

# **GENDER EQUITY AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT (GEWE) POLICY PAPER 2025**

**A POLICY PAPER ON FACILITATING IMPLEMENTATION OF POLICIES THAT  
FACILITATE GENDER EQUALITY THROUGH EDUCATION COMMUNITIES**

## LIST OF ACRONYMS

ACHPR	African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights.
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.
CSOs	Civil Society Organizations.
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States.
EF	Egunec Foundation.
EU	European Union.
G-VAP	Gender Violence Awareness Project.
GEWE	Gender Equity and Women's Empowerment.
ICCPR	International Convention on Civil and Political Rights.
IPV	Intimate Partner Violence.
NEPAD	New Partnership for African Development.
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization.
SRGBV	School Related Gender Based Violence.
UN	United Nations.
UNDP	United Nations Development Program.
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund.
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund.
VAWG	Violence Against Women and Girls.
WARIF	Women at Risk International Foundation.
WHO	World Health Organization.

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# 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Gender inequality exists in Nigeria and cuts across economic, social, political, cultural, and religious contexts. Due to the severity of gender inequality in Nigeria, policies have been developed and ratified to address the gaps. Some of these policies include the National Gender Policy, the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) adopted in 1981, the Women's Rights Protocol of 2003, and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

Despite the existence of these gender development policies, there have been gaps in implementation due to poor governance, lack of political will, prevailing patriarchal culture, inadequate public awareness, and absence of adequate productive capacity that will create opportunities for women's empowerment and development.

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) General Recommendation No. 35 is a policy that promotes gender reforms. It includes a clause that recommends including gender equality education into the curricula for all levels of education, whether public or private. This clause creates a viable opportunity to bridge gender policy implementation gaps through education communities.

The policy implementation opportunity of CEDAW General Recommendation No. 35 was explored by the Centre for Gender Studies at Veritas University, Abuja, Nigeria, in the design and execution of the Gender Violence Awareness Project (G-VAP). Relying on CEDAW General Recommendation No. 35, G-VAP was designed by the Centre to address the societal challenge of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) and its increase during COVID-19. The policy implementation opportunity of CEDAW General Recommendation No. 35 explored by the Centre through G-VAP opened her to partnership opportunities and streamlined her attention and focus towards gender development. The success of G-VAP proves that education communities are essential platforms for implementing gender policies that will accelerate the implementation of gender equality and women's empowerment. It is therefore recommended that gender reforms and policies be mainstreamed using education communities for a more effective implementation.

## 2. POLICY BACKGROUND

Gender inequality can be defined as the social phenomenon in which people are not treated equally on the basis of gender, often caused by gender discrimination<sup>1</sup>. It has been proven that gender inequality is present in Nigeria<sup>2</sup>. This is expressed mostly in economic, social, cultural, and religious contexts. For example, there are more male (65.67%) wage earners than females (34.33%), even though females have a higher return on education than males. Women are usually made to bear the brunt of problems and failures in some family settings, even before the facts are known<sup>3</sup>. A report<sup>4</sup> showed that “80.2 million (49%) of Nigeria’s 162.5 million people are women, although only 15% of households are headed by females.”

Due to the severity of gender inequality in Nigeria, policies have been developed and ratified to alleviate the situation. They include the National Gender Policy, National Action Plan (NAP) on Women, Peace and Security<sup>5</sup>. Others include the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights (ACHPR) adopted in 1981; the Women's Rights Protocol of 2003; the ECOWAS Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance, and the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) adopted in 2001<sup>6</sup>. The United Nations (UN) has also developed policies to combat gender inequality, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights

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<sup>1</sup> Wharton, A. (2004) *Handbook of Social Problems: A Comparative International Perspective*. [Online]. 2455 Teller Road, Thousand Oaks California 91320 United States : SAGE Publications, Inc.

<sup>2</sup> Adeosun, O. T. & Owolabi, K. E. (2021) Gender inequality: Determinants and Outcomes in Nigeria. *Journal of Business and Socio-economic Development*. [Online] 1 (2), 165–181.

<sup>3</sup> Okafor, A. C. (2015) Gender inequality in Nigeria. *Journal of Research in Arts and Social Sciences*. 4 (1), 69–80.

<sup>4</sup> Chimhowu, A. et al. (2012) *Gender in Nigeria Report 2012. Improving the Lives of Girls and Women in Nigeria, Issues, Policies, Action*. 2nd edition. Research Gate.

