ii. Support approaches that leverage both public and private sectors, which is integral for creating a media network that is relevant and accessible to women and girls through supporting the creation and development of online content that meets the needs and interests of women and girls, especially content developed by women and girls.



- iii. Foster collaboration between technology providers, manufacturers, content producers, and end users to provide women-tailored content for nutrition for women and girls.

## **4.6 Monitoring and Evaluation**

### **4.6.1 Monitoring and evaluation framework**

Government at all levels, with the support of all relevant stakeholders, including civil society, local communities, private sector and development partners, should:

- i. Establish or strengthen existing national monitoring system to ensure the implementation of programmes and interventions on women's and girls' empowerment using adequate indicators.
- ii. Provide effective surveillance and monitoring/evaluation (M&E) systems to generate accurate, reliable, and timely information on progress of strategy implementation and regular reporting on the specific priorities, objectives, and programme-level outcome indicators and utilize data to build and track progress in achieving the targets.
- iii. Support the creation of a database to keep accurate and relevant information, and the introduction of a feedback mechanism to enable data sharing.
- iv. Promote the collection, analysis and use of sex and age disaggregated data, and gender statistics in food systems, including local communities, in order to have accurate understanding of existing gender gaps, norms and roles. Designing effective public



policies and programmes for women's and girls' empowerment requires context-specific gender analysis with quality data.

- v. Ensure development and use of systems to tag nutrition and food system for appropriate allocation, monitoring, release and utilization of funds.
- vi. Ensure evidence-based decisions for programme planning and implementation, and strengthen monitoring and information systems throughout the programme cycle.
- vii. Establish participatory monitoring through the direct involvement of beneficiaries (women and girls) to generate a larger volume of data in a cost-effective way.

#### **4.6.2 Research Needs**

Government at all levels, with the support of all relevant stakeholders, including civil society, local communities, academia, private sector and development partners, should:

- i. Regularly collect, analyse and use data disaggregated by sex, age, disability and other variables related to all forms of discrimination, nutrition of women and girls as well as gender-sensitive statistics and indicators.
- ii. Collect accurate and relevant information compiled through vertical and horizontal collation of data from the LGAs, state, and federal levels to ensure that progress and changes are tracked, and impact measured.
- iii. Study context-specific structural characteristics, such as socioeconomic status and gender norms, beliefs, and practices that



can constrain girls' choices and influence their behaviour, values, and preferences.

- iv. Consolidate research and expert opinion to describe the nature and effectiveness of women's and girls nutrition and health programmes.
- v. Operations research on pre-existing infrastructure of the educational system that can offer a more cost-effective route for delivery of simple health interventions and health promotion targeted at adolescents.
- vi. Analyse risks and opportunities to increase women's income and savings, including through revision of policies of microcredit and other financial providers, and to advance programmes to increase women's savings.
- vii. Research to help inform policy, make it more effective, and need for knowledge and tools to inform women and girls about nutrition.
- viii. Provide data on adolescent empowerment and health to facilitate research on the gendered pathways to better health for adolescents.
- ix. Provide better data on adolescent empowerment and health, including increased research into age-, sex- and gender-appropriate empowerment measures and longitudinal data to assess causality.
- x. Support targeted gender-responsive research in the context of food security and nutrition, co-creation of knowledge and extension and advisory services (EAS) to enable women to access and produce affordable and nutritious food.
- xi. Support research needed on nutrition intervention that encourages higher dietary diversity.
- xii. Provide evidence to understand women's health needs, combined with health infrastructure relevant to their cultural context to accelerate women's empowerment.



- xiii. Support research to understand the role of women in decision-making and their effect on policies as gender-balanced leadership is associated with better environmental and sustainability performance.
- xiv. Carry out an analysis on gender differences using a set of gender-relevant survey indicators from the Women Empowerment in Agriculture Index (WEAI)
- xv. Commission an in-depth gender study to inform implementation and to provide a baseline for gender related indicators.
- xvi. Train staff and policy analysts in the collection and use of sex-disaggregated data, and development of gender-responsive socioeconomic indicators.

