

## GENDER EQUALITY AND SOCIAL INCLUSION (GESI)

### Country-level Assessment: Nigeria

#### RISA Programme Overview

Research and Innovation Systems for Africa (RISA) is a programme funded by the UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) that aims to strengthen R&I ecosystems in Africa. The RISA Fund is jointly funded by two separate FCDO programmes – SRIA for research ecosystems and ATIP for innovation ecosystems. The intended impact of the RISA Fund is to strengthen national research and innovation systems in target countries; this in turn will contribute to economic growth and development. The RISA fund has three core objectives, 1) to support research organisations to have the capabilities necessary to produce relevant, high-quality research, 2) to create an enabling environment for researchers and research organisations, and 3) to strengthen the enablers for scaling of new and emerging technologies with high potential for poverty reduction and inclusive growth.

#### Addressing GESI in R&I Ecosystems

In the interest of ensuring that research and innovation (R&I) ecosystems are intentionally gender equitable and socially inclusive, the RISA programme is committed to understanding and addressing the various GESI gaps and barriers that arise within such ecosystems. Drawing on the International Development Innovation Alliance (IDIA) framework, which articulates nine key Ecosystem Strengthening Goals, 'equitable and inclusive participation' (Goal #7) has been identified as a critical element to be addressed in the process of strengthening R&I ecosystems.<sup>1</sup> This goal explicitly recognizes the existing inequities and patterns of social exclusion that unfold in R&I spaces, and emphasizes the need for being more intentional about assessing how innovation is applied, in order to ensure that the inequalities of established systems are not reproduced.

Some of the key GESI challenges in research and innovation include:

- Underrepresentation of disadvantaged groups within R&I talent pools
- Ecosystem strengthening efforts that often do not address, and can even exacerbate, existing inequalities and patterns of social exclusion
- Lack of gender equality and social inclusion in research

The GESI country-level assessments undertaken for priority countries during the programme inception period (Kenya, Ghana, Nigeria and South Africa) will serve to illustrate some of the key GESI gaps and barriers within each country's unique context, as well as to illuminate the broader, overarching challenges that may also cut across countries. Country-level GESI assessments are informed by existing research and evidence, as well as key stakeholder interviews with different actors from typically excluded groups within the R&I space for each country. These assessments will help guide RISA in its efforts to provide targeted GESI support to country-level projects funded by RISA as well as shape and inform a high-level GESI strategy for the RISA programme, with the intention of strengthening the broader R&I ecosystems within each country in line with the nine Ecosystem Strengthening Goals.

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<sup>1</sup> Strengthening Innovation Ecosystems; IDIA, November 2021.

## Country Overview

Nigeria is a lower middle-income country situated on the Atlantic Ocean and bordered by Benin, Niger, Chad and Cameroon. At over 206 million people, the country accounts for roughly half of West Africa's total population and has one of the largest populations of youth in the world.<sup>2</sup> Women comprise roughly 49.3 percent of the population.<sup>3</sup> While Nigeria has made efforts to advance socio-economic outcomes in recent years, it continues to face significant development challenges. According to the World Bank's 2020 Human Capital Index, Nigeria ranks 150<sup>th</sup> out of 157 countries.<sup>4</sup> Factors contributing to this include issues with governance and corruption, lack of infrastructure, ongoing security threats, the need to diversify its economy and poor public financial management systems.

Nigeria currently has 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory and is ruled by the Progressives Congress party (APC). The war against the Boko Haram terrorist group continues to threaten the security and livelihood of people in the north, while kidnappings and banditry threaten individuals residing in the northwestern part of the country, and ongoing civil unrest threatens those in the southeast.<sup>5</sup> Social and economic divides are also felt amongst people living in urban versus rural areas; in 1960, 84.5 percent of Nigerians resided in rural areas, while today, only 48 percent of people do.<sup>6</sup> While Nigeria is the largest economy in Africa, its economy is not diversified, as the bulk of it (over 80 percent) is reliant on oil exports.<sup>7</sup> This has caused the country to become particularly vulnerable to economic shocks, such as the effects of COVID-19. Due to declining oil prices driven by the pandemic, in 2020 the country experienced its worst recession in over two decades. As a result, the number of people living below the poverty line is expected to rise by 12 million between 2019 and 2023, even though economic growth began to resume in 2021. Poverty rates were already high before the pandemic, as 40 percent of Nigerians lived below the poverty line and 25 percent were economically vulnerable in 2018. In spite of government attempts to respond to the Covid situation through policy reforms - including harmonizing exchange rates, reducing nonessential spending, and introducing reforms to eliminate gasoline subsidies - Nigeria's economic outlook remains precarious.<sup>8</sup>

Although the country does not have a national policy specifically devoted to research, it does have a policy on science, technology and innovation (STI), which recognizes the critical links between scientific research and economic development.<sup>9</sup> The first National Science and Technology Policy was produced in 1986 and was later revised in 1997 and again in 2003. In 2011, the government updated this to a National Science, Technology and Innovation Policy, which recognizes knowledge as a key driver for socioeconomic growth. Nigeria was ranked 118<sup>th</sup> out of the 132 countries in the Global Innovation Index (GII) for 2021; this ranking decreased from 114<sup>th</sup> in 2019 and 117<sup>th</sup> in 2020. Among the 27 economics in sub-Saharan Africa, Nigeria ranks 16<sup>th</sup> and, in relation to the country's GDP, it is performing below expectations for its level of development. Conversely, Nigeria performs above average for the sub-Saharan Africa region in two pillars: market sophistication and business sophistication, which it received positive scores for. Nigeria received negative scores for human capital and research, infrastructure, and knowledge and technology outputs, with its weakest performance in knowledge and technology outputs.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>2</sup> [Nigeria - Country Summary](#); World Bank Climate Change Portal, 2021.

<sup>3</sup> [Population, female \( percent of total population\) - Nigeria](#); World Bank, 2020.

<sup>4</sup> [Human Capital Project - A Project for the World](#); World Bank, 2020.

<sup>5</sup> [The World Bank in Nigeria — Country Context](#); World Bank, 2021.

<sup>6</sup> [Rural population, female \( percent of total population\) - Nigeria](#); World Bank, 2020.

<sup>7</sup> [Nigeria - Country Summary](#); World Bank Climate Change Portal, 2021. [The World Bank in Nigeria — Country Context](#); World Bank, 2021.

<sup>8</sup> [The World Bank in Nigeria — Country Context](#); World Bank, 2021.

<sup>9</sup> Assessing the needs of the research system in Nigeria: A report for the SRIA programme; UK Department for International Development, October 2019.

<sup>10</sup> [Global Innovation Index 2021 — Nigeria](#); WIPO, 2021.

## Policy, Strategy and Institutional Environment in Relation to GESI

**1999 Constitution (amended 2011):** Nigeria's Constitution affirms key fundamental rights and freedoms for all people and guarantees equality under the law.<sup>11</sup> Discrimination is not permitted on most grounds, including sex, place of origin, religion, status, ethnic or linguistic association. The Constitution outlines specific commitments for the State to provide adequate facilities for and encourage free mobility of all people, goods and services; to secure full resident rights for each citizen; encourage inter-marriage among people of different origins, religions, ethnic or linguistic ties; and promote associations being formed across ethnic, linguistic, religious or other sectional barriers. However, the Constitution does not provide specific protections for LGBTQ+ individuals and makes no mention of sexual orientation. For women and children, efforts are made to mainstream women into Nigeria's economic development. For instance, Section 17 promotes equal pay for equal work and affirms that people shall not be discriminated against on any ground, including sex. The Constitution also states that children, young people and elderly shall be protected against violence including exploitation and moral or material neglect, although this article does not mention women specifically. Section 26 provides an extension of a Nigerian man's citizenship to his foreign-born wife, although no similar reference is made for a Nigerian woman with a foreign-born husband; in fact, there are very limited rights for a Nigerian woman to transmit her citizenship to a foreign husband. The Constitution also makes minimal references supporting the rights of people with disabilities (PWD); it states that the overall welfare of the disabled should be promoted, in addition to other measures such as promoting suitable shelter and food for all people, providing a national minimum living wage, old age care and pensions, and sick and unemployment benefits.

**National Development Plan (NDP) 2021-2025:** Nigeria's current medium-term national development strategy replaces the country's previous Vision 2020 strategy (which was introduced in 2009) and earlier poverty reduction plans.<sup>12</sup> The plan outlines broad objectives for the economic transformation of the country. In terms of gender and social inclusion, in Chapter 25, the NDP states that women are key drivers to socioeconomic growth and development. It also emphasizes constraints that women are still burdened by, such as patriarchal norms, child marriage, poor maternal/child care, low political representation of women, poor enforcement of laws/policies (including the National Gender Policy), and low remuneration of women compared to men, among others. Chapter 25 further outlines specific objectives and targets to promote gender inclusion and equality including strengthening its legislative and policy framework to work towards gender parity and better integrating women into economic and social development. The Plan also states an estimated public investment of N108 billion naira to be allocated to achieving the objectives. Lastly, the Plan includes separate chapters to promote social and economic development opportunities for other vulnerable groups, including PWD and youth.

**Federal Ministry of Women Affairs:** The Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development is a product of a 1989 Decree that first led to the establishment of the National Commission for Women.<sup>13</sup> Though the Commission was initially recognized as a government institution, its activities were conducted on an ad-hoc basis. In 1995, the Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development was established, replacing the Commission, though it is now formally referred to as the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs. The Ministry initially lacked resources and technical cadre; through reformative measures over the years, the Ministry established a new vision, which aims to promote equal access to social, economic and wealth opportunities for all and places a focus on children, the elderly and PWD. Since then, the Ministry has worked to advise the Nigerian government on issues related to these areas and groups. The Ministry also works to draft policy guidelines and spearhead processes aimed at promoting gender equality and to place gender issues on national and international agendas. However, the Ministry's own website states that the institution has never been perceived as equal to other Ministries and has struggled for many years to secure adequate funding and resources to fulfill its mandate and be taken seriously.

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<sup>11</sup> Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999.

<sup>12</sup> [National Development Plan \(NDP\) 2021-2025 - Volume 1](#); Federal Ministry of Finance, Budget and National Planning, 2021.

<sup>13</sup> [The Ministry's Mandate](#); Federal Ministry of Women Affairs, 2022.