<sup>5</sup> Miller, B. et al. (2014) Women in Peace and Security through United Nations Security Resolution 1325: Literature review, Content Analysis of National Action plans, and Implementation. *Institute for Global and International Studies*. 16.

<sup>6</sup> Ejumudo, K. B. O. (2013) Gender Equality and Women Empowerment in Nigeria: the Desirability and Inevitability of a Pragmatic approach. *Developing Country Studies*. 3 (4), 59–66.

(ICCPR), and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women<sup>7</sup>.

Despite the existence of these gender development policies, there has been a gap in the implementation of policies in Nigeria as a result of poor governance, lack of political will, prevailing patriarchal culture, inadequate public awareness, and absence of adequate productive capacity that will create opportunities for women's empowerment and development<sup>8</sup>.

Therefore, there is a need for a functional action-based approach that will translate gender equality instruments and conventions into reality. For this to be achieved, an active process embodying proper analysis, goal definition, action programs, and monitoring results needs to be implemented, not just passive policies without action<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> Makama, G. A. (2013) Patriarchy and Gender Inequality in Nigeria: the Way Forward. *European Scientific Journal*. 9 (17).

<sup>8</sup> Okeke, C. (2020) Challenges in the Enforcement of Women's Rights in Nigeria. *African Human Rights Law Journal*. 20 (2), 513–532.

<sup>9</sup> Ejumudo, K. B. O. (2008) *Sustainable Development in Nigeria: The Policy Gap and Action Dilemma*. Proceedings of International Conference on Research and Development. Ghana: Pan-African Book Company.

### 3. THE CEDAW CASE STUDY

Several legal frameworks have been established to promote gender equality in Nigeria. Among them is the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which Nigeria ratified in 1985, marking a significant milestone in the country's commitment to gender equality<sup>10</sup>.

CEDAW is the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, which is often called the “international bill of rights for women”<sup>11</sup>. This convention implores every administration to take matters of gender-based violence and all forms of discrimination seriously, to incorporate equality of men and women in their legal system, abolish discriminatory laws and adopt appropriate ones to prohibit discrimination against women, and establish public institutions and tribunals that will ensure the effective protection of women against discrimination<sup>12</sup>.

The CEDAW Committee recommends how administrations that partner with them can fulfil obligations under the Convention<sup>13</sup>. These recommendations cover gender-based violence, women and health, economic rights, and education. As of December 2024, the Committee has adopted 40 general recommendations. The CEDAW Map measures the responses of administrations in implementing the recommendations and identifies the areas in which they are failing to act, including collecting data on the drivers of violence against women, developing gender-equal laws, and improving access to health care for underserved women<sup>14</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> Para-Mallam, F. J. (2017) Gender equality in Nigeria. In Gender equality in a global perspective. 1st edition. Anders Örténblad et al. (eds.). [Online]. New York: Routledge.

<sup>11</sup> Melander, G. et al. (2004) ‘Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women’, in *The Raoul Wallenberg Institute Compilation of Human Rights Instruments*. [Online]. Brill | Nijhoff. pp. 223–237.

<sup>12</sup> United Nations (1979) Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women New York, 18 December 1979 [online]. Available from: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-elimination-all-forms-discrimination-against-women>.

<sup>13</sup> U.N. Women (1979) Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). UN Women.

<sup>14</sup> Shanthosh, J. (2021) *Launching the CEDAW Implementation Map on Women’s health. Progress on the Journey Towards Health and Human Rights for All Women*. 8–13.

Just as was observed with gender policies generally, it has also been observed that there are implementation gaps in the CEDAW recommendations. It is challenging to note that “only 22 member states out of 192 have adopted national action plans.”<sup>15</sup> In most official peace negotiations, women are still underrepresented, if not completely absent. There has also been a lack of action, a need to improve the review system of the CEDAW Map, and a need to strengthen accountability<sup>16</sup>.

The CEDAW Committee adopted its General Recommendation No. 35 on 14 July 2017<sup>17</sup> to update General Recommendation No. 19, which is centered on violence against women. There was a need to adopt the General Recommendation No. 35 twenty-five years after the General Recommendation No.19 because the CEDAW was created in 1979. At the time, there was little to no “recognition of violence against women as an issue falling within the ambit of international human rights law”<sup>18</sup>. This recommendation has been adopted to provide more comprehensive guidance to fast-track the elimination of gender-based violence against women and girls.