## **4.7 Funding and Resource Mobilization**

### **4.7.1 Advocate for increased funding for women's and girls' empowerment programs**

Government at all levels, with the support of all relevant stakeholders, including civil society, local communities, private sector and development partners, should:

- i. Ensure that adequate funding is available for the implementation of the guidelines and monitor expenditure over time.
- ii. Prior to funding, analyse constraints faced by women (e.g. unequal domestic responsibilities, other context specific constraints arising from social norms and discrimination) to be able to address them as applicable.





- iii. Increase financing to ensure girls and women's access to learning, economic opportunities, utilization of health services, and to strengthen the institutional capacity for gender equality.
- iv. Support direct funding for women empowerment organizations, to enable them take leadership roles in decision-making process at local, state and national levels.
- v. Provide adequate and sustained financial investments and allocations to support long-term universal social protection programmes for women and girls.
- vi. Monitor resource allocations, budget oversight, and raise the importance of adequate funding for inclusive programming.
- vii. Ensure the legislature plays a decisive role in removing the barriers to women's and girls' empowerment to respond to the differentiated needs and realities of diverse members of the population, and provide monitoring and oversight to ensure the effective implementation of the guidelines.
- viii. Mobilize adequate financial, technical and human resources, as well as gender-responsive budgeting mechanisms to increase the human and institutional capacity at the national, state and local levels.
- ix. Encourage stakeholders within their mandates to support the implementation of this guidelines with their resources.

#### **4.7.2 Partnerships with philanthropic organizations and private sector entities for resource mobilization**

Governments, with the support of all relevant stakeholders, including civil society, local communities, private sector and development partners, should:



- i. Commit greater attention on implementing stakeholder resource mobilization by defining the provision of capital and human resources
- ii. Provide strong and coherent leadership and build effective partnerships with all relevant actors for the attainment of women's empowerment and rights.
- iii. Ensure that commitments to gender equality and gender mainstreaming translate into action.
- iv. Develop and implement a context-responsive capacity-building model to leverage the private sector for the production and distribution of commodities and products such as Multiple Micronutrient Supplement/Iron Folic Acid (MMS/IFA) and scaled up across the country through provision of technical support and resource mobilization.
- v. Enhance engagement with the private sector and strengthen accountability mechanisms for system-wide delivery on gender equality and women's empowerment to secure sustainable funding.
- vi. Emphasis should be on costing and tracking gaps to funding gender equality and develop innovative and joint funding mechanisms.
- vii. Provide direct funding and support to local civil society and community-led organizations, including women's rights organizations that are leading mitigation and adaptation efforts to climate change and conflict-induced risks.
- viii. Consult women and girls in rural and urban areas, on needs in crises with respect and consideration given to local knowledge gained in adapting to crises.



## PART 5

### 5.0 COORDINATION, PARTNERSHIP, ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

#### 5.1 Strengthening coordination among stakeholders

- i. **Establishing a National Steering Committee:** A National Steering Committee to be established, consisting of representatives from the relevant government Ministries, Departments and Agencies, (MDAs), civil society organizations, development partners and private sector stakeholders. The committee will be responsible for providing overall guidance and strategic direction to ensure effective coordination and implementation of the guidelines.
- ii. **Conducting regular coordination meetings:** The National Steering Committee will conduct regular coordination meetings to share progress, exchange ideas, and address any emerging challenges. These meetings will provide a platform for all stakeholders to collaborate, align their efforts, and develop joint strategies to improve women's and girls' empowerment for optimal nutrition.
- iii. **Fostering partnerships with Development Partners and the Private Sector:** Recognizing the crucial role of development partners and the private sector in advancing women's and girls' empowerment and nutrition, efforts be made to forge partnerships and collaborations. This will include engaging with relevant organizations, industries, and businesses to leverage resources, expertise, and networks that can contribute to the implementation of the guidelines.
- iv. **Enhancing communication and information sharing:** A communication strategy to be developed to ensure effective



dissemination of information related to the guidelines. Platforms such as websites, social media, and newsletters will be utilized to facilitate communication and foster collaboration among stakeholders. Regular updates on progress, successes, and lessons learned to be shared to maintain stakeholder engagement and momentum.