**National Commission for Persons with Disabilities (NCPWD):** The NCPWD sits within the Federal Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, Disaster Management and Social Development. Its core mandate is to advance and promote full immersion of PWD into all aspects of Nigerian society, including areas such as education, social and economic development, and civil rights.<sup>14</sup> It was formed in August 2020 following the signing of the Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act of 2018, and works to implement the provisions of the Act. The NCPWD has recently drafted a 5-year strategic plan, beginning in 2022, which is multi-sectoral and aims to promote a rights-based approach to advance the health, education and justice of PWD, including children living with disabilities.<sup>15</sup>

**National Human Rights Commission (NHRC):** Established in 1995, the NHRC's mandate is to protect and promote all aspects of human rights.<sup>16</sup> The Commission aims to promote human rights through a range of activities including public education and enlightenment, research, mediation and conciliation, conflict resolution, peace building, and advocacy and training programs, each of which aim to raise awareness of issues relating to human rights. Focus areas of these activities include the rights of women and gender-related matters; child rights; freedom of expression and the media; human rights defenders; labour; right to health; refugees and internally displaced people; food and shelter; right to education; freedom of religion or belief and peaceful assembly; and the right to development. The NHRC has offices in all 36 states and 'Village Square' community meetings are held throughout the country to discuss the NHRC's mandate and relevant issues. A complaint treatment mechanism has also been established at the Commission's headquarters as well as six zonal offices to handle complaints of human rights violations, which all citizens can access free of charge.

**The Federal Ministry of Youth and Sports Development:** In 2016, the Federal Ministry of Youth Development and the National Sports Commission merged to form the Federal Ministry of Youth and Sports Development.<sup>17</sup> The main role of the Ministry is to advance youth and sports development in collaboration with government and relevant stakeholders, and aims to help young people transition into the workforce and wider society as adults. The Ministry's website outlines 19 primary functions to advance youth and sport development. Of these, Function 6 emphasizes the importance of instilling human rights, social justice, equity, fairness and gender equality into the minds of youth. Moreover, function 15 states that participation of women should be promoted in interstate, national and international competitions.

**National Youth Policy, 2019-2023:** Nigeria's national policy on youth describes young people as a critical resource for the country's future development and aims to promote youth development and participation in economic, political and community life.<sup>18</sup> In recent years, the Federal Ministry of Youth and Sports Development reviewed and updated the previous 2009 version of the Policy (the original National Youth Policy was first established in 1981). A major change made was updating the definition of 'youth' from individuals aged 18 to 35 years of age to now 15 to 29 years. The Policy articulates five cross-sectoral pillars, which are key to successfully enable youth to transition to adulthood. These include ensuring a productive workforce and sustainable economic engagement for youth; health and health-promoting lifestyles; participation, inclusiveness and equitable opportunities for all youth; promotive and protective environment for youth development; and partnership-building and effective collaboration. The Policy also indicates guiding values and principles, including the need for full consideration of gender equity into youth development programmes. Throughout, the policy emphasizes that gender must be incorporated into various strategies, such as promoting gender equality at all levels of education.

**National Gender Policy, 2006 (amended 2022):** Nigeria's National Gender Policy identifies gender equality and women's empowerment as prerequisites for sustainable development and poverty reduction.<sup>19</sup> The overall goal of the Policy is to mainstream gender equality concerns into all aspects of

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<sup>14</sup> [Home](#); The National Commission for Persons with Disabilities (NCPWD), 2022.

<sup>15</sup> Call to Action from Save the Children in Nigeria Ahead of the Global Disability Summit 2022; Save the Children, 2022.

<sup>16</sup> [About National Human Rights Commission - Background, Structure and Departments](#); National Human Rights Commission, 2022.

<sup>17</sup> [About the Ministry](#); The Ministry of Youth and Sports Development, 2022.

<sup>18</sup> [National Youth Policy \(2019-2023\)](#); Federal Ministry of Youth and Sports Development, 2019.

<sup>19</sup> [National Gender Policy Strategic Framework/Analysis](#); Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development, 2006.

planning, policy, legislation and transformation activities. The Policy explicitly recognizes that women, girls and vulnerable groups face specific barriers that perpetuate issues related to poverty, discrimination, lack of education, and power imbalances between men and women. The Policy emphasizes the need for women be proportionally represented as at least 35 percent of all participants in governance processes. Although the Policy is formally recognized, it is not widely practiced due to insufficient structures and processes set in place; for example, Nigeria's plural legal system does not protect women and girls from violence.<sup>20</sup> On March 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2022, the Federal Executive Council approved a revised National Gender Policy 2021-2026, which outlines specific standards for the government to meet its mandate for gender equality.<sup>21</sup>

**Criminal Code Act (Criminal Code), 1916 (amended 1990):** Nigeria's Criminal Code applies to the southern states of Nigeria.<sup>22</sup> It distinguishes between assault against men versus women, with assault against a man considered to be a more serious crime and can thus lead to a higher sentence. Rape is defined in section 357 as "unlawful carnal knowledge of a woman or girl, without her consent, or with her consent, if the consent is obtained by force or by means of threats or intimidation of any kind, or by fear of harm, or by means of false and fraudulent representation as to the nature of the act, or, in the case of a married woman, by personating her husband." The Criminal Code Act criminalizes abortion in sections 228-230, and abortion is defined as an attempt to procure miscarriage. It states that a mother attempting to cause her own miscarriage is liable for imprisonment for up to 7 years, while anyone who assists with an abortion or tries to force a miscarriage upon a woman can face imprisonment for up to 14 years. The Code also criminalizes same-sex sexual conduct, formally referred to as sexual relations 'against the order of nature' and 'acts of gross indecency' with an emphasis on sex between men, and is prohibited under Section 214, 215 and 217 of the Code.<sup>23</sup>

**Penal Code Act, 1960:** Nigeria's Penal Code applies to the northern states of Nigeria. Section 55 allows a husband to "correct his wife" as long as it does not lead to "grievous hurt" and states that the correction shall be reasonable according to the person's age and physical and mental state.<sup>24</sup> It criminalizes abortion in Section 232, which is defined as an attempt to cause miscarriage and can result in up to 14 years imprisonment for anyone involved in the procedure. Under this Penal Code, abortion is only legal if the life of the mother is at risk. Section 282 addresses rape and states that forced sexual intercourse by a man with his wife is not considered rape if the wife has already encountered puberty.

**Same Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act, 2013:** This Act defines marriage as being a union between a man and a woman, and makes it illegal for same sex individuals to enter into marriage or a civil union, or to gain access to any benefits that come with it.<sup>25</sup> For same sex couples who may have married outside of Nigeria, the Act states that the relationship is considered void in Nigeria and that the couple therefore gains no access to any legal marriage benefits. Section 4 states that a person who participates in organizations, LGBTQ+ clubs or meetings promoting same sex relationships can be criminalized, along with anyone who exhibits any public display of same sex intimate or romantic interest or relationship; arrest and prosecution can lead to 10 to 14 years of imprisonment. This Act emerged from a draft bill proposed in 2006, which was not passed during its first reading.

## The Gender Context of Nigeria

While Nigeria has made efforts to advance opportunities and equality for women at legislative and policy levels, women still face persistent injustices and marginalization. Patriarchal societal norms continue to inhibit women's autonomy and ability to fully participate in society.<sup>26</sup> For example, it is not uncommon for

<sup>20</sup> [USAID Gender Analysis for Strategic Planning Report](#); USAID, July 2014.

<sup>21</sup> [Nigerian govt approves revised gender policy day after lawmakers reject 'women bills'](#); Premium Times Nigeria, 2022.

<sup>22</sup> [Criminal Code Act](#); Laws of the Federation of Nigeria, 1960.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> [Penal Code \(Northern States\) Federal Provisions Act](#); Laws of the Federation of Nigeria, revised edition, 1990.

<sup>25</sup> [Same Sex Marriage \(Prohibition\) Act](#); National Assembly of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013.

<sup>26</sup> [Policies and Social Norms: Their Relationship to Women's Economic Empowerment in Nigeria](#); The Nigeria Social Norms Learning Collaborative, 2021.



boys to be viewed as more deserving of investment, support and care than girls. These social beliefs hinder women from advancing their own economic and social development and taking part in decisions that affect themselves and their families. Further disparities exist amongst women in the north.<sup>27</sup> Due to the Boko Haram insurgency, 7.9 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance and amongst those affected, 81 percent are women.<sup>28</sup> This overall inequality is exacerbated by poor monitoring and evaluation systems to adequately track gender-specific indicators. These cumulative factors present current challenges for the country to implement its various policy and legal frameworks and commitments on gender equality.<sup>29</sup>

Traditional gender norms embedded within the cultural context of the country further burden women with unpaid labour and perpetuate violence against women. It is not uncommon for both men and women to view some form of gender-based violence (GBV) - including emotional, sexual and physical violence - as being an appropriate measure for 'disciplining' women who have not fulfilled their traditional gender roles and expectations. These norms are further compounded by the country's discriminatory laws, which enable men to use violence as a means to 'discipline' their wives, contributing to the country's high rates of GBV.<sup>30</sup> Amongst women who have been married, 36 percent report experiencing some type of GBV from their husbands, although this figure is likely even higher given the prevalence of underreporting.<sup>31</sup> Gender norms related to sex and sexual entitlement make it socially acceptable for men to have more than one sexual partner and to have sex with girls and young women. Sexual violence increases women's risk of HIV infection and has contributed to infection rates being three times higher amongst young women aged 15 to 24 years, compared to men in the same age group.<sup>32</sup>

Patriarchal norms have also led to widespread forced child marriage, with higher rates in rural areas and amongst women in the Northwest; 43 percent of all girls in Nigeria are married before the age of 18.<sup>33</sup> The Nigerian Child Rights Act of 2003 set the minimum age of marriage at 18 years, but as of March 2013, only 23 of Nigeria's 36 states have adopted the Act; as a result, state laws on the minimum age of marriage tend to vary. In southern Nigeria, the minimum age of marriage is between 18 and 21 years of age, depending on the region, while in the north it ranges from 12 to 15 years.<sup>34</sup> Female genital mutilation (FGM) is also commonly practiced despite Nigeria passing the Violence Against Persons Prohibition Act in 2015, which makes FGM illegal. In total, 20 percent of women aged 15-49 are circumcised. Despite this high prevalence rate, attitudes towards FGM appear to be slowly changing. Amongst women who have heard of the practice, 67 percent believe it should not be continued, indicating a shift in social attitudes that may play a contributing role in the FGM prevalence rate amongst women aged 15-49 decreasing from 25 percent in 2013 to now 20 percent; however, it is unclear if the attitudes of men and other social gatekeepers who play a major role in promoting FGM's social importance and continued practice have begun to shift at all.<sup>35</sup>

Women in Nigeria tend to engage in lower paid jobs and/or jobs that are typically rejected by men, such as household helpers and cleaners. Women are also disproportionately involved in the informal sector, including the micro, small and medium enterprise (MSMEs) segment of the economy.<sup>36</sup> In terms of the labour force participation rate, women's participation in Nigeria remains low at just 47 percent compared to 65.7 percent for men.<sup>37</sup> Men also predominate in the formal sector, with only 20 percent of enterprises in the formal sector owned by women, while just 12 percent of corporate Board of Directors are female. Conversely, women predominate when it comes to vulnerable employment at 85 percent, compared to

<sup>27</sup> [Policies and Social Norms: Their Relationship to Women's Economic Empowerment in Nigeria](#); The Nigeria Social Norms Learning Collaborative, 2021.

