

## **BACKGROUND PAPER ON ENGENDERING POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND ACCOUNTABILITY IN NIGERIA**

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### **Gender responsiveness in elections**

#### **Political FEATURES in Nigeria shaping gender responsiveness in elections**

Contemporary notions of democracy provide that every citizen has the right to seek public office and participate in the process of decision making. However, in practice many social interests are not represented, as only a small proportion of the population seeks elective office and even fewer are elected. This includes women and the people living with disability, who quantitatively are the most under-represented as candidates in elections.

Various economic, political, social and systemic practices narrow the field of potential female candidates in Nigeria. Systemic factors such as the type of electoral system Nigeria adopts; (the First-Past-The-Post system) and the nature of the party system affect men's and women's access to political life. Party politics in Nigeria is still virtually an exclusive affair of men as only very few women were elected into offices of political parties. The party machineries are male dominated. Women's wings of parties have been abolished but have been quickly replaced by the position of 'Woman Leader'.

Male dominated political culture and values are one of the reasons for gender imbalance in elective offices. The situation has been further aggravated by the growth of corruption, criminal activity and violence perpetuated by the major political parties. There is a widespread incidence of violence against women and women are victims of different forms of discrimination and religious fundamentalism. Women hold a secondary position except as voters. Indigene-ship has been used as a weapon to exclude women from political participation. Women who are married to men who are not indigene of their local government or state suffer systematic discrimination. They are told to return to their maiden local government to contest for elective positions. At the same time their marriage to men from other local government has alienated them from their families of birth.

Electoral finance is an increasing obstacle to the achievement of gender equality in the electoral process. This is partly because women have traditionally been relegated to the private, domestic sphere, and thus have neither the personal financial resources nor the moneyed networks to allow them to compete effectively in increasingly expensive electoral politics. The cost of contesting a party nomination was disadvantageous to women, who on the average had less access to financial resources than men (Brodie 1991:7).

There is always a clear preference of male aspirants over female aspirants by party machinery, and the electorate. Other experiences include insincere negotiations for consensus in favor of male aspirants or sheer pressure from family engineered by external forces to compel potential female aspirants to step down in favor of male aspirants. Among the hypotheses given as to why women are eliminated in the primary process or if they succeed, later on as candidates, is that they usually cannot compete with male aspirants or candidates in terms of vote buying.

The process for the selection of candidates is not always an open democratic process where the merits of male and female aspirants are determined by the party members. The men who fund the parties or 'Godfathers' see themselves as the owners of the parties and therefore control and dominate others including the party leadership. Even when women win the party nomination exercise they still have several hurdles to cross within and outside the party. According to Ibrahim and Salihu (2004)<sup>1</sup> several labels (anti party people, cultural deviant, use of invectives and insults) are used as strategies to exclude them from participating and once a negative label has been successfully imposed on an aspirant, it is easy to exclude the labelled person irrespective of the formal rules and procedures established, because the person's legitimacy has been eroded.<sup>2</sup>

Nigeria is a state party to all the international and regional conventions on gender equality but has not domesticated them, to make them applicable locally.

### **Stakeholder analysis**

Political Parties are critical in determining who runs for elective positions, yet women are not found in decision making organs of parties. The more popular position for women is that of "Woman leader" which has little or no powers. Women are often marginalized and excluded at the Political primaries level by neglecting delegates' votes or cancelling primaries completely and presenting a consensus candidate. Although many of the political parties have waived the payment of high nomination fees for women, they hardly make it through the primaries.

The opportunity the executive arm of government had to reform the electoral process in Nigeria was misused and lost by rejecting the progressive gender equality recommendations made by the Justice Uwais Electoral Reform Committee. The Committee recommended the mainstreaming of gender equality in the electoral process through adopting a Mixed system of the First-Past-the-Post and the proportional representation electoral systems. The PR system will make it mandatory for political parties to include at least 30% women and 2% of people with disability in their party lists. The Constitutional Review Committee jettisoned the bulk of the ERC recommendations.

The state has therefore not shown sufficient commitment both in terms of providing the appropriate legal framework, accountable institutions and the capacity for gender planning and budgeting. It had not accepted affirmative action for bridging gender gaps, had not engendered party and election guidelines despite the existence of a National Gender Policy and the ratification of CEDAW since 1985.

The Committee's recommendation that women should have 30% representation in the Board of the Independent National Electoral Commission and that any political party that did not have

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<sup>1</sup> Jibrin Ibrahim and Amina Salihu, 2004 edits. "Women, Marginalisation and Politics in Nigeria" Joe-Tolalu and Associates

<sup>2</sup> Supra

at least 20% women in its leadership should not be registered, were all rejected. These would have expanded the space for women to make input in the nomination of candidates.

The judicial process and a legal culture in Nigeria are tardy and expensive. It deliberately “encourages violation of the spirit of the law, through taking advantage of ambiguities in the letter of the law, and hiding behind procedural technicalities in the judicial process to frustrate and prolong litigation. The result is a cynical resignation and a general disenchantment with the electoral process, with its failure as a mechanism for participation and accountability. Every four years, the electorate engage in the ritualistic charade of “voting without choosing,” it is little wonder that the political class shows nothing but contempt for the electorate, violating the sovereignty of the people with impunity.<sup>3</sup>

Few women are card carrying members of political parties and their recreation activities were tied to their reproductive activities and were home based limiting skill building, mentoring and constituency building. Male politicians in comparison were more involved in political associations and recreation clubs and spent more time outside the home networking with other men.

Traditional Rulers and Religious Leaders have a lot of influence over who contests and wins elections particularly at the local government level.

### **Organised Efforts to Utilise Elections towards Engendering Agendas**

There are several civil society initiatives aimed at redressing the gender imbalance in the electoral process. These include the Civil Society Coordinating Committee on Electoral Reform, a coalition of NGOs in Nigeria that engaged the Justice Uwaigbo Electoral Reform Committee to advocate for gender sensitive provisions in the Constitution and Electoral Act.

The National Coalition on Affirmative Action, an umbrella organisation of over 100 NGOs in Nigeria has been working on the domestication of the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Protocol to the African Charter on the Rights of Women in Africa to provide Nigerian women the legal framework to demand for affirmative action to close the gender gaps in political participation.

The United Nations agencies especially UNIFEM and UNDP are taking the lead to mobilise civil society to action to ensure that women participate adequately in the 2011 elections. UNIFEM’s Women and Democracy in Nigeria Project aims to promote a more visible and effective

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<sup>3</sup> Jinadu L.A; Historical Analysis Of Elections And Election Management In Nigeria, Paper prepared for presentation at the Civil Society Organization Meeting on Electoral Reform, organized by the Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA), in Abuja, Nigeria, October 19 2007.

participation of women in the forthcoming general elections in 2011 through creative and context-specific mass information and communication activities.

In 2007, under the Women in Governance Project, CIRDDOC partnered with Heinrich Böll Foundation (HBF) to build the capacity of female political aspirants in Anambra, Ebonyi and Enugu States to compete favorably with their male counterparts in the field and assist them with media strategy and engagement. Several other NGOs are implementing projects that typically involve developing skills among women candidates, advocating for steps such as quotas to bolster women's participation, assisting with the formation of women's networks, engaging political parties to bring gender into their platforms and conducting media campaigns.

### **Gender responsiveness in setting political agendas**

#### **Political Features in Nigeria Shaping Gender Responsiveness in Agenda Setting**

The experience to date is that civil society organizations have been the critical players in putting gender on the political agenda. They are the ones taking women's voices to the public domain and seeking women's equality in regards to socio-economic and political emancipation but, both at the national, state and local levels the struggle to get women involved in elective positions has had extremely limited success. The struggle for change takes a well-defined position in areas of women's education, employment and health and it raises social, economic and political demands designed to remove discrimination and to attain equality for women in Nigeria.

NGOs have also organised campaigns, public meetings, rallies and press conferences to raise awareness on multiple issues related to gender equity. Others have undertaken extensive research and study in areas of women's social, economic and political life. They have also created gender sensitivities among planners, public functionaries, and development agency personnel to name a few. They have been involved in policy development for the government around gender equality.

The understanding is that traditionally an engendered agenda would be achieved by involving women in public and governmental decision-making opportunities. This means that more women needed to be in positions of decision-making such as in parliament, executive and judiciary. Over the years the realisation has been that though it is essential to create a critical mass, it is also however important to understand that numbers do not automatically result in changes in policies. There needs to be conscientisation and sensitization of the general public and leadership around gender concerns and issues at all levels and across institutions. Organizations have to work closely with women in positions of power to ensure an engendered polity and political agenda.

#### **POLITICAL TRENDS in with regard to gender responsiveness in agenda setting**

**GOVERNMENT:** Despite a general commitment to the principle of non-discrimination as enshrined in Section 2 of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Nigeria falls

short of the desired result of giving males and females equal opportunities to advance socially, physically, educationally, politically and economically. Evidence abound that several negative aspects of gender relations, such as gender-based division of labour, disparities between males' and females' access to power and resources, and gender biases in rights and entitlements, remain pervasive in Nigeria. The Nigerian Constitution<sup>4</sup> confers upon all citizens the right to democratic governance including equal rights of women and men to participate in the elective governance in Nigeria. The above progressive provisions notwithstanding, the history of development policies in Nigeria has been that of a general neglect of the gender variable leading to the exclusion of one half of the population from development. The first twenty years of development planning in Nigeria as a Republic remained largely gender-blind or gender insensitive, thus gender was never an issue of development planning.

Primarily, it is the responsibility of the Government of Nigeria to create an enabling environment for gender equality. Creating such an environment requires concrete policies, programmes and resources. However, the 1999 Constitution has not integrated women's needs, concerns and human rights. There is a need for an inclusive Constitution-making process that encourages women to participate, and allows them, in partnership with men, to shape the future of the country and their status within the future.

Gender equality activists continue to express serious reservations about the character and nature of the State in Nigeria, pointing to indications of systemic and structural exclusion embedded in its present framework. For instance, place of origin is given privilege over residency. With application of the federal character formula, rather than citizenship and capacity, women face marginalization. Federal character negates the protection of gender concerns under section 42 of the 1999 Constitution, which significantly minimizes women's participation and access to policy and decision-making.

The Nigeria National Gender Policy adopted in 2006 set a major policy goal to achieve gender equity in political participation and representation, and to draw up mechanisms for the empowerment of women in politics. It also recommends 35% minimum representation of women in all levels of governance to address the gender bias in the political system. The policy is a significant way of redirecting public policies to promote gender equality and enhance complementary roles which women and men should play in development. The policy thrust is equity, social order and social well-being.

Nigeria has a policy environment that would appear to support gender equity. It is a signatory to most of the international conventions on gender equality. It has a Ministry of Women's Affairs and Youth Development, (which is soon to be addressed as Ministry of Gender Affairs) with desk officers for each sector, and corresponding women's affairs officers in each Ministry. The National Poverty Alleviation Plan is supposed to allocate a quota of 35% of funding to poor

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<sup>4</sup> Section 40 of the 1999

women. At the same time, follow through within the national government is weak. Monitoring of the impact of government policies and of adherence to conventions and covenants is limited. The Ministry is severely under-funded and its staff under-trained for this kind of responsibility. Further, the Minister is to some degree overshadowed by the First Lady who is active in women's affairs.

**PARTIES:** Political parties are the main vehicles by which citizens elect or dismiss governments, and they maintain firm control over the nomination of candidates for elected office. The representation of women in the major political parties is very minimal. Most political parties have woman leaders after the women's wings were banned. They are seen to be active in mobilising fellow women to participate mostly in supporting the male candidates and by and large their role is not clear; they work at the behest of the party caucus without having a significant role in the caucus itself or in its policy making. It is argued that existence of the women's sections tends to push women to the sideline and reduce women politicians to a lower status than men. In effect, the parties consider women not eligible for nomination during election and the vicious cycle has proven difficult to break.

#### **Organized efforts to engender agendas**

NGOs such as the Civil Resource Development and Documentation Centre (CIRDDOC), Women Advocates Research and Documentation Centre (WARDC), Gender and Development Action (GADA), Women Law and Development Centre, (WLD) National Coalition on Affirmative Action (NCAA), Community Partners for Development (CDP), Coalition of Eastern NGOs (CENGOS), Women's Rights Advancement and Protection Alternative (WRAPA), Women Aid Collective (WACOL) and others have worked towards achieving the objective of gender equality in governance. The CDP's project, Women Agenda 2003 in partnership with USAID/OTI and DFID Governance Fund was aimed at awakