

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY 2012

CEGIST Programme Report 1

Summary

Every year on 8 March, the world celebrates International Women's Day (IWD) as a way of recognising and applauding women's achievements as well as for observing and highlighting gender inequalities and issues. Thousands of events occur not just on this day but throughout March to mark the economic, political and social achievements of women. The United Nations (UN) anchors this programme by providing a general theme but women organisations may choose different themes that reflect local gender issues. The Centre for Entrepreneurship and Gender Issues in Science and Technology (CEGIST) decided to adopt the theme: "**Connecting Girls, Inspiring Futures**" in view of the fact that our female students need attention with respect to protecting themselves from sexual assault in their male-dominated environment. It has been recognized that sexual assault is the most unreported crime on University campuses affecting an upward of 12% of females. In a University of Science and Technology such as FUTA where male students dominate, the figures are unimaginable. We therefore sought to address this issue by discussing strategies for prevention of sexual assault on our campus during the Women's Day seminar tagged: "**Stand Out, Stand Right**". The seminar was held in collaboration with the Organization for Women in Science for the Developing World (OWSDW), FUTA Chapter. Over 500 persons including staff and students of FUTA and neighboring institutions were in attendance. Government institutions including Ondo State Ministries of Environment, Agriculture and Community Development were fully represented and gave moral, material and financial support. The Chairperson for the occasion was Mrs. Olukemi Mimiko, wife of the Governor, Ondo State whose entourage comprised wives of legislators, wives of Commissioners, female Commissioners and Permanent Secretaries among others. The guest speaker was Hon. Justice Yemi Akintan-Osadebay who gave a lucid presentation on definitions of rape, laws concerning rape, handling rape cases and practical rape prevention strategies. This report presents highlights of the event.

Background

A seminar for female (undergraduate and postgraduate) students in commemoration of the **2012 International Women's Day** was held at the **Hilltop Auditorium, Federal University of Technology, Akure (FUTA)** on **March 8, 2012** from **10 am to 2 pm**.

Many organizations and individuals work tirelessly to support gender equality through a multitude of initiatives, causes and actions. Every year on 8 March, the world celebrates International Women's Day (IWD) as a way of recognising and applauding women's achievements as well as for observing and highlighting gender inequalities and issues. Thousands of events occur not just on this day but throughout March to mark the economic, political and social achievements of women. The United Nations (UN) anchors this programme by providing a general theme but women organisations may choose different themes that reflect local gender issues.

In adopting the UN theme for 2012 IWD, the Centre for Entrepreneurship and Gender Issues in Science and Technology (CEGIST) in collaboration with Organization for Women in Science for the Developing World (OWSD) FUTA Chapter decided to organize a seminar tagged: "**Stand Out, Stand Right**" with focus on campus rape.

Rape, a type of sexual assault usually involving sexual intercourse, which is initiated by one or more persons against another person without that person's consent, is increasingly become rampant on our campuses especially male-dominated environments like FUTA where only about 25% of the students' population are female. Rape used to be a matter that was hushed in whispers or rumours, because it belonged, in the Nigerian social context, to the realm of forbidden acts and was indeed uncommon. However in recent times, rape cases feature as a recurring decimal in public and private places, including our ivory towers, which, as reports now have it, are not insulated from menacing rapists. The gang rape of a female student of the Abia State University in August, 2011 was a prominent case that received wide press attention and public outrage. Recent reports indicate that rape cases in the country have reached alarming proportions requiring urgent attention and concerted redress and control efforts by all stakeholders.

Programme Details

Collaboration with Organization for Women in Science for the Developing World (OWSD), FUTA Chapter

Organization for Women in Science for the Developing World (OWSD), formerly TWOWS is an independent, non-profit and non-governmental body based at the Academy of Sciences for the Developing World (Twas) in Trieste, Italy. OWSD is the first international forum to unite eminent women scientists from the South with the objective of strengthening their role in the development process and promoting their representation in scientific and technological leadership. OWSD is working to strengthen research efforts and training opportunities of young women scientists working and living in developing countries, promote the recognition of the scientific and technological achievements of women, improve access to education and training for women in science and technology, increase the scientific productivity and efficiency of women scientists in the Third World, promote collaboration and communication among women scientists and technologists in the Third World and with the international scientific community as a whole, promote their participation in the decision-making processes, both at national and international levels, encourage other international organizations to increase their activities concerned with promoting the role of women in science and technology in the Third World.