<sup>28</sup> [Rapid Gender Analysis North East Region](#); UN Women Nigeria, CARE Nigeria, Oxfam in Nigeria, 2020.

<sup>29</sup> [USAID Gender Analysis for Strategic Planning Report](#); USAID, July 2014.

<sup>30</sup> [Policies and Social Norms: Their Relationship to Women's Economic Empowerment in Nigeria](#); The Nigeria Social Norms Learning Collaborative, 2021.

<sup>31</sup> [Demographic Health Survey](#); National Population Commission, 2018.

<sup>32</sup> [Women, girls, gender equality and HIV in Nigeria Fact Sheet](#); National Agency for the Control of AIDS, 2016.

<sup>33</sup> [Gender Equality in Nigeria's Private Sector: A Gender Gap Assessment of the 30 Most Capitalized Companies Listed on the Nigerian Exchange](#); International Finance Corporation, September 2021.

<sup>34</sup> [Minimum Age of Marriage in Africa](#); African Child Policy Forum, June 2013.

<sup>35</sup> [Demographic Health Survey](#); National Population Commission, 2018.

<sup>36</sup> [Policies and Social Norms: Their Relationship to Women's Economic Empowerment in Nigeria](#); The Nigeria Social Norms Learning Collaborative, 2021.

<sup>37</sup> [Labor force participation rate, female \(percent of female population ages 15+\) \(modeled ILO estimate\) - Nigeria](#); World Bank, 2019.

men at 74 percent.<sup>38</sup> Literacy rates are also comparatively low for women at 53 percent compared to 71 percent of men.<sup>39</sup> Women fare worse as well when it comes to income earned. For every dollar gained, women earn 86 percent of what men do in Nigeria; this figure is even lower for women in the north who earn just 65 percent of men's pay.<sup>40</sup> Overall, progress in women's economic participation in the country has been notably slow; in 2018, only 50 percent of women participated in Nigeria's labor force – a mere 3 percent increase since 1990.<sup>41</sup>

Gender gaps also exist in education, which are compounded by poverty and geography. In total, 36 percent of women have no formal education compared to 27 percent of men.<sup>42</sup> The median number of years of schooling is 3.6 amongst women and 5.4 for men. This disparity is widened amongst rural residents. Nearly half (49 percent) of women in rural areas have no formal education compared to 20 percent of women residing in urban areas. These figures are much lower for men at 37 percent and 13 percent, respectively. At a regional level, the lowest education levels are in the Northwest and Northeast. Wealth also plays an important role in education, as 24 percent of women in the top wealth quintile have earned more than a secondary education compared to only 1 percent of women in the lowest quintile. Meanwhile, 75 percent of women in the lowest quintile have earned no formal education whatsoever. For women in the north who have been educated, they experience higher rates of paid employment; however, due to gender norms, they are often pursuing opportunities deemed socially acceptable for women such as nursing, midwifery and teaching.<sup>43</sup>

Female participation in entrepreneurship is amongst the highest in the world in Nigeria, with 41 percent of micro-businesses being owned by women.<sup>44</sup> According to the Mastercard Index for Women Entrepreneurs (MIWE), Nigeria ranked second amongst African countries and 11<sup>th</sup> worldwide on its number of women business leaders, professionals and entrepreneurship activity. However, when it comes to the best supporting environment for female entrepreneurs, Nigeria scored lower than many African countries including Botswana, South Africa, Nigeria, Tunisia, Uganda, Malawi and Algeria. This is likely due in part to Nigeria's unstable economic conditions, which pose challenges to female entrepreneurs.<sup>45</sup> Overall, while it may appear encouraging for Nigeria to have a relatively high number of female entrepreneurs, this participation has largely emerged out of necessity, as women experience much lower levels of access to formal employment opportunities, compared with men.<sup>46</sup> When it comes to growing their businesses, women entrepreneurs face additional barriers. For instance, husbands often have significant influence over their wives' financial decisions, and women who are unemployed or earn less than their husbands are even more vulnerable to their husbands' decisions over how their earnings are used.<sup>47</sup> This lack of agency presents a significant obstacle in women's ability to invest profits earned back into their business to help them grow. These financial barriers, coupled with women having lower levels of education, may help to explain why women-owned businesses in Nigeria are 20 percent less likely to have introduced a new product design and/or improved their products compared to ones owned by men.<sup>48</sup>

In terms of political participation, there are significant gaps in the Nigerian context. The national average of women's political participation is 6.7 percent across all elected and appointed positions, a far distance from the global average of 22.5 percent. Women make up just 3.61 percent of Nigeria's lower chamber of parliament, and only 7.3 percent of the upper chamber.<sup>49</sup> In terms of ministerial seats, women comprise 16.7 percent, or just 6 out of the 36 available seats. Some efforts have been made to promote inclusion

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<sup>38</sup> [Vulnerable employment, female \(percent of female employment\) \(modeled ILO estimate\) - Nigeria](#); World Bank, 2019.

<sup>39</sup> [Impact of women on Nigeria's economy](#); PWC, 2020.

<sup>40</sup> [Policies and Social Norms: Their Relationship to Women's Economic Empowerment in Nigeria](#); The Nigeria Social Norms Learning Collaborative, 2021.

<sup>41</sup> [Nigeria Gender Lens Entrepreneurship and Investing Report](#); She Who Ventures, 2022.

<sup>42</sup> [Demographic Health Survey](#); National Population Commission, 2018.

<sup>43</sup> [Policies and Social Norms: Their Relationship to Women's Economic Empowerment in Nigeria](#); The Nigeria Social Norms Learning Collaborative, 2021

<sup>44</sup> [Impact of women on Nigeria's economy](#); PWC, 2020.

<sup>45</sup> [The MasterCard Index of Women Entrepreneurs](#); MasterCard Foundation, 2020.

<sup>46</sup> [Impact of women on Nigeria's economy](#); PWC, 2020.

<sup>47</sup> [Demographic Health Survey](#); National Population Commission, 2018.

<sup>48</sup> [Profiting from parity: Unlocking the potential of women's businesses in Africa](#); World Bank Group, 2019.

<sup>49</sup> [About Parliament: Nigeria](#); Interparliamentary Union, 2022.

and increase representation of women in politics in Nigeria, namely through the National Gender Policy, which aims to ensure that at least 35 percent of those in political positions are women. Despite this, women are still drastically underrepresented. This is largely due to persistent patriarchal norms, lower levels of education, lack of access to financial capital, religious barriers, and stigmatization - as women who enter politics are often perceived as "shameless and promiscuous".<sup>50</sup> Women face additional barriers regarding expectations around domestic responsibilities and childcare. These can significantly limit when and where women can participate in political meetings, campaigns and events.<sup>51</sup>

When it comes to political participation, women also face harassment and violence at all levels of politics. This violence can include emotional or physical harm and can come from the media, family members and others.<sup>52</sup> It can also come in the form of 'soft violence' like whispering campaigns, rumours, and insults. These threats aim to deter women and girls from seeking political office and further entrench deep-rooted beliefs and norms that women do not deserve to be in positions of power. To overcome these barriers, efforts have been made by government and non-governmental organizations to promote greater inclusion of women in politics, including at the grassroots level.<sup>53</sup> For instance, women's groups have formed across Nigeria's 36 states and have enabled women to take part in political advocacy efforts. One recent example took place in March 2022, when five constitution bills that would have promoted gender equality—including allocating more political positions for women—were voted against by the National Assembly. In response, women held protests outside of the National Assembly to demand reconsideration of the bills; however, the protests were quickly suspended. Despite these barriers, women's rights groups and civil society organizations continue to work to enable women to participate in political advocacy and decision making processes.<sup>54</sup>

One of the most persistent barriers that women in Nigeria and elsewhere face - which has a direct and significant impact on their economic and political participation - is unpaid care work (UCW). UCW refers to the often-invisible household, care and domestic work that largely falls on women and girls.<sup>55</sup> It involves all aspects of domestic and care work, including cooking, cleaning, all facets of childcare, fetching water and firewood, and caring for other family members, including the sick and elderly. It is largely invisible, unvalued and unremunerated labour, and has been well documented in terms of the impact it has on perpetuating women's poverty and gender inequality.<sup>56</sup> Before the Covid pandemic, women and girls were already spending 12.5 billion hours globally on unpaid care work every day. This amounts to a contribution of at least \$10.8 trillion annually - three times that of the global tech industry.<sup>57</sup> In Nigeria, 60 percent of all household work is performed by women and girls, regardless of their employment status or education level.<sup>58</sup> The Covid situation has only served to exacerbate the current situation, with women's UCW burdens significantly increasing during the pandemic.<sup>59</sup>

While gender barriers play a cross-cutting role in all facets of life, gender norms further intersect with other social variables to compound the marginalization that individual women and girls face. Not all women and girls experience the same disadvantages and marginalization; while gender discrimination and violence can and do impact the lives of women and girls from all walks of life, the nature, frequency and severity of these experiences varies based on other variables of life circumstance and identity, including age, disability, sexual orientation, geographic location, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, educational attainment, religion and culture, among others.

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<sup>50</sup> [Monitoring Participation of Women in Politics in Nigeria](#); Oloyede, O, 2016.

<sup>51</sup> [Gender Justice and Empowerment: Evaluating Women's Unpaid Care Work in Nigeria](#); Atim, G. and Awodola, B., International Journal of Gender and Women's Studies, 2020.

<sup>52</sup> [USAID Gender Analysis for Strategic Planning Report](#); USAID, July 2014.

<sup>53</sup> [Monitoring Participation of Women in Politics in Nigeria](#); Oloyede, O, 2016.

<sup>54</sup> [How Nigerian women are mobilizing grassroots support for 2023 general elections](#); Premium Times, 2022.

<sup>55</sup> [Addressing Unpaid Care and Domestic Work for a Gender-Equal and Inclusive Kenya](#); Care, April 2021.

<sup>56</sup> [Building Back Better for Women and Girls](#); Report of the G7 Gender Equality Advisory Council, 2021.

<sup>57</sup> [Addressing Unpaid Care and Domestic Work for a Gender-Equal and Inclusive Kenya](#); Care, April 2021.

<sup>58</sup> [Gender Justice and Empowerment: Evaluating Women's Unpaid Care Work in Nigeria](#); Atim, G. and Awodola, B., International Journal of Gender and Women's Studies, 2020.

<sup>59</sup> [The burden of unpaid care work amidst Covid-19 and the expansion of gender inequality](#); International Centre for Investigative Reporting, 2020.



## The Social Inclusion Context of Nigeria

Social inclusion is a broad term that can refer to any number of social groups that may experience systematic discrimination and thus exclusion from social, political and economic life.<sup>60</sup> This assessment focuses on how social exclusion creates barriers for some individuals to access, participate in and benefit from R&I ecosystems within their country context. Factors such as poverty, rural/urban divides, age, disability, and sexual orientation and gender identity play a key role in this regard, diminishing certain groups' and individuals' access to opportunities, resources and support.

