

## Empowering Rural Girls and Women through the Family

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New York, United States -- During the 62nd session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women, UPF co-sponsored a program on empowering rural girls and women.

The program titled "The Role of the Family in Empowering Rural Girls and Women" was held by UPF together with the Mission of Nigeria to the United Nations, NGO Committee on the Family-NY, and LDS Charities.

The topic echoed this year's CSW theme, "Empowering Rural Women and Girls." However, our event had a special focus on the unique role of mothers. The program was held on March 21, 2018, in a beautiful, sunlit room at the Nigerian Mission.

The program was opened by Ryan Koch, the co-chair of NGO Committee on the Family-NY and the UN representative of LDS Charities. He explained that NGO Committee on the Family-NY promotes the Universal Declaration of Human Rights statement on the family "as the natural and fundamental group unit of society entitled to protection by society and the State."

His Excellency, Professor Tijjani Muhammad-Bande, the ambassador of the Permanent Mission of Nigeria to the UN, spoke next. He emphasized that the value of the family is deeply embedded within Nigerian culture and society. Rural women are the most disadvantaged, he said, and therefore are particularly affected by the weakening of the family.

Cherishing babies and children, valuing mothers and fathers, and strengthening the extended families involved in supporting the family are all at the root of Nigerian life and social stability, Ambassador Muhammad-Bande stated. Despite any new trends in the world, Nigeria stands firm in protecting and promoting the traditional family, he said.

Mrs. Shelly Locke, the founder of the organization The Power of Mothers, gave a presentation on "Mothers' Role, Family Stability and Empowering Rural Girls and Women." She opened her PowerPoint with a delightful photo of Nigerian mothers enjoying their babies and explained that she has visited Nigeria twice, interviewing mothers and doing service work.



Mrs. Locke, who has a master's degree in family and human development, described mother-child interaction as being critical for a child's emotional, social, and physical development and for the child's intelligence -- all of which have lifelong effects.

If a mother is sensitive, consistently warm and responsive to her infant and child, Mrs. Locke said, the child will form a secure attachment to her and develop optimally. Less secure and ambivalent attachments lead to a child being less trusting of others and having a poor sense of self-worth, she said.

Mrs. Locke pointed out that, fortunately, a person can reverse a less than ideal parent-child relationship and can develop good social capacities. Fathers are important as they parent differently and have important, unique influences on their children, she said. A father and mother working in complementarity and mutual support optimize the child's development. Mrs. Locke noted that our natural hormonal responses play a substantial role in enhancing the bonding, sensitivity, and attachment of the mother-child and father-child relationships.

The final speaker was Mrs. Friay Kimde Bulus, the deputy director for women's rights and gender development at the Federal Ministry of Women's Affairs and Social Development of Nigeria. Mrs. Bulus described Nigeria's many programs and policies that effectively support rural women, allowing them to develop income-earning capacities and family stability.

After a lively question-and-answer period, the program ended and moved into networking and connecting over a delicious African lunch buffet. Special thanks should be given to Mrs. Grace Charrier, a UPF member and UN representative of the International Association for Applied Psychology, who took on a key responsibility in organizing this successful event.