CEDAW General Recommendation No. 35 also goes ahead to recommend an integration of content on gender equality into curricula at all levels of education, whether public or private. This recommendation is at the heart of this policy paper because it creates a policy implementation opportunity for gender development policies through education communities.

Education is said to be an effective tool used to evoke transformation, development, and progress<sup>19</sup>. Therefore, education communities are powerful platforms for policy implementation. It is essential to make gender equality in education institutions

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<sup>15</sup> Mullins, L. B. (2017) CEDAW: the Challenges of Enshrining Women’s Equality in International Law. *Public Integrity*. [Online] 20 (3), 257–272.

<sup>16</sup> Many, M. (2024) An Analysis of the Legal Framework for the Protection of Women Against Discriminatory Practices in Nigeria. *East African Journal of Law, Policy and Globalization*. 1 (1),. [online]. Available from: <https://journal.kiut.ac.tz/index.php/eajlpg/article/view/108>.

<sup>17</sup> Vijayarasa, R. (2020) CEDAW’s General Recommendation No. 35: a Quarter of a Century of Evolutionary Approaches to Violence against Women. *Journal of Human Rights*. [Online] 19 (2), 153–167.

<sup>18</sup> McQuigg, R. J. A. (2017) The CEDAW Committee and Gender-Based Violence against Women. *International Human Rights Law Review*. [Online] 6 (2), 263–278.

<sup>19</sup> Ikoni, U. D. (2009) *The Challenges of Poverty in a Globalised World: Perspective on the Nigerian Situation*. Lagos: Longman Publishers.



mainstream<sup>20</sup> because mainstreaming gender equality for staff and students can help accelerate policy implementation through seamless transmission of values, knowledge, and the development of human potential and skills. When more women and girls are enlightened and empowered through education, there will be significant growth in the implementation of gender policies because they will be primary executors of these policies in their communities.

Education communities help to enhance the implementation of gender policies in society. In these communities, gender equality norms and policies are implemented and modelled. The opinions, thoughts, and voices of women and girls are acknowledged, valued, and promoted. This leads to building a sustainable structure towards an acceleration in women's equality and empowerment<sup>21</sup>.

With CEDAW General Recommendation No. 35, a concrete link was established between education communities and gender policy implementation. This link was explored and acted upon by Veritas University, Abuja, Nigeria, through its Centre for Gender Studies.

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<sup>20</sup> Lamprey, A. et al. (2015) *A Guide for Gender Equality in Teacher Education Policy and Practices*. Paris: UNESCO.

<sup>21</sup> Arman, P. (2023) Strategies for Higher Education Institutions to Strengthen Gender Equality [online]. Available from: <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/campus/strategies-higher-education-institutions-strengthen-gender-equality>.

## 4. THE VERITAS UNIVERSITY CASE STUDY

The G-VAP Project in Veritas University, Abuja, Nigeria provides a concrete and practical case study on how education communities can play an important and prominent role in gender policy implementation. Education communities, because of their youth population and community structure, provide a fertile ground for gender policy advocacy. This was an insight that was gained from the Gender Violence Awareness Project (G-VAP) designed by the Centre for Gender Studies, Veritas University, Abuja, Nigeria.

The Centre for Gender Studies, Veritas University Abuja is the platform in Veritas University Abuja, Nigeria, mandated with the power and authority to develop and implement projects and policies that will advance the gender development vision of the university. G-VAP was a project designed by the Centre to address the societal challenge of intimate partner violence and its increase during COVID-19.

The WHO Global Database on Prevalence against Women reveals that Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) is by far the most prevalent form of violence against women globally, affecting around 641 million<sup>22</sup>. One in seven women (13%) – almost 500 million globally – had experienced domestic violence within the last year of the research being conducted<sup>23</sup>. The bad situation was made even worse because of the COVID-19 pandemic, which intensified all types of violence against women and girls. According to the Gender Equality Index 2021, social distancing and restrictions on movement to contain COVID-19 trapped women and girls at home with their abusers<sup>24</sup>. Anti-COVID-19 measures compounded and connected different intersecting forms of discrimination against women belonging to vulnerable and marginalized groups. If victims of violence had legal and social support networks, these were shattered during the pandemic.