Poverty is a primary driver of social exclusion, while social exclusion in turn worsens poverty.<sup>61</sup> Those who are socially excluded are often denied access to resources and opportunities available to others to increase their income and develop their households and communities by their own efforts. While the economy may grow and broader income levels may rise over time, socially excluded people are likely to be left behind, and make up an increasing proportion of those who remain in poverty despite improved overall growth levels. Nigeria's economic growth is generally volatile due to the country's dependency on oil. Between 2000 to 2014, the average GDP growth rate hovered around 7 percent; however, a sharp decline occurred in 2015 to 2.7 percent, which further decreased to -1.6 percent in 2016. The GDP growth rate rebounded to 0.8 percent in 2017 and 1.9 percent in 2018.<sup>62</sup> However, sharp declines were again felt in 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic, which resulted in a GDP growth rate of -1.7 percent.<sup>63</sup> Although Nigeria moved from being classified as a low-income country to a lower middle-income country by the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO) in 2016, the country is underdelivering in terms of converting its prosperity and wealth into inclusive and sustainable growth.<sup>64</sup> Key factors driving this situation include security threats (namely the Boko Haram insurgency in the north), weather-related shocks such as floods and droughts, and the country lacking diversity in its investments outside of the oil sector.<sup>65</sup> These factors have led to high inequality and poverty levels in spite of Nigeria's abundance in natural and human resources. Before Covid-19, 39.1 percent of households lived below the international poverty line of \$1.90 USD/day, of which 84.6 percent were living in rural areas and 76.3 percent were located in the north.<sup>66</sup> Covid-19 has only worsened the situation. The pandemic has caused the country's worst recession in nearly two decades and led to lower household income levels and higher rates of food insecurity. In turn, the number of people living below the international poverty line in Nigeria is expected to rise by 12 million between 2019 and 2023.<sup>67</sup>

Another aspect of exclusion is disadvantage on the basis of where individuals live, known as 'spatial' exclusion.<sup>68</sup> People who live in rural or remote/isolated areas are often prevented from fully participating in national economic and social life, and faced with the additional constraints of poverty, they can be systematically left behind in a vicious, self-perpetuating cycle. Lack of access to electricity and internet connectivity compound the exclusion that poor, rural individuals and communities face, in particular economic exclusion. The geographical and socioeconomic divides between the north and south in Nigeria play a significant role in the exclusion of certain groups. Similar to Ghana, Nigeria's overall development pattern is characterized by a significant 'north-south divide' where the north lags behind the south in socioeconomic growth and development, often resulting in higher poverty and exclusion rates amongst northern Nigerians.<sup>69</sup> A legacy of British patterns of colonization, a large part of southern Nigeria was used to facilitate international trade and to spread Western education, along with Christianity; this spread of trade and education in the south was not as rapid or extensive in the north, leading to slower

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<sup>60</sup> [Reducing poverty by tackling social exclusion](#): A DFID policy paper; DFID, 2005.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> [Nigeria Economic Update, Fall 2019: Jumpstarting Inclusive Growth - Unlocking the Productive Potential of Nigeria's People and Resource Endowments](#); World Bank Group, 2019.

<sup>63</sup> [GDP growth \(annual percent\) - Nigeria](#); World Bank, 2020.

<sup>64</sup> [UN Ranks Kenya and Nigeria under the lower Middle-Income countries](#); African Markets, September 2016. [Nigeria ranked 135th of 149 on the 2016 Legatum Prosperity Index](#); Legatum Prosperity Index, 2016.

<sup>65</sup> [Nigeria ranked 135th of 149 on the 2016 Legatum Prosperity Index](#); Legatum Prosperity Index, 2016.

<sup>66</sup> [Poverty & Equity Brief](#); Nigeria; World Bank Group, 2021.

<sup>67</sup> [The World Bank in Nigeria — Country Context](#); World Bank, 2021

<sup>68</sup> [Reducing poverty by tackling social exclusion](#): A DFID policy paper; DFID, 2005.

<sup>69</sup> [Poverty in Nigeria: Understanding and Bridging the Divide between North and South](#); Center for Global Development, 2018.

development and increasing social and economic disparities between the north and south over time.<sup>70</sup> This divide has caused subsequent tensions and resulted in the north lagging behind in education, employment and health indicators. In post-colonial Nigeria, the country faced further challenges including democracy being overturned and the country being ruled by three consecutive military juntas from the North until 1999. In terms of education, considerable disparities also exist between the north and south. For instance, there are significantly more universities and thus more access to higher education in the south compared to the north. State spending per citizen is also significantly higher in the south. Moreover, the average household size is much larger in northern Nigeria, a key factor that can heighten a family's vulnerability to poverty.<sup>71</sup>

For people with disabilities (PWD) in Nigeria, social exclusion is a widespread reality. In total, Nigeria's Demographic Health Survey indicates that 7 percent of people aged five and older have at least some difficulty in a functional domain (i.e. seeing, hearing, communicating, remembering, concentrating, walking, climbing, dressing, and washing). Roughly 1 percent of the total population have significant difficulty or cannot function at all in one of these domains.<sup>72</sup> PWD continue to experience social stigma, exclusion and discrimination, and traditional and religious beliefs tend to reinforce harmful stereotypes and perpetuate myths and misunderstandings around disability. Nigeria has several legal and constitutional provisions intended to protect socially disadvantaged groups, including PWD. In 2007, Nigeria signed the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities and its Operational Protocol in 2010. Following efforts made since 2011, the country also signed into law the Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act in January 2019. This Act established the National Commission for Persons with Disabilities to combat social exclusion and ensure that PWD have access to housing, education and healthcare.<sup>73</sup> However, despite these promising commitments, PWD still face persistent discrimination, stigma and barriers to socioeconomic opportunities. PWD often experience bullying and name-calling by family and community members and lack access to accessible infrastructure, including learning materials, teachers trained in inclusive education, and accessible facilities and hospitals.<sup>74</sup> As a result, PWD encounter higher rates of unemployment while also being excluded from many parts of society. Unemployment rates for youth with disabilities are at 77.3 percent, compared to 49.2 percent for those without disabilities, while unemployment rates for adults with disabilities are 62.5 percent compared with 21.5 percent for adults without disabilities.<sup>75</sup> People with disabilities in Nigeria are also disproportionately affected by poverty; an estimated 9 out of 10 people with disabilities in Nigeria live below the poverty line. The exclusion that PWD face in Nigeria has only been further exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic.<sup>76</sup>

Sexual orientation and gender identity are highly contentious issues in the Nigerian context, and LGBTQ+ individuals are not socially accepted in the country. The country's Same Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act formally criminalizes same sex marriage, however, the scope of the Act is much wider than marriage or civil union. It also prohibits any gatherings, organizations or public displays that promote or normalize same sex relationships. Individuals convicted of such violations of the law can face 10 to 14 years imprisonment. While Nigeria's colonial-era criminal and penal codes already outlawed same sex acts, the Same Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act has effectively normalized and legitimized widespread discrimination and abuse against LGBTQ+ individuals. Following the passing of the Act in 2014, cases of violence against LGBTQ+ individuals dramatically increased, including mob attacks, and the law has become a tool used by some police officers and members of the public to legitimize multiple human rights violations perpetrated against LGBTQ+ people.<sup>77</sup> Such violations include torture, sexual violence, arbitrary detention, violations of due process rights, and extortion. UN officials expressed concerns over vague

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<sup>70</sup> [Nigeria: A history of conflicts](#); The New Humanitarian, 2003.

<sup>71</sup> [Poverty in Nigeria: Understanding and Bridging the Divide between North and South](#); Center for Global Development, 2018.

<sup>72</sup> [Demographic Health Survey](#); National Population Commission, 2018.

<sup>73</sup> [Nigeria Passes Disability Rights Law](#); Human Rights Watch, 2018.

<sup>74</sup> [Ibid.](#)

<sup>75</sup> [Nigeria Situational Analysis](#); Institute for Development Studies, June 2020.

<sup>76</sup> [Social inclusion of persons with disabilities in Nigeria: Challenges and opportunities](#); World Bank Blog, 2020.

<sup>77</sup> ["Tell Me Where I Can Be Safe": The Impact of Nigeria's Same Sex Marriage \(Prohibition\) Act](#); Human Rights Watch, 2016.

language used in the Act, its broad scope, and the severity of punishments. According to Human Rights Watch, as of 2016 no evidence had yet been reported of an individual being prosecuted or sentenced under the Act. Despite this, LGBTQ+ individuals have become increasingly vulnerable to hate crimes based on their sexual orientation and/or gender identity. One example took place in February 2014, when 14 people in Abuja were forcibly dragged from their homes and beaten by 50 armed men because they were thought to belong to the LGBTQ+ community. In turn, many members of the LGBTQ+ community have consciously altered their self-expression and how they present themselves in public to avoid acts of violence and/or imprisonment.<sup>78</sup>

In terms of youth and inclusion, Nigeria has a significant youth bulge within its population, with young people comprising 33 percent of the country's population.<sup>79</sup> In total, over 65 million Nigerians are youth ages 10 to 24, causing Nigeria to have one of the largest populations of young people in the world.<sup>80</sup> A range of factors exacerbate the vulnerabilities and exclusion that Nigerian youth encounter today. Access to quality education and training, poverty, information and communication technology (ICT), and health care have a significant impact on young people's ability to transition effectively into the workforce and contribute to wider society. These issues are heightened amongst youth in rural areas who have less access to education and where the educational quality is also poorer compared to urban centres.<sup>81</sup> It's important to note that youth are not a homogeneous group; girls and young women face unique barriers compared to boys and young men, which need to be factored into any efforts meant to engage and support young people. Gender inequalities amongst youth in terms of education and ICT access create additional challenges for young people, and poverty, hunger and healthcare issues continue to exacerbate the overall situation. For instance, when parents of low-income households cannot afford to send all of their children to school, girls tend to be the first to be taken out of school.<sup>82</sup> Nigeria's significant human and financial resources have not translated into meaningful and dignified jobs for youth. In 2020, the youth unemployment rate (amongst youth ages 15-34) was 35 percent, while an additional 27 percent of youth were considered underemployed. Efforts have been made to strengthen youth employment through interventions targeting skills training, entrepreneurship promotion, employment services, research, and data collection. A primary focus of these interventions has been on women and low-income youth; however, other vulnerable groups including youth with disabilities or those who have dropped out of school have often been overlooked or left behind.<sup>83</sup>

## Key GESI Gaps and Barriers in Research and Innovation

Across Nigeria's R&I ecosystem, a range of gaps and barriers persist when it comes to the equitable participation of women, youth and other marginalized groups. Available research and evidence in this area has been further supplemented by in-depth interviews with a diverse range of key stakeholders within Nigeria's R&I ecosystem.