- v. **Monitoring and evaluating coordination efforts:** Regular monitoring and evaluation will be conducted to assess the effectiveness of coordination mechanisms and partnerships established. This will help identify areas for improvement, address bottlenecks, and ensure that coordination efforts are aligned with the overall objectives of women's and girls' empowerment for optimal nutrition.

## **5.2 Key Actors and Activities on Implementation of Guidelines with Responsibilities**

Multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder collaboration and coordination are essential for achieving desired results. The key implementers include Government Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs); States and Local Government Authorities (LGAs); Development Partners; NGOs, the Private Sector; Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), Nigeria Governors Forum (NGF) and Faith-Based Organizations (FBOs)

### **5.2.1 Government**

The guidelines includes sectoral programmes, such as health, education, science and innovation, poverty reduction and economic empowerment, food security, clean energy and climate change mitigation, water and sanitation, and social protection to incorporate and respond to gender



equality to achieve optimal nutrition for women and girls. The Ministries, Departments and Agencies of Government are to use this guidelines to:

- Develop and implement policies and programmes that promote women and girls' empowerment and improved nutrition.
- Provide adequate funding and resources for the implementation of the guidelines.
- Establish monitoring and evaluation systems to track progress and ensure accountability for all programmes/activities.
- Utilize nutrition related data for decision-making in their interventions.
- Nigeria Governors Forum to ensure domestication and provide adequate capacity development for the implementation of the guidelines.

### **5.2.2 Civil Society**

- Conduct advocacy and awareness campaigns to promote women's and girls' empowerment and nutrition.
- Provide grassroots support and community-level interventions to improve nutrition outcomes.
- Mobilize resources and facilitate linkages between stakeholders for effective implementation.
- Conduct budget analysis and advocacy to ensure adequate resource allocation for implementation of the guidelines.
- Track expenditure in collaboration with the Development Partners Group (DPG) and Nigeria Governors Forum (NGF) at national and sub-national levels to review how funds in the budget were allocated, disbursed and spent.



- Support the development of performance management tools such as scorecards, social auditing, or consensus-based monitoring.
- Promote accountability of government, donors, private sector and other actors.
- Support community mobilization and implementation of interventions and programmes down to the household level.

### **5.2.3 Development Partners**

- Provide technical and financial assistance to support the implementation of the guidelines.
- Share best practices, knowledge, and capacity-building opportunities.
- Collaborate with government and other stakeholders to leverage resources and ensure alignment with national priorities.
- Synchronize efforts with existing development partners and stakeholders based on an agreed upon country-level strategy.

### **5.2.4 Private Sector**

- Engagement of the organized private sector as crucial stakeholders in the implementation of the guidelines.
- Investment in research and innovation to develop and market locally available, affordable and nutritious local foods.
- Implement corporate social responsibility programmes that address women's and girls' empowerment and nutrition.
- Engage in partnerships and collaborations to promote sustainable business practices that support optimal nutrition.



- Provide substantive technical support and increase investments to production of products and social services for empowerment of women and girls.
- Integrate empowerment of women and girls support in corporate social responsibility plans and activities.
- Improve workplace gender-sensitive programmes and ensure compliance with all national laws, regulations, guidelines and international protocols.

### **5.2.5 Academia/Research Institutions**

- Generate evidence and conduct research on effective strategies for women's and girls' empowerment and optimal nutrition.
- Disseminate research findings and contribute to the development of evidence-based policies and programmes.
- Collaborate with stakeholders to build capacity and promote knowledge exchange.
- Participate in monitoring and evaluation of implementation of the guidelines.
- Mobilize funding for research and undertaking research and disseminate research findings to stakeholders.
- Provide technical advice and consultancy on implementation of the guidelines.
- Strengthen data collection, research and innovation to accelerate implementation.
- Analyse data across all indicators and provide guidance for decision-making and capacity building.