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<sup>22</sup> World Health Organization (2021) *Violence against Women Prevalence Estimates, 2018: global, Regional and National Prevalence Estimates for Intimate Partner Violence against Women and Global and Regional Prevalence Estimates for non-partner Sexual Violence against women*. [online]. Available from: <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240022256>.

<sup>23</sup> Sardinha, L. et al. (2022) Global, regional, and National Prevalence Estimates of Physical or sexual, or both, Intimate Partner Violence against Women in 2018. *The Lancet*. 399 (10327), 803–813.

<sup>24</sup> Barbieri, D. et al. (2021) *Gender Equality Index 2021 Health*. [online]. Available from: [http://eige.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/gender\\_equality\\_index\\_2021\\_health.pdf](http://eige.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/gender_equality_index_2021_health.pdf) (Accessed 20 April 2025).

The COVID-19 crisis exposed and exacerbated serious pre-existing gaps in the prevention of violence against women<sup>25</sup>.

As a result of these troubling realities, the Centre for Gender Studies, Veritas University Abuja, Nigeria, in 2022 saw an urgent need to respond to prevent violence against women from becoming a culture in her community. To meet this need, the Centre for Gender studies, Veritas University Abuja leaned on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) General Recommendation No. 35 as a policy mechanism to facilitate increased knowledge, partnerships and advocacy that can help strengthen her to prevent intimate partner violence within her community.

To respond to the challenge before her, the Centre asked a design question;

- ❖ How can we lean on CEDAW General Recommendation No. 35 to increase the capacity of the Centre for Gender Studies, Veritas University, Abuja, to prevent violence against women?

To answer the above design question, the Centre developed the Gender Violence Awareness Project (G-VAP). Gender Violence Awareness Project (G-VAP) is an orientation project inspired by CEDAW General Recommendation No. 35. CEDAW General Recommendation No. 35 recommends an integration of content on gender equality into curricula at all levels of education, whether public or private. G-VAP was designed as a gender equality curriculum to strengthen the knowledge and awareness of the Centre for Gender Studies, Veritas University Abuja, on issues relating to violence against women. G-VAP served as an advocacy platform, establishing an advocacy relationship between the Centre and development partners relevant to CEDAW General Recommendation No. 35.

Emboldened by CEDAW General Recommendation No. 35, the Centre for Gender Studies, Veritas University Abuja, was able to expand her partnership leverage with the development space. G-VAP was a project that involved a partnership between the

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<sup>25</sup> Butler, N. et al. (2022) The Impact of COVID-19 and Associated Measures on health, police, and non-government Organisation Service Utilisation Related to Violence against Women and Children. *BMC Public Health*. [Online] 22 (1).

Centre, Egunec Foundation (EF), Women at Risk International Foundation (WARIF), and other international development organizations under the Spotlight Initiative Project. The ensuing Gender Violence Awareness Project (G-VAP) comprised a general symposium and a Capacity Building workshop geared towards strengthening the knowledge of the Centre for Gender Studies, Veritas University, to eradicate all forms of School Related Gender Based Violence (SRGBV).

Below are some visuals from the symposium and workshops that arose from the partnership.





## 5. LESSONS AND NEXT STEPS

Leaning on CEDAW General Recommendation No. 35 to design, plan, and execute the Gender Violence Awareness Project (G-VAP) was an enlightening journey for the Centre for Gender Studies, Veritas University, Abuja. The experience had valuable lessons and insights on the opportunity presented by CEDAW General Recommendation No. 35 for policy implementation in education communities.

First of all, the Centre was able to recognize how leaning on CEDAW General Recommendation No. 35 opened up multi-sector partnership opportunities for educational institutions. CEDAW General Recommendation No. 35 gave a policy legitimacy and affirmation to the Centre as she engaged development partners during the design and execution of the Gender Violence Awareness Project (G-VAP). This was what led the Centre to a partnership with the Spotlight Initiative. The Spotlight Initiative is a global initiative embarked on by the European Union (EU) and the United Nations (UN) to eliminate all forms of Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG). It brings focused attention on the issue of VAWG, moving it to the spotlight and placing it at the center of efforts to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment in line with the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development<sup>26</sup>.

The partnership opportunity that CEDAW General Recommendation No. 35 unlocked cuts across education, private, policy, and development sectors. This partnership leverage and opportunity is critical to addressing violence against women, as no one entity can solve the challenge on its own. The partnership leverage will go a long way to get more hands on deck in facilitating the implementation of gender based policies in communities that need them.