In Nigeria, women face numerous barriers in terms of their ability to access, participate in and benefit from R&I ecosystems on par with men and others in positions of social privilege. Stakeholders in the Nigeria context report a diverse range of gaps and barriers in this regard, including significant gender pay gaps, gender-based barriers to internal promotion and career progression, workplace discrimination, gender-based violence and significant security concerns, sexual harassment and exploitation, and the considerable burden of unpaid care work that reduces the amount of time and energy women have available to invest in and grow their careers. In addition, low levels of knowledge and capacity related to gender equality and social inclusion mean that many actors and institutions are neither aware of, nor intentionally focusing on, addressing these gaps and barriers within their organizations or approaches to

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> [Youths, Innovation, and a Pandemic](#); World Bank Blog, 2021.

<sup>80</sup> [Delivering connectivity, skills, and job opportunities to 20 million young Nigerians by 2030](#); UNICEF, 2022.

<sup>81</sup> [National Youth Policy \(2019-2023\)](#); Federal Ministry of Youth and Sports Development, 2019.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> [Nigerian youth employment action plan](#); Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2021.

their work. In fact, stakeholders in Nigeria report a high degree of tokenism when it comes to gender equality and women's inclusion, both within R&I ecosystems as well as other industries and sectors.<sup>84</sup>

Patriarchal gender norms are at the root of women's and girls' exclusion from many areas of life, including research and innovation, and from a very young age. Stakeholders report that that deeply entrenched roles, stereotypes and expectations related to gender play a powerful role in shaping girls' and women's access to education, free time, sense of self confidence, independence and decision making power, barriers which start in the home from childhood and manifest themselves continually across all spheres of girls' and women's lives.<sup>85</sup> From childhood, stakeholders report that boys in Nigeria are typically seen as 'kings' and future leaders and decision makers, while girls are relegated to the home and expected to prioritize childcare and domestic work above all else. In the school setting at the primary and secondary level, female students are also expected to clean and sweep classrooms and school grounds, while male students are given ample time to spend on studying and socializing, activities that help to build a strong social and economic foundation for them in the future. In turn, R&I ecosystems in Nigeria further reflect these embedded inequalities and the discriminatory attitudes and behaviours that drive them, as individuals, teams and leaders in these ecosystems have also been raised in the same patriarchal culture that normalizes various expressions of gender discrimination, inequality and violence in daily life.<sup>86</sup>

At the level of primary and secondary education, boys' enrolment remains higher than girls, and stakeholders in R&I report that education is still prioritized for boys, while girls are encouraged to prioritize becoming wives and mothers. Primary school enrolment is at 86.4 percent for girls compared with 88.4 percent for boys, while enrolment at secondary level is at 42.4 percent for girls compared to 44.5 percent for boys; overall, secondary school enrolment remains rather low for both boys and girls, presenting additional long-term development challenges for the country.<sup>87</sup> Stakeholders in R&I report that gender norms related to girls' and women's value and roles directly affect their ability to access education, and in turn, to become part of broader R&I ecosystems; in particular, girls in the northern part of the country are often married around the age of 13 and taken out of school to become wives, resulting in a profound level of social, economic and political exclusion for them.<sup>88</sup>

At tertiary level, men continue to outnumber women, with 11.9 percent enrolment for men compared to 8.3 percent for women, though more recent data on enrolment rates at tertiary institutions is difficult to access.<sup>89</sup> In a statement from 2020, the National Universities Commission indicated that only 1 percent of Nigeria's population are enrolled in tertiary education, with poor quality of education cited as a major driver of low enrollment rates.<sup>90</sup> Men continue to outnumber women to a significant degree in STEM fields in Nigeria, with the number of women enrolled in science and engineering studies at tertiary level diminishing significantly at increasingly higher levels of education, considering both undergraduate and graduate levels.<sup>91</sup> In addition, female staff and professors in science and engineering are very few compared to men, a gap that is even more pronounced in the field of engineering. Studies examining gender disparities in Nigerian universities over multi-year periods found that of 203 staff and professors in the sciences across two state universities, just 49 were women as of 2013, a minor improvement from just 33 women in 2005; meanwhile, of 143 staff and professors in engineering studies, only 9 of these were women as of 2013, a nominal increase from just 2 women in 2005.<sup>92</sup> Drivers of these significant gender gaps include the lack of female role models, discriminatory gender stereotypes against women in STEM, and less family-friendly flexibility in STEM fields. Of all STEM graduates in the country, reportedly

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<sup>84</sup> Stakeholder interviews, Nigeria; April 2022.

<sup>85</sup> Stakeholder interviews, Nigeria; April 2022.

<sup>86</sup> Stakeholder interviews, Nigeria; April 2022.

<sup>87</sup> School enrollment, primary and secondary, female and male (% gross) – Nigeria; World Bank Databank, 2018.

<sup>88</sup> Stakeholder interviews, Nigeria; April 2022.

<sup>89</sup> School enrollment, tertiary, female and male (% gross) – Nigeria; World Bank Databank, 2011.

<sup>90</sup> [Nigeria university enrolment 'near crisis' with only 2 million students — NUC](#); Premium Times, January 2020.

<sup>91</sup> [Gender gap in career progression in STEM fields in two southwestern states of Nigeria](#); Ojokoh, B.A. et al., September 2018.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.



only 22 percent are women, as of 2018.<sup>93</sup> These gaps are particularly significant in terms of women's meaningful access to and participation in historically male-dominated fields like research and innovation.

In line with many other countries, stakeholders in Nigeria report that career progression in research spaces is greatly hindered by gender bias and norms around women as the primary caregivers within households. In particular, women in Nigeria's research sector report that UCW is one of the most critical barriers for women to be able to build their careers to the same degree and at the same pace as their male counterparts.<sup>94</sup> The need to continuously publish one's research in order to build credibility in the sector as well as to secure academic promotion and higher pay is a primary and distinctly gendered barrier for women; sexist expectations and demands on women's time related to UCW, particularly for those who are mothers, greatly limit their ability to devote the considerable time required for career advancement within the research sector. This has the knock-on effect of much slower or even stalled career growth for women in research, compared with their male colleagues. Stakeholders report that while male colleagues may even recognize the unique barriers women face in this regard, they are also reluctant to work together to co-author and publish research with women who are mothers, as they often assume that the woman will not contribute her fair share of time and effort.<sup>95</sup> Being a mother, particularly for those with more than 1-2 children, is seen as a significant hindrance for career growth in research in Nigeria; stakeholders report that bosses as well as colleagues have openly advised or instructed women to limit the number of children they have in order to be able to achieve career growth and credibility amongst their male colleagues, and female researchers with children are often the target of disparaging jokes and comments related to having 'too many children'. Some stakeholders also report that certain institutions in Nigeria, particularly in the financial sector, have a reputation for forcing women who get pregnant to resign behind closed doors, as they cannot legally fire them outright; women with children are often stereotypically perceived to be less productive and to take more time off than men or women who are not mothers, and firms reportedly do not want to 'compromise' profit and productivity when women staff become mothers.<sup>96</sup> Similar to many other country contexts, UCW was repeatedly cited by multiple stakeholders as a major barrier for women across both R&I.<sup>97</sup>

Sexism and discriminatory behaviour in the work environment is another barrier that women face in R&I spaces in Nigeria. Stakeholders report that being taken seriously as a woman in male-dominated fields such as economics, technology or innovation is extremely difficult.<sup>98</sup> Technology and innovation are considered the domain of men, and from a young age, girls are taught that such sectors and fields of study are "too hard" for them and should be left to men and boys.<sup>99</sup> While women can enter into business, they are expected to stick to more mainstream sectors that are 'appropriate' for their gender role, and entrepreneurship among women is particularly popular because it tends to allow women more flexibility in terms of their work hours and location, in order to be able to manage UCW alongside their business.<sup>100</sup> However, the time and energy diverted away from business growth and instead prioritized for UCW in the home often works against them and results in slow or stagnant growth rates for women entrepreneurs. Women in innovation are also consistently second-guessed and questioned about whether or not they have the drive or ambition that men have – yet when women are particularly passionate and visibly driven, they are criticized for being 'too masculine' or not focusing enough on their families. Stakeholders in Nigeria's innovation sector report that the few efforts being put forth to engage women more effectively and improve gender equality in the R&I ecosystem are still too superficial in their approach and do not effectively address the foundational issues that drive women's exclusion and the barriers, discrimination and risk of violence they must grapple with on a daily basis.<sup>101</sup> Compounding this problem is the fact that if women in R&I are open advocates themselves for greater gender equality and increasing women's

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<sup>93</sup> [Only 22% of STEM graduates are women – Dr. Joe Abah](#); Ajao, G., Tech Dot Africa, November 2018.

<sup>94</sup> Stakeholder interviews, Nigeria; April 2022.

<sup>95</sup> Stakeholder interviews, Nigeria; April 2022.

<sup>96</sup> Stakeholder interviews, Nigeria; April 2022.

<sup>97</sup> Stakeholder interviews, Nigeria; April 2022.

<sup>98</sup> Stakeholder interviews, Nigeria; April 2022.

<sup>99</sup> Stakeholder interviews, Nigeria; April 2022.

<sup>100</sup> Stakeholder interviews, Nigeria; April 2022.

<sup>101</sup> Stakeholder interviews, Nigeria; April 2022.



participation, they are often viewed negatively by their male colleagues for not keeping in line with discriminatory expectations that women should be “submissive and obey their husbands” first and foremost. Stakeholders also report that women professors are not taken as seriously as male professors in terms of their credibility or expertise, and that male colleagues have more time than women to ‘play the politics’ of academia within universities, which helps them to progress in their careers more quickly and favourably. As of 2019, roughly 33.5 percent of all PhD students in Nigeria are women, compared with 66.5 percent for men, and male professors outnumber female professors to a significant degree, with women comprising just 15 percent of all university professors in Nigeria.<sup>102</sup>

GBV and sexual exploitation is widespread both within companies and institutions in Nigeria as well as within the country’s universities, with young women dropping out of school entirely due to pressure from male professors to exchange sex for good grades, or experiencing sexual violence from male peers; the rampant problem of sexual abuse and exploitation in Nigeria’s universities has previously been investigated by various organizations and documented in detail by media outlets such as the BBC.<sup>103</sup> The majority of perpetrators on university campuses tend to be ‘cultists’ (young men belonging to different cult groups), followed by male students and lecturers. Campus ‘cultism’ driving high rates of violent behaviour at tertiary institutions has become an increasingly worrisome phenomenon in Nigeria, with its origins dating back to the early 1950s, but a more recent history of violence and gang rivalry now on the rise between cults, a situation that was reportedly not the original intention of founding campus groups.<sup>104</sup> Despite awareness of the serious scope and scale of the problem of sexual violence and exploitation on school campus, attitudes and beliefs about the drivers of the problem continue to promote harmful gender norms that encourage victim blaming (for example, attitudes that female students should dress more conservatively in order to prevent sexual violence) and perpetuate common myths about the ‘uncontrollable sexual urges’ of men.<sup>105</sup>

Gender gaps and barriers in science, technology and innovation continue to persist in the Nigerian context, including within the private sector as well as across policy and government interventions. Nigeria’s National Science, Technology and Innovation Policy acknowledges gender gaps across the sector, and Section 3.8 of the Policy outlines a brief list of key objectives and strategies related to increasing women’s participation in STI, though these are not clearly articulated in practical terms of how they will be achieved beyond high-level, descriptive language.<sup>106</sup> Any other considerations or objectives related to gender equality or mainstreaming are absent throughout the rest of the policy. Nigeria’s booming information and communications (ICT) sector continues to be male-dominated, and recent studies indicate that gender inequality as well as GBV are prevalent in the sector.<sup>107</sup> The sector’s contribution to GDP in Nigeria reached more than 17 percent in the second quarter of 2020, and the country has seen explosive growth in ICT companies in recent years, with valuations of relatively young start-ups running into the hundreds of millions of dollars.<sup>108</sup> However, gender inequality in the sector is high, and new research shines a light on the experiences of women in these spaces.