OWSD, FUTA Chapter was inaugurated as “TWOWS-FUTA Chapter” on May 4, 2010. The idea for a FUTA Chapter was conceived at the TWOWS African Regional Conference in Abuja, Nigeria which was held in November, 2009. The first gathering of FUTA women took place in January, 2010 where 18 determined women scientists initiated plans towards inaugurating the Chapter. The chairperson and convener was Prof. Mrs. O. O. Odeyemi, the current Director, CEGIST. The same day, interim executive members were elected. In furtherance of the vision, another meeting was held in February, 2010 where Prof. Mrs. I. A. Fuwape, the interim President of the soon to be inaugurated Chapter, gave a lecture introducing TWOWS to FUTA women. By March, 2010, when another meeting was held, more women scientists had indicated their interests in becoming members of TWOWS-FUTA. It was at this meeting that the first in the series of TWOWS-FUTA lectures was delivered by Prof. O. Fagbenro on *Scientific Research Proposal Writing*. A number of other lectures have been given since inauguration of the Chapter including: *Data Analysis and Statistical Software Packages* in biological research by Prof. R.D. Aladesanwa, *Food is Medicine* by Dr. G. Oboh, *Scientific Presentations* by Dr. Mrs. M. O. Edema and *Writing Style and Funding Opportunities* by Dr. Mrs. V. O. Oyerinde. Further to achieving the goals of OWSD, FUTA Chapter marked her first anniversary in July 2011 with a programme on *Popularising Science* among school children. The programme organized in collaboration with the African Regional Centre for Space Science and Technology Education, included a science exhibition and launching of a space science club.

In view of the track record of OWSD-FUTA activities and the fact that the Organisation is well known on campus and in the State, the Gender Issues programme requested collaboration, moral and financial support from the Organization which comprises over 130 female members of FUTA staff to date. Working Committees for the IWD were set up among members of OWSD-FUTA Chapter who worked speedily and tirelessly to make the Women’s Day programme a huge success.

Summary of Speeches and Guest Lecture

1. Welcome remarks by the Ag. Vice-Chancellor, Prof. E. A. Fashakin: The Ag. Vice-Chancellor, Prof. E. A. Fashakin was unavoidably absent and his welcome address was presented by Prof D. O. Adefolalu, Ag. Dean, School of Earth and Mineral Sciences (SEMS). He noted that the 2012 International Women’s Day (IWD) marked the 101st year of significant advancement in the course of women emancipation. The Ag. VC noted that it was the first time FUTA community would be celebrating the IWD with such magnitude of attention and sensitization, confirming that the University’s strong commitment to gender issues in line with the mandate of CEGIST towards ensuring gender main-streaming as a strategic key for promoting gender equality. Although the percentage of girls in Nigeria who now complete a full course of primary education is gradually, though slowly increasing, the Ag. VC recognised the need for all stakeholders to join hands in doing more to achieve gender balance especially in higher education where the gap is still wide. Speaking on the focus of the FUTA IWD seminar which addresses the issue of rape, the Ag. VC recognised rape as one of the most repressed negative indicators mitigating against gender development. Describing the different

types of rape and some factors responsible for it, the Ag. VC ended his opening speech with advice and tips for young women on how to avoid this menace of sexual assault.

2. Chairperson's address by Mrs. Olukemi Mimiko: The Chairperson, Mrs. Olukemi Mimiko, wife of Ondo State Governor expressed her delight at being part of the IWD's seminar, another enriching programme organized by FUTA. Starting with a brief historical background to the IWD, the Chairperson gave an overview of the development of the International Women's Day from a labour movement-based activity to a day for celebrating women's achievements and evaluating the untapped potential and opportunities that await future generations of girls and women. Highlighting the challenges limiting women's participation and progress in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, Mrs. Mimiko identified the increasing incidence of rape, one of the sore areas of our society today, as an emerging limiting factor to the progress being made at encouraging girls in science and technology disciplines. She noted with concern that many people are ignorant of the laws concerning rape while noting also that "The entire evidential burden placed on victims makes it difficult for them to pursue the part of justice hence, it should be reviewed." The governor's wife said the laws against the menace should not remain only in the statute book but be made more efficient and effective appealing to government to create more enabling environment for victims to come out. She regretted that presently, victims often do not report rape because they feel embarrassed or ashamed, blame themselves, fear retaliation, or do not wish to relive the experience.

3. Background to IWD by Dr. Mojisola Edema, AD Gender, CEGIST: in providing the background to the FUTA IWD, the AD, Gender Issues in Science and Technology, FUTA, Dr. Moji Edema identified the progress made through the IWD platform towards achieving gender equality in science and related disciplines. She stated that the tone and nature of IWD has, for the past few years, moved from being a reminder about the negatives (abuse, inequality, frustration, oppression, poverty, health and human rights problems) to a celebration of the positives such as creation of family-friendly work environments for nursing mothers who work outside their homes. Another strategy for achieving gender equality has been the emergence of women-only opportunities in science and technology such as the OWSD Awards for Young Women Scientists supported by the Elsevier Foundation, Faculty for the future fellowship by Schlumberger, L'ORÉAL-UNESCO for women in science and the AWARD fellowship. Dr. Edema also highlighted some of the activities of CEGIST in addressing gender equality in science and technology such as identifying gender-related problems and providing platforms to adequately address the problems. This she stated, led to the choice of rape as the focus of the 2012 IWD seminar. Dr. Edema re-affirmed the commitment of the Centre towards educating and sensitizing relevant stakeholders on the global trends in gender issues especially in the area of science and technology and invited further collaboration with relevant organs within and outside the university to ensure positive attitude and realization of the goals of CEGIST and OWSD for gender equity and entrepreneurship in science and technology.