- Provide concrete suggestions for framing and designing monitoring and evaluation work.

The clearly defined roles and responsibilities of each actor is to ensure that the implementation of the guidelines will be carried out in a coordinated and efficient manner, maximizing the impact on women's and girls' empowerment for optimal nutrition.





## **PART 6**

### **6.0 PROMOTION, IMPLEMENTATION AND MONITORING OF THE USE AND APPLICATION OF THE GUIDELINES**

The Guidelines is intended to support the development and implementation of relevant coordinated multi-sectoral national policies, laws, programmes and investment plans that will contribute to the achievement of gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment in the context of food security and nutrition.

Multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder collaboration and coordination are essential for achieving desired results. Sectoral programmes such as health, education, science and innovation, poverty reduction and economic empowerment, food security, clean energy and, climate change mitigation, environment, water and sanitation, climate change mitigation and adaptation, and social protection should incorporate and respond to gender equality in the context of food insecurity and malnutrition.

#### **6.1 Implementation of the guidelines**

- i. Building on existing opportunities using existing infrastructures and partnership to accelerate implementation of this guidelines.
- ii. Inclusive and innovative identification of implementation partners as public resources are crucial for the implementation of programmes, as well as contributions from outside the public sector can be vital.
- iii. Governments must make a dedicated effort to implement the plan, ensure budgetary allocation, coordinate, evaluate and advocate with



full appreciation of the critical role women play in unlocking success to scale up nutrition.

- iv. Partners have proven effective in supporting public sector programmes through training and supervision, particularly at local levels and private sector involvement.
- v. Catalyse a diverse global and national network of champions, advocates and change agents, as well as increase political will to support implementation.
- vi. Promoting gender-transformative approaches in national normative frameworks, governance structures, systems and services, as well as in national assessments and studies, through policy engagement and reform, investment in public sector capacity and provision of technical support.
- vii. Coherent and coordinated action across sectors and institutions is key to coordinating efforts across different sectors and implementing bodies.
- viii. Stakeholders are encouraged to support and promote at all levels within their constituencies, and in collaboration with other relevant initiatives and platforms, the dissemination, use and application of the guidelines.
- ix. Governments at all levels, and intergovernmental organizations are invited to use the guidelines as a tool to undertake initiatives toward achieving gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment in the context of food security and nutrition at all levels.
- x. Production of this guidelines and dissemination at all levels to multiple stakeholders, implementers, communities and beneficiaries to establish ownership is necessary for the implementation.



## 6.2 Building and strengthening capacity for implementation

- i. Strengthening the capacity of gender focal points at national and sub-national levels in key ministries will enhance the implementation of gender responsive actions.
- ii. Mobilizing financial and human resources, establishing gender responsive mechanisms with support of partners and local actors to strengthen institutional capacity at all levels for the implementation of the guidelines.
- iii. Development partners, private sector and other relevant stakeholders are encouraged to support with their resources and within their mandates to implement the guidelines.
- iv. The Federal Ministry of Women Affairs to develop a costed action plan including interventions and activities with expected results and achievable targets identified through the results framework and the establishment of a strong financial tracking system.
- v. Establishing and strengthening multi-stakeholder platforms, processes and frameworks, with safeguards for the identification and management of potential conflicts of interest will enhance policy coherence and coordination.
- vi. Engage stakeholders to form coalitions at national and sub-national levels to strengthen efforts at addressing women's and girls' empowerment.
- vii. Establishing mechanisms to facilitate inter-sectoral collaboration and actions needed to provide an environment conducive to implement the guidelines.