Women in Nigeria’s ICT sector emphasize that employers often take advantage of women in the industry by paying them less than their male counterparts; such observations are not limited to the ICT industry by any means, and have been reported across various industries in Nigeria in recent years; stakeholder interviews further support these findings.<sup>109</sup> Stakeholders report that deeply entrenched norms and

<sup>102</sup> [Number of Ph.D. students at universities in Nigeria as of 2019, by ownership and gender](#); Statista, 2022. [Number of university professors in Nigeria as of 2019, by gender](#); Statista, 2022.

<sup>103</sup> [Rape and Sexual Abuse in Tertiary Institutions in Nigeria](#); Africa Polling Institute, December 2019. [Gender-based violence in a male-dominated industry: Identifying and responding to challenges in Nigeria’s Information and Communications Technology sector](#); Makinde, O. et al., ALIGN Briefing Note, June 2021.

<sup>104</sup> [Nigeria’s campus cults: Buccaneers, Black Axe and other feared groups](#); Oyibo, H., BBC, June 2020. [Cultism And Violent Behaviours in Tertiary Institutions in Nigeria](#); Gboyega, I., 2005.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> [National Science, Technology and Innovation \(STI\) Policy](#); Federal Ministry of Science and Technology, 2012.

<sup>107</sup> [Gender-based violence in a male-dominated industry: Identifying and responding to challenges in Nigeria’s Information and Communications Technology sector](#); Makinde, O. et al., ALIGN Briefing Note, June 2021.

<sup>108</sup> [Gender-based violence in a male-dominated industry: Identifying and responding to challenges in Nigeria’s Information and Communications Technology sector](#); Makinde, O. et al., ALIGN Briefing Note, June 2021.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid. [Gender Equality in Nigeria’s Private Sector: A Gender Gap Assessment of the 30 Most Capitalized Companies Listed on the Nigerian Exchange](#); International Finance Corporation, September 2021. Stakeholder interviews, Nigeria; April 2022.

attitudes around men as breadwinners and women as homemakers in Nigerian culture mean that men tend to get paid more than women across the board, as employers believe or assume that married women will be (or should be) taken care of financially by their husbands, thus the need for women to make an adequate salary is much less of a concern compared with men. In addition, women don't feel as confident to negotiate for what they deserve; they consistently second-guess themselves and often undercharge for their work or accept low salaries.<sup>110</sup> In addition to the gender pay gap, women in Nigeria's innovation spaces tend to struggle with marketing their skills, underestimating their own qualifications and negotiating effectively, a barrier that is driven by gender norms and expectations that women should be submissive and compliant in order to be seen as socially valuable and accepted. Targeted studies on such barriers further reveal that women often resort to covert tactics in order to be taken seriously by partners and investors; some female innovators in Nigeria report having male associates or companions act as the 'front man' to take the lead, while they take a backseat when pitching their ideas to others. In the words of one female CEO from Abuja, *"you are dead on arrival, the moment you get in front of investors and they see that you are a woman and it's your idea and you are driving it."*<sup>111</sup> Women also face barriers when it comes to moving ahead in their careers and achieving leadership roles, as male managers and executives pose additional obstacles for them and tend to direct female staff into roles that male bosses see fit for them to occupy. Indeed, across Nigeria's private sector, women comprise just 17 percent of Board Chairs, 23 percent of Board Members, 20 percent of all executives, and 27 percent of all senior management.<sup>112</sup> Stakeholders further report that even for renting space for personal or business purposes, women who are unmarried, single mothers or widows are actively discriminated against by landlords; some women even pretend to be married or bring along male companions in order to be considered as credible and respectable potential tenants.<sup>113</sup>

Beyond the ICT sector, sexual harassment and violence in the workplace, including emotional and psychological violence, is prevalent within Nigeria's broader innovation spaces, across both the public and private sector. Studies find that while stringent policies are often in place in public offices, preventative steps are rarely enforced and mechanisms for reporting are rarely taken up, for fear of retaliation or termination; meanwhile, women report that private sector companies tend to have more freedom to take more immediate action against abusers in the workplace, including outright dismissal, though this is not often the case.<sup>114</sup> Stakeholders in Nigeria report the widespread normalization of violence against women in all areas of life, including the workplace, and a general culture of impunity for abusers.<sup>115</sup> The gender norms that both exclude women from the innovation sector and normalize GBV within it include the beliefs that men are superior to and more intelligent than women, that women should not take on 'physically taxing' ICT jobs, that older employees should automatically command respect (particularly from younger women), and the dominant perception of women as domestic homemakers. In addition, technology-facilitated violence and abuse (TFVA) has been reported to occur in online groups used for work and can result in emotional and psychological violence and a sense that women are less worthy among colleagues. Women in Nigeria's innovation spaces also report that leaders of firms and organizations are often blind to the extent of the problem of women's safety and men's violence against them, and tend to consider the approach of "well, no one is actively excluded" as being sufficient for ensuring inclusion, rather than taking proactive steps to understand women's unique needs and circumstances and intentionally putting measures in place to address them so that women feel safe and comfortable enough to participate in R&I spaces on equal footing with their male counterparts.<sup>116</sup> Social norms that encourage women to be quiet and subservient to men, and which encourage men to be outgoing and boisterous often with little social accountability for their behaviours, have a profound influence on the safety, progression and possible achievements of women in Nigeria's innovation spaces.

<sup>110</sup> Stakeholder interviews, Nigeria; April 2022.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> [Gender Equality in Nigeria's Private Sector: A Gender Gap Assessment of the 30 Most Capitalized Companies Listed on the Nigerian Exchange](#); International Finance Corporation, September 2021.

<sup>113</sup> Stakeholder interviews, Nigeria; April 2022.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Stakeholder interviews, Nigeria; April 2022.

<sup>116</sup> Stakeholder interviews, Nigeria; April 2022.

Access to finance and other critical resources remains one of the biggest barriers for women entrepreneurs who want to start and grow a business in Nigeria.<sup>117</sup> Just 27 percent of women have a bank account, compared to 51 percent of men, and 25 percent of women have Internet access compared to 41 percent of men. Women-owned MSMEs in Nigeria face a \$21 billion credit gap. While some institutions are creating financial products to help address the specific needs of women clients, progress in this regard remains slow.<sup>118</sup> Stakeholders report that access to finance for women innovators and entrepreneurs is a major barrier in the Nigerian context, an issue that is slowly being addressed as more microfinance institutions begin to focus programming on women, and savings groups are also becoming more popular for entrepreneurs, including those that are concentrated in specific sectors of business.<sup>119</sup>

In terms of social inclusion beyond gender, targeted and supportive efforts are extremely limited within Nigeria's R&I ecosystem, not unlike other countries on the continent. Stakeholders report that efforts to consider, engage or include PWD, LGBTQ+ communities or poor, rural communities remain limited. Among these commonly excluded groups, youth as a demographic seem to fare slightly better overall in terms of inclusion in R&I, though barriers for youth in the Nigerian context remain significant.

PWD in Nigeria experience widespread stigma and discrimination in all areas of life. Stakeholders report that PWD are often seen as "incomplete" and individuals to be pitied by society.<sup>120</sup> The physical barriers and lack of accessibility that PWD experience on a daily basis, combined with persistent social stigma and exclusion, mean that PWD consistently struggle to claim their rights and build the lives they want and deserve. In most cases, PWD are not considered 'full human beings', and families tend to hide away any children with disabilities, limiting their access to education and social development experiences.<sup>121</sup> Nigeria's education system is generally not disability inclusive, and stakeholders in this space report that parents and other caregivers often have to shoulder the burden of educating their children by directly assisting them at school or paying for home tutors, a luxury that many families cannot easily afford. The participation rate in education for children with disabilities is just 12 percent, compared with 57 percent for those without disabilities.<sup>122</sup> In addition, the media in Nigeria still address disability as a 'charity' issue rather than a public policy concern, which further perpetuates discrimination and misinformation about PWD.<sup>123</sup>

The strategic inclusion of PWD in the R&I sector is not widespread, and the vast majority of physical and communication spaces in R&I are also not disability-friendly or inclusive. Stakeholders report that disability is often only addressed when select organizations or initiatives are focused solely on PWD as a target demographic for a specific purpose; conversely, supporting PWD to equally access and participate in wider social, economic and political spaces and processes is much rarer. Further, PWD are often not seen as 'good enough' to be active players in R&I systems, and their lack of access to quality education is a key driver of their exclusion from research, entrepreneurship and innovation.<sup>124</sup> Religious and cultural beliefs perpetuating the idea that there is 'something wrong' with PWD also play a major role in maintaining stigma and exclusion.<sup>125</sup> In addition, girls and women with disabilities face even greater barriers, compounded by gender bias and discriminatory beliefs and norms; stakeholders report that boys and men with disabilities have an easier time accessing education, jobs and other life opportunities compared to girls and women with disabilities, as men and boys are often still able to capitalize on male privilege and the belief that men and boys should become social leaders and breadwinners. In particular, girls and women with disabilities have even less social value because communities perceive them as fundamentally incapable of effectively fulfilling their most important social role – becoming good wives

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<sup>117</sup> [Gender Equality in Nigeria's Private Sector: A Gender Gap Assessment of the 30 Most Capitalized Companies Listed on the Nigerian Exchange](#); International Finance Corporation, September 2021.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Stakeholder interviews, Nigeria; April 2022.

<sup>120</sup> Stakeholder interviews, Nigeria; April 2022.

<sup>121</sup> Stakeholder interviews, Nigeria; April 2022.

<sup>122</sup> [Overview of social exclusion in Nigeria](#); Birchall, J., Knowledge, Evidence and Learning for Development (K4D), November 2019.

<sup>123</sup> [Nigeria Situational Analysis – Disability Inclusive Development](#); Institute of Development Studies, June 2020. Stakeholder interviews, Nigeria; April 2022.

<sup>124</sup> Stakeholder interviews, Nigeria; April 2022.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

and mothers. Stakeholders report that men with disabilities are better supported by their communities and often able to marry and even have children, while women with disabilities are considered in many ways to be socially worthless and struggle to ever marry or build a family.<sup>126</sup> In a cultural context that prizes marriage and children, this is a significant form of social exclusion faced by women and girls with disabilities. Women with disabilities are also more likely to be unemployed than men.<sup>127</sup> Low levels of literacy play a role in excluding PWD from participating in research, entrepreneurship and innovation; recent studies indicate that only 36 percent of children and young people with disabilities in Nigeria are literate.<sup>128</sup> Additional barriers to entrepreneurship for PWD in Nigeria include the lack of specially trained personnel, the absence of a disability-inclusive curriculum that addresses entrepreneurship, lack of access to finance and difficulty raising capital, as well as distinct disadvantages in competing with non-disabled entrepreneurs.<sup>129</sup> Facing high poverty rates and limited access to disability-inclusive education, employment opportunities and disability-friendly healthcare, PWD face tremendous barriers in terms of their meaningful inclusion in R&I ecosystems.

Rural communities also face significant barriers when it comes to their inclusion in R&I spaces, including low quality / lack of education, lack of access to key resources and opportunities and a general lack of reliable infrastructure such as electricity, water and internet access. Gender dimensions related to rural exclusion are also significant; 51 percent of rural women in Nigeria have no education compared to just 16 percent of urban women.<sup>130</sup> More children are out of school in the north and in rural areas of the country compared with urban areas, and stakeholders report that rural communities are some of the most left behind in Nigeria when it comes to R&I.<sup>131</sup> Stakeholders report that high levels of government corruption also make it difficult for rural communities to hold government accountable for its commitments to rural development and inclusion; many rural communities don't know how or when to engage with government actors.<sup>132</sup> Nigeria's three-tiered system of government (local, state and federal) means that state government passes down resources to the local government, provided by the federal government - but due to a high prevalence of corruption among government officials, much of these resources never reach the local government or local communities. Assessments of Nigeria's rural development initiatives over the years reveal a significant gap between policy and practice, with most rural communities left out of the conversation in terms of their participation in planning and implementation, and many programmes never even being launched due to widespread corruption and embezzlement of state funds.<sup>133</sup> Despite these issues, Nigeria's National Directorate of Employment has a focus on rural employment promotion, special public works, small-scale enterprise development and vocational skills development, while youth entrepreneurship in the rural economy is also a focus of the Nigerian Youth Employment Action Plan (NIYEAP) 2021-2024.<sup>134</sup> However, stakeholders report that even when rural communities are targeted for inclusion in innovation and entrepreneurship, the broader systemic barriers they face are rarely factored into the equation or meaningfully addressed, in particular the significant problem of poor infrastructure and lack of access to electricity, technology and high speed internet, as well as low levels of digital literacy, that are a consistent driver of exclusion for Nigeria's rural communities.<sup>135</sup>

Youth as a group overall appear to face somewhat less exclusion from Nigeria's R&I ecosystem compared to other marginalized groups, such as PWD or the LGBTQ+ community. A range of different government programmes as well as private initiatives have been put in place to help target and foster youth entrepreneurship and innovation. In 2007, the Nigerian University Commission (NUC) issued a national directive that made it mandatory for all Nigerian universities to provide entrepreneurship education (EE)

<sup>126</sup> Stakeholder interviews, Nigeria; April 2022.

<sup>127</sup> [Overview of social exclusion in Nigeria](#); Birchall, J., Knowledge, Evidence and Learning for Development (K4D), November 2019.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> [Entrepreneurship Education for Persons with Disabilities in Nigeria](#); Omede, A. et al., 2016.

<sup>130</sup> [Overview of social exclusion in Nigeria](#); Birchall, J., Knowledge, Evidence and Learning for Development (K4D), November 2019.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid. Stakeholder interviews, Nigeria; April 2022.

<sup>132</sup> Stakeholder interviews, Nigeria; April 2022.

<sup>133</sup> An Appraisal of Nigeria's Rural Development Programmes and Policies: Lessons Learnt and the way forward; Ahmed, A.O. et al., March 202.

<sup>134</sup> [Nigerian Youth Employment Action Plan \(NIYEAP\) 2021-2024](#); Federal Ministry of Youth and Sports Development, 2021.

<sup>135</sup> Stakeholder interviews, Nigeria; April 2022.



for undergraduate students, starting from the 2007/2008 academic year.<sup>136</sup> The programme has four key objectives: the empowerment of students, employment creation, diversification in business and building individual confidence. Stakeholders close to the programme report that this initiative was put in place largely due to the fact that youth unemployment rates remain alarmingly high and it is now widely acknowledged in the country that the government is unable to provide adequate growth or jobs to absorb new graduates, thus entrepreneurship is seen as critical for the long-term development of the nation.<sup>137</sup> However, evaluations of the success of the programme since its launch reveal that implementation has been patchy, and some universities simply design just a few entrepreneurial courses, taught by professors who have no practical experience with entrepreneurship; meanwhile, students enroll in EE courses mostly as a prerequisite for graduation.<sup>138</sup> In addition, while some students may develop an entrepreneurial spirit and skills during their time at university, they face other critical barriers in being able to start and grow a business, in particular a lack of start-up capital and access to finance.<sup>139</sup>

Nigeria's government has also developed more recent national policies and strategies to address youth unemployment and related issues, including the country's targeted action plan for youth employment (NIYEAP) as well as the National Youth Policy (NYP) for 2019-2023. The first core pillar of the NYP focuses on building a productive workforce and the sustainable economic engagement of youth, with the support of youth entrepreneurs and innovators and improvements in digital literacy as primary goals within this pillar.<sup>140</sup> Activities to achieve these goals include expanding short-term entrepreneurship capacity development initiatives to assist 10,000 emerging and practicing youth entrepreneurs in each state and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), as well as establishing and/or strengthening incubation centres (at least one per state and the FCT) and providing support to youth innovators to secure rights over their properties and/or inventions through patents and trademark registration.<sup>141</sup> Youth engagement in the ICT sector as a whole also receives special emphasis within the policy. The NIYEAP is meant to compliment the NYP, and also focuses on entrepreneurial growth, the digital economy, and technology and innovation hubs for youth entrepreneurship and economic development.<sup>142</sup> The NIYEAP aims to contribute to the achievement of the ambitious job creation target set within the NYP, which is to create 3.7 million jobs annually from 2019 to 2023.<sup>143</sup>

In addition to government initiatives, private sector associations and organizations have also been established to connect and support youth entrepreneurs in Nigeria. The Young Entrepreneurs of Nigeria (YEN), also known as the Association of Youth Entrepreneurs of Nigeria, is a non-profit private sector led organization that promotes youth entrepreneurship development and Nigeria's economic growth.<sup>144</sup> YEN was founded as an umbrella body and voice for young Nigerian entrepreneurs, and seeks to empower youth entrepreneurs with access to finance, capacity building support, networking opportunities and business tools, while championing the cause of young entrepreneurs at local, regional and national levels to help curb youth unemployment in Nigeria and contribute to national productivity. Membership of the organization is open to all young Nigerian entrepreneurs, including aspiring entrepreneurs, from the ages of 18 to 45 years old. Despite these various interventions across both the public and private sector, youth unemployment and underemployment remain high, at 63 percent nationally as of 2020.<sup>145</sup> Entrepreneurialism itself has also been questioned as a 'cure-all' solution to the problem of Nigeria's high youth unemployment rates, as it does not sufficiently address larger structural issues and youth aspirations; there remains what is sometimes referred to as an "imagination gap" between the employment futures that policy makers imagine for young people, and those that young people imagine

<sup>136</sup> [Entrepreneurship Education in Nigerian Tertiary Institutions: A Remedy to Graduates Unemployment](#); Onuma, N., May 2016.

<sup>137</sup> Stakeholder interviews, Nigeria; April 2022.

<sup>138</sup> [Entrepreneurship Education in Nigerian Tertiary Institutions: A Remedy to Graduates Unemployment](#); Onuma, N., May 2016.

<sup>139</sup> Stakeholder interviews, Nigeria; April 2022.

<sup>140</sup> [National Youth Policy](#); Federal Ministry of Youth and Sports Development, 2019.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> [Nigerian Youth Employment Action Plan \(NIYEAP\) 2021-2024](#); Federal Ministry of Youth and Sports Development, 2021.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

<sup>144</sup> [About Us](#); Young Entrepreneurs of Nigeria (YEN), 2022.

<sup>145</sup> [Nigerian Youth Employment Action Plan \(NIYEAP\) 2021-2024](#); Federal Ministry of Youth and Sports Development, 2021.



for themselves.<sup>146</sup> Young people in Nigeria are also beginning to speak out about ‘toxic’ work environments where they are expected to work exceedingly long hours for very little pay and endure harsh and belittling behaviour and treatment from employers, including in start-ups and small businesses. In recent months, investigative journalists and online Twitter campaigns in Nigeria have put a direct spotlight on youth disenchantment with harsh working conditions, workplace corruption and little hope for upward mobility, though most young people are still apprehensive about speaking out about such situations for fear of facing backlash or losing their jobs altogether.<sup>147</sup>

In addition to these issues, young women innovators and entrepreneurs in Nigeria face unique gender barriers to their participation in innovation and entrepreneurship, including limited free time to engage in R&I activities due to the significant burden of UCW (including childcare and motherhood), significant differentials in their levels of education and skills compared with young men, and discriminatory gender norms that result in poorer outcomes for women, including gendered job segregation, mobility constraints, and safety and violence concerns, both in and around the workplace.<sup>148</sup> In addition, young men and young women tend to have unequal access to assets that are critical for entrepreneurial growth and success, including information, financial services, land, and other productive assets, and young women tend to face greater structural barriers than young men, including discriminatory gender norms related to inheritance and gender bias in the provision of financial and other services. When considering youth as a critical driver of economic growth, the situation in Nigeria remains challenging - 31 percent of young people aged between 15 and 24 are Not in Employment, Education and Training (NEET) as of 2019, and the NEET rate is considerably higher among young women (37 percent) compared with young men (26 percent).<sup>149</sup> This substantial gender gap has remained consistent over the past 10 years, highlighting the need to address gender barriers and boost labour market participation among young women. In addition, lower levels of literacy among young women present an additional barrier to their participation in R&I ecosystems; the literacy rate of young people in Nigeria aged 15 to 24 is roughly 75 percent, and within this group literacy is significantly lower among young women (68 percent) than among young men (82 percent).<sup>150</sup>

In light of these gender gaps and barriers, some organizations and institutions have invested in supporting girls and young women in pursuing innovation and entrepreneurship, including those in the STEM fields. These include initiatives like the Future Females Business School Tech Programme and the Girls in Tech Bootcamp Lagos program, as well as other small and large organizations and homegrown hubs like Andela, Wennovation Hub, Eko Innovation Centre and the High-Tech Centre for Nigerian Women and Youths. As one example, the Future Females Business School Tech Programme is an initiative of the UK-Nigeria Tech Hub, and the programme supports female Nigerian entrepreneurs working with technology to build their businesses and impact their communities.<sup>151</sup> Other interventions and organizations as noted above also target women and girls as innovators and entrepreneurs through different channels, focusing on ICT, digital literacy, STEM, technology, accelerator and incubation programs, networking and mentoring opportunities, and fast-tracking innovation and entrepreneurship growth across Nigeria.<sup>152</sup>

For those in the LGBTQ+ community, barriers to inclusion in R&I are likely the most severe among marginalized groups in Nigeria. Stigma, discrimination and violence against LGBTQ+ communities is brutal and widespread in the Nigerian context, and the ability of LGBTQ+ individuals to openly access, participate in and benefit from R&I spaces is almost non-existent, without individuals completely self-censoring their identities. Nigeria’s Same Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act, passed in 2013, effectively prohibits any individual from participating in any gatherings, organizations or public displays of same sex

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<sup>146</sup> [#ToxicWorkplaces: The Future of Youth Employment in Nigeria](#); Adeniyi-Ogunyankin, G., The Conversation, April 2022.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> [Gender and Youth Livelihoods Programming in Africa](#); MasterCard Foundation, January 2018.

<sup>149</sup> [Nigerian Youth Employment Action Plan \(NIYEAP\) 2021-2024](#); Federal Ministry of Youth and Sports Development, 2021.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

<sup>151</sup> [Business School](#); Future Females, 2022.

<sup>152</sup> [About Us](#); Andela, 2022. [About Wennovation](#); Wennovation, 2022. [Eko Innovation Centre partners with Africa Agility to train 10,000 girls in tech in Lagos](#); Techpoint.africa, June 2021. [About Us](#); High-Tech Centre for Nigerian Women and Youths, 2022.

relationships, as well as any activities that normalize same sex relationships or promote the human rights of LGBTQ+ community members. Negative social attitudes and beliefs related to any sexual orientation that differs from the mainstream heteronormative and patriarchal ideal mean that LGBTQ+ individuals often do not feel safe or accepted in any environment; individuals who are biologically intersex also face discrimination and erasure from society. Organizations advocating for LGBTQ+ rights are not legally allowed to register in Nigeria, and twelve northern regions of the country have recently adopted a form of Sharia Law which makes same-sex relations punishable by death, while also criminalizing gender expression which does not correspond with gender norms associated with the person's sex assigned at birth.<sup>153</sup> Stakeholders in this space report that some government officials will even refuse to sit at the same table as an LGBTQ+ person in a conference or meeting, referring to them as “criminals”.<sup>154</sup> In addition, multiple stakeholders shared that religion plays a major role in the exclusion of all marginalized groups; actors in these spaces report that religion fuels stigma and exclusion and keeps it going, even if other social norms or attitudes might make some progress. As a result of these numerous and severe social and legal barriers, LGBTQ+ individuals are not openly welcomed into R&I ecosystems in Nigeria and actors or organizations within R&I cannot easily or openly work to target, support or include LGBTQ+ communities without the potential of serious repercussions.

## Summary & Recommendations

Evidence from the Nigerian context illustrates that women and other marginalized groups face numerous barriers both within the broader social, economic and political landscape of the country, as well as within R&I ecosystems in particular. Such barriers significantly influence how these different social groups access, participate in and benefit from R&I processes and outcomes. Based on the findings of this assessment as well as suggestions and guidance provided directly by key stakeholders in Nigeria, the following recommendations have been developed to address key GESI gaps and barriers in the country's R&I ecosystem.

- **Baseline capacity building for firms and institutions to better mainstream GESI into their work:** It is crucial for individuals, teams and organizations to have a more robust grasp and nuanced understanding of GESI gaps and barriers and the drivers of exclusion, in order for them to be able to respond intentionally and effectively within their work. Teams should also have their knowledge built around how GESI barriers directly impact their work in R&I, and how GESI barriers manifest themselves in different ways within the R&I ecosystem across different levels and pillars. This applies to concerns of gender equality as well as the inclusion of key target groups such as PWD, where understanding and capacity is significantly lower among actors in the Nigerian R&I ecosystem. Stakeholders also emphasized the need for women, girls and other marginalized groups to be psychologically empowered and to have their own capacity built related to gender equality, norms and social inclusion, as well as their right to equally participate in and benefit from R&I spaces and systems.
- **Coaching top leadership within R&I:** Engaging and coaching key leaders, influencers and decision makers within the R&I ecosystem on GESI issues is a critical component for sustainable GESI transformation and inclusion. This enables top leadership to act as drivers of change and proactively foster enabling and inclusive environments within R&I spaces, including institutionalizing commitments to GESI awareness and mainstreaming through internal policies, strategies and practices within firms and other organizations. Stakeholders in the Nigerian context emphasized the need for ‘less talk, more action’ in terms of pushing power holders to act on the existing evidence base available related to the importance and value of GESI mainstreaming in R&I and development.

<sup>153</sup> [Nigeria: At A Glance](#); OutRight International, 2022.

<sup>154</sup> Stakeholder interviews, Nigeria; April 2022.

- **Financial incentives to support, hire and promote more women:** Offering financial incentives to businesses, organizations and other initiatives to support, hire and promote women can help to increase women's quantifiable representation in spaces where they are often left behind. However, such incentives should be coupled with qualitative requirements, going beyond women's representation in numbers only and supporting firms to invest in other efforts that address critical capacity gaps in GESI mainstreaming knowledge and practice among staff and leadership, as well as provide targeted skills and career development support for women.
- **Invest in promoting education for girls and women:** Nigerian stakeholders emphasized the need for ensuring women and girls are able to access quality education at all levels, as a foundational stepping stone for their meaningful participation in R&I ecosystems.
- **Convening events/spaces where different R&I actors can come together to normalize and mainstream GESI within the ecosystem:** Convening a diverse array of R&I actors as well as other key stakeholders in GESI offers a targeted and efficient way to foster collective knowledge and understanding around GESI issues and best practice approaches for GESI mainstreaming in the Nigerian context. Such convening could take the form of a member-led, participatory, collaborative Community of Practice for research and innovation actors from all backgrounds, an initiative that could help achieve goals across the different pillars of the ecosystem as well as have a cross-cutting *and* stand-alone focus on GESI. This approach helps to normalize and mainstream conversations about GESI issues and move away from the perception that GESI is a 'fringe' issue that only certain actors or groups need to care about or engage in. Convening also creates intentional space for different actors and organizations to network, learn from one another and strategize around priority issues to improve how GESI is addressed and mainstreamed across different levels and pillars of the ecosystem, including areas such as access to finance. Nigerian stakeholders also highlighted that convening could help bring together different marginalized groups in one place to find synergies amongst themselves and strategize around how to best mitigate and respond to GESI gaps and barriers in R&I.
- **Put into place robust monitoring and evaluation systems alongside a strong theory of change in order to measure real progress related to GESI in R&I:** Stakeholders in the Nigerian context report the need for effective monitoring frameworks alongside a practical theory of change to be able to assess where progress is being made and which approaches achieve the best results, as well as where change is slower and requires more targeted investment. Multiple stakeholders also emphasized the importance of donors setting detailed and progressive criteria related to GESI outcomes and mainstreaming to hold partners and implementers accountable for their commitment and performance in this regard.
- **Invest in participatory grant making:** Stakeholders in Nigeria highlighted the importance of directly engaging women and other marginalized groups in decision making process related to grant making and funding for R&I actors who are expected to prioritize and mainstream GESI in their work. As one example, this could take the form of a GESI advisory panel relevant to the country context to support the RISA programme in making decisions about project grants that are directly informed by the perspectives and lived experiences of disadvantaged groups that are often left out of the conversation.
- **Establish women-friendly workplaces that consider the responsibilities of childcare:** Individual firms and organizations can vastly improve how they support women who choose to be mothers. Stakeholders report missing out on valuable career development and learning opportunities due to the demands of childcare. Supporting women in this regard could look like investing in childcare services on site or offering subsidized childcare services to women employees who are mothers,

as well as offering private rooms for breastfeeding mothers to tend to their infants during breaks from work hours.

- **Mentoring and role models for women's career progression:** Putting in place mechanisms where women can engage with and learn from other women at different stages of their career growth provides support and solidarity for women pursuing careers in R&I, which are often male-dominated spaces. Such mentoring/role model engagement spaces could happen at a national or regional level, and/or within individual R&I institutions themselves. This approach could also be useful for connecting and supporting other excluded groups, such as adolescents/young people or people with disabilities.
- **Consult directly with women and marginalized groups to assess how best to respond to their needs and support their integration into R&I spaces:** Having intentional conversations with women and other excluded groups is key for ensuring that R&I actors and spaces are responding effectively to the unique needs and barriers that marginalized groups are facing, rather than assuming that they already know what different excluded groups will need. This is particularly important when it comes to the inclusion of youth in innovation, or people with disabilities. Participation is crucial for the process of inclusion to have impact and meaning, and excluded groups need to have a direct voice in the R&I ecosystems that are seeking to integrate and address GESI issues more proactively. In addition, intersectionality must be considered when assessing which groups are being targeted or are meant to benefit from certain projects, and how; women and marginalized groups are not homogenous and responses to the challenges of different groups whose disadvantages intersect, such as youth (age) with disabilities or girls (gender) with disabilities, need to be fit for purpose and informed by the target group.
- **Targeted GESI capacity building for male leaders and allies:** In often male-dominated and able-bodied R&I spaces, it can be extremely helpful to have well-informed and supportive male leaders and allies who can help to change the status quo around GESI and normalize the importance of directly addressing these issues in R&I work. While engaging men in such activities and dialogues is a useful approach, it is important to ensure that existing systems of privilege and power are not further exacerbated by spotlighting men's voices only, which means ensuring that men's voices and views do not become centered and prioritized in GESI conversations at the expense of the voices of women and other marginalized groups. Ensuring that male actors and leaders have a clear understanding of how to be effective allies without reproducing harmful hierarchies is critical for this approach to result in positive, transformative change.
- **Policy advocacy around GESI issues in the wider country context:** There is a distinct need to address the normative belief systems and institutional structures that drive gender inequality and social exclusion to begin with. In Nigeria, the rights of certain groups often remain unrealized, including the LGBTQ+ community as well as people with disabilities. R&I in Nigeria could benefit from high level advocacy around policy and legislation that directly affects the ability of excluded groups to fully claim their human rights and participate in all realms of life, including within R&I ecosystems. Stakeholders in Nigeria also emphasized the need for women's rights and freedoms to be better addressed and secured within the country's various policies and legislation.