Another benefit that came with leaning on CEDAW General Recommendation No. 35 was that it challenged the Centre for Gender Studies, Veritas University Abuja, to streamline and channel attention on the issue of gender inequality. It has been stated that for policies to be implemented, it demands an active process embodying proper analysis, goal definition, action programs, and monitoring results needs to be

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<sup>26</sup> Razavi, S. (2016) The 2030 Agenda: Challenges of Implementation to Attain Gender Equality and women's Rights. *Gender & Development*. [Online] 24 (1), 25–41.

implemented, not just passive policies without action<sup>27</sup>. When it comes to gender policy implementation, all of these processes demand strategic attention that will increase the consciousness of gender equality in a community.

The above was achieved and communicated in the project report for the Gender Violence Awareness Project (G-VAP). In the report, the Centre observed that the scope of Gender Based Violence is broad and came to an understanding that, as a platform, it was important for her to focus on a theme most relevant to her target audience. The Centre concluded in their report that this strategy will help her to build capacity faster and galvanize the needed partnerships and resources to support young women from violence. So, leaning on CEDAW General Recommendation No. 35 to design, plan, and execute the Gender Violence Awareness Project (G-VAP), the Centre was able to hone in on the needs of the young women in her community and her own needs as a gender equity platform.

CEDAW General Recommendation No. 35 advocates for a curriculum on gender development. Developing a curriculum requires the university community to pay increased and streamlined attention to gender inequality within her community. Developing a curriculum will also enhance and strengthen the knowledge capital of education institutions on practices and culture that help address gender discrimination. These are very powerful project development benefits that strengthen the advocacy and project execution capacities of education communities interested in gender based policies.

In the G-VAP report, the Centre concluded that there was a need to enhance the facilitation capacity of the staff and students of the university so they were more equipped to be ambassadors and advocates of Gender Development. This is a mind-set achievement that comes with exploring CEDAW General Recommendation No. 35. This is a huge win for policy implementation. With this mind-set, the Centre for Gender Studies, Veritas University Abuja, was able to pay deeper attention to the needs,

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<sup>27</sup> Ejumudo, K. B. O. (2008) *Sustainable Development in Nigeria: The Policy Gap and Action Dilemma*. Proceedings of International Conference on Research and Development. Ghana: Pan-African Book Company.

assets, and opportunities that come with implementing gender policies in her community.

Having seen the opportunities and benefits that come with implementing gender equality policies in education communities through CEDAW General Recommendation No. 35, it is important for this approach to be replicated in other educational institutions. The CEDAW Committee should take advantage of education communities as implementation platforms for CEDAW, and efforts should be made to direct policy attention to this channel for consolidation.

Beyond CEDAW, gender development policies should take a cue from CEDAW General Recommendation No. 35 and create specific unlocking mechanisms that enable education communities play a more prominent implementation role. This can extend to having gender policy ambassadors in education communities whose mandate is to facilitate the implementation of these policies.

Gender policy budgets should also pay attention to the implementation opportunity present in education communities by setting aside implementation funds that activates and harness education communities. An implementation partnership between education communities and NGOs will go a long way in addressing the implementation gaps that plague gender policies.



## 6. CONCLUSION

This policy paper talks about gender inequality and the policies that exist to address gender inequality. It zeroes in on the challenge of policy implementation and how CEDAW General Recommendation No. 35 provides an avenue for policy innovation to address the implementation gaps that gender policies face. It shows this innovation in action at Veritas University, Abuja, Nigeria.

The success of CEDAW General Recommendation No. 35 in the design and execution of the Gender Violence Awareness Project (G-VAP) in Veritas University, Abuja, Nigeria, is a significant milestone in addressing gender policy implementation gaps in Nigeria and the African Continent. Having seen the opportunities and benefits that come with implementing gender equality policies in education communities through CEDAW General Recommendation No. 35, it is important for this approach to be replicated in other educational institutions. The CEDAW Committee should take advantage of education communities as implementation platforms for CEDAW, and efforts should be made to direct policy attention to this channel for consolidation.

Gender development policies should take a cue from CEDAW General Recommendation No. 35 and create specific unlocking mechanisms that enable education communities play a more prominent implementation role, and more resources and partnerships should be directed at this approach. Veritas University Abuja, Nigeria, is just a hint at what's possible, and partnership and resources should be invested to replicate this approach in other university communities in Nigeria and Africa.

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