- viii. Support multi-sectoral collaboration across MDAs and other key stakeholders to safeguard rights and promote equal educational and career pathways for women and girls.
- ix. Government at all levels to collaborate with partners and collectively advocate to ensure gender-transformative education and champion girls' and women's empowerment.
- x. Prioritize local agenda and build alliances with grassroots movements that promote gender equality of girls' and women's rights through education.
- xi. Strengthen the gender-responsiveness of policies and programmes through capacity-strengthening initiatives.
- xii. Strengthen efforts to coordinate dialogue including accountability on the implementation of the guidelines between governments at all levels and other stakeholders.
- xiii. Train stakeholders and community support workers to understand their roles as they align with common result framework to collect data and monitor activities.
- xiv. Increase expertise of civil society organizations to embed gender equality in education strategy and programme initiatives.
- xv. Train decision-makers at all levels and relevant institutions on women's rights, gender mainstreaming and participatory gender planning.
- xvi. Encourage coherence and clarity of functions between institutions responsible for the implementation of laws, policies and programmes related to women's and girls' empowerment.



### **6.3 Monitoring the use and application of the guidelines to track progress on women's empowerment and nutrition indicators**

Regular monitoring and evaluation should be conducted to assess the effectiveness and impact of policies, programmes, and interventions aimed at improving women's and girls' access to economic resources and opportunities. Data should be disaggregated by sex, age, ethnicity, and other relevant variables to identify gaps and ensure targeted interventions.

- i. Government at all levels, in consultation with relevant stakeholders, are encouraged to define national policy priorities and related indicators, mobilize regional and local structures to report on these indicators.
- ii. Establish or strengthen, where appropriate, existing national monitoring and reporting systems in order to assess the efficacy and effectiveness of policies and regulations, review and implement appropriate actions in case of negative impacts or identified gaps.
- iii. Government at all levels are encouraged to use evidence-based monitoring and evaluation approaches focused on learning what works, and adaptation to maximize results.
- iv. Participatory monitoring and accountability mechanisms to engage women at the national and sub-national levels.
- v. Monitoring and evaluation systems should be strengthened to track progress made, to assess the efficacy and effectiveness of the guidelines and address identified gaps.
- vi. Evaluate the effectiveness and sustainability of programmes promoting women's and girls' empowerment for optimal nutrition.



- vii. Mobilize national and sub-national structures to report implementation regularly using existing national monitoring and reporting systems.
- viii. Provide tools to enable the implementers to select process, output and impact indicators to measure progress.

#### **6.4 Adaptation and domestication of the guidelines by states**

Domestication seeks to facilitate the incorporation of commitments made at the national level into States and Federal Capital territory (FCT) policy frameworks and programmes anchored on existing planning machinery with the Ministry of Women Affairs to lead in the implementation of the guidelines through the SCFN.

This is a process of building awareness and strengthening engagement and appropriation of guidelines on women's and girls' empowerment for optimal nutrition, leading to informed inclusion of its goals, priorities, and targets into legislative, policy, institutional, planning, programming, and budgetary processes that drive States/FCT, sectoral and local level development.

The overall aim of domestication is to provide support to assist the States/FCT to have the political will to drive the development and socioeconomic transformation of women and girls, leading to the achievement of optimal nutrition through the implementation of this guidelines. The following are expected as the States/FCT domesticate this guidelines.

- i. Sensitize and facilitate the implementation of key elements of the guidelines,



- ii. Plan for, organize, and steer a multi-stakeholder consultative process towards the guidelines on women and girls' empowerment,
- iii. Build state institutions and citizens' awareness, engagement, and ownership of the guidelines on women and girls' empowerment for optimal nutrition to catalyse and sustain momentum for change and transformation,
- iv. Ensure that the States/FCT translate the strategies into States/FCT visions and plans for the socioeconomic development and transformation of women and girls.
- v. Facilitate collective progress of States/FCT in implementing the guidelines, leading to the transformation of the country and ensuring that women and girls assume their rightful place and contribute to economic development.
- vi. Ensure constant engagements, and advocacy with government and relevant partners on the implementation of the guidelines.

Contextualize the guidelines to make it more relevant, appropriate and accessible across a variety of contexts, cultures, and situations at all levels. This is to make it locally meaningful and improve the programme feasibility, interventions and outcomes. This will also inform the selection of indicators and means of verification (MOV) that are relevant to the cultural context and help stakeholders avoid causing unintended harm. Therefore, leading to improvement in accountability, demonstration of responsiveness to the women and girls populations and effectiveness of donors' support.

The operationalization of the guidelines will require significant capacity building for effective implementation at inception and regular ongoing training. There is need for a guidance tool, designed to inform the planning



process and decision-making for the delivery of guidelines to address the needs of women and girls, including a range of programmatic actions, not all of which will be appropriate, or should be prioritized in every setting or community across different cultures, contexts, and situations.

The implementation of the guidelines requires key competencies, for staff and stakeholders, based on their roles and the types of interventions they are implementing. They are to receive the training and supervision necessary to develop the skills relevant to their work. There will be a person in each sector to lead the process, coordinate, and assume overall responsibility for the sector. There is need for timely, sufficient resources and effective implementation with connections to relevant stakeholders (e.g., government, civil society, and community leaders).

Monitoring of the activities will be done through routine data collection, collation, analysis, interpretation, and dissemination using standardized tools like sectoral routine data collection and reporting systems existing in all relevant MDAs, National District Health Information System (DHIS 2) as well as community-level food and nutrition information and data collection systems. This will be complemented with a multi-sectoral annual review of operational achievements and progress, challenges of implementation, lessons learned, and recommendations using such national platforms as National Committee on Food and Nutrition (NCFN)/State Committee on Food Nutrition (SCFN) meetings. Evaluation of ongoing activities through the DHIS 2 and M & E system in every sector will accommodate periodic assessments of interventions. The effectiveness of the implementation of this guidelines requires the use of baselines to be obtained from the





existing routine data and disaggregated to the sub-national level, while for new interventions, baseline surveys need to be conducted.

Evaluation of the overall impact of the implementation of the guidelines will rely on annual joint review meetings to evaluate performance in addition to annual and periodic surveys such as the NNHS, MICS, and NDHS.



## **7.0 CONCLUSION**

### **7.1 Summary of the importance of women's and girls' empowerment for optimal nutrition**

The economic empowerment of women and girls is a critical driver of national economic growth and Nigeria need to provide concrete national plans and programmes, and promote innovative partnerships through increased investments in human and financial resources that are conducive to promoting women's and girl's empowerment. There is a need to work with communities and key stakeholders to provide the tools that women and girls require to meaningfully contribute and compete in all areas of national development to achieve their full potential.

Governments at all levels and stakeholders are invited to use the guidelines as a tool to undertake initiatives toward achieving gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment in the context of food security and nutrition.

### **7.2 Commitment and action from stakeholders to implement the guidelines**

- i. Government to mobilize all stakeholders at all levels in implementing this women's and girls' empowerment guidelines for optimal nutrition
- ii. The creation of a sense of belonging in all stakeholders will help overcome challenges and resistance throughout the process of implementing the guidelines. This guidelines represents the diverse needs of and situations in the different areas of empowerment of



women and girls and promotes processes and activities proposed in the guidelines.

- iii. Cooperation and engagement are crucial for the successful development and implementation, with responsibilities of the diverse stakeholders clearly stated and mutually agreed on and made clear from the beginning.
- iv. Strengthening multi-stakeholder platforms, partnerships, processes, and frameworks that support women's meaningful participation, agency, and leadership.

### **7.3 Call for states to domesticate the guidelines**

This guidelines calls on States/FCT for domestication by ensuring the involvement of all stakeholders' through establishing structures or processes that promote participatory, bottom-up, or co-creation/co-design approaches or consider the local context for ease of implementation.



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