4. Guest lecture by Hon. Justice Yemi Akintan-Osadebay: in a lucid and very practical presentation, the guest speaker, Hon. Justice Yemi Akintan-Osadebay explained the many definitions of rape explaining its meaning in various contexts and countries. Hon. Justice Akintan-Osadebay stated that in Nigeria as in many other countries, the act of 'rape' is a crime, punishable under applicable laws governing it. She explained that changing attitudes about sexuality and gender equality have led to re-definition of rape and what behaviors constitute rape, leading to the promulgation of various types of rape including forcible rape, acquaintance rape, gang rape, marital rape, war rape, statutory rape, date rape and campus date rape. Historically, a form of rape described as bride capture, used to be socially acceptable in ancient Rome. In the Nigerian law, only a woman or a girl can be raped but in some countries like Canada and South Africa, all non-consensual sexual acts, irrespective of gender is considered rape. Under the Criminal Code of Southern Nigeria, the offence of rape is a capital offence (felony) and it is punishable with life imprisonment. It is viewed as a serious crime not only against the victim but also against the society as it tends to erode or destroy societal cohesion and value system. Advising all girls and ladies present on how to stand out correctly in their male-dominated environments, she pointed out that rapists are usually not strangers but may be neighbors, co-workers, casual acquaintances, dating partners, former boyfriends, even husbands. Rape remains an under-reported crime in Nigeria because victims are hesitant to report rapes because of insensitive and sometimes hostile treatment by law enforcement personnel. While the guest speaker identified that changes have taken place in public and professional attitudes toward rape in recent years, many victims remain hesitant to report rape. Even where the police and courts are sympathetic, victims often do not report rape because they feel embarrassed or ashamed, blame themselves, fear retaliation, or do not wish to re-live the experience. This is because in Nigeria, the burden of proof that courts place on a victim of rape such as having to prove tricky issues like absence of consent and penetration, results in victims being subjected to yet another traumatic experience and so they are unwilling to go through the further ordeal of a public

trial. Hon. Justice Akintan-Osadebay concluded by providing cautionary measures women can take to avoid being raped. These included: proper/decent dressing, walking in pairs or groups especially at night or in remote locations, avoiding poorly-lit areas or areas with minimal escape routes when walking alone cannot be avoided, carrying pepper spray or a similar item for emergency self defense, keeping away from persons of questionable character. She highlighted some human right groups (FIDA, an International Association of Female Lawyers; NAWOJ - National Association of Female Judges; NAPTIF - National Agency for the Prohibition of Traffic in Persons) that assist rape victims in seeking justice with adequate secrecy and protection. The take home message from the guest speaker was “Carry yourself with dignity and respect. Stand out, Stand right and be the virtuous woman that your family and the society expect you to be”.

5. Goodwill message by Mrs. Osundolire, PS, Ministry of Environment

In a special goodwill message from the Ministry of Environment tagged: “strategies for prevention of sexual assault on campus”, the Permanent Secretary, Mrs. Osundolire explained the relationship between sexual assault and rape while giving a statistical overview of the increasing prevalence of rape globally. She summarized the various types of sexual assault including rape. Explaining the causes and effects of rape, Mrs. Osundolire gave hands-on advice on rape prevention: avoiding men with aggressive or violent tendencies, care and alertness on first dates and parties where men out-number women, avoiding late nights out and isolated places, avoiding excessive use of alcohol and drugs. The Permanent Secretary also had a few words of advice for men (never force yourself on a woman; don't assume that a woman who dresses in a "sexy" manner wants to have sexual intercourse; don't assume that previous permission for sexual contact applies to the current situation; be aware that a man's size and physical presence can be intimidating to a woman), parents (teach your teenagers traditional values of mutual respect; point out the dangers of peer pressure, drugs and alcohol; be a role model; teach your daughters about their rights), schools (develop policy statements that demonstrate commitment to eliminating or reducing sexual assault in the institution; develop a multidisciplinary taskforce on campus to address sexual violence prevention and response services that includes high-level campus administration, academic leaders, student leaders, and community partnerships; revise, enforce, and widely distribute disciplinary regulations in the student code that demonstrate an intolerance of all forms of sexual violence and implement sanctions for violations by faculty, staff, and students), rape victims (never blame yourself for a sexual assault; talk to someone you trust; contact your local rape crisis center; refrain from eating, drinking, washing, douching, brushing your teeth and combing your hair before reporting; seek medical help; seek counseling from highly trained and professional therapists; deal with your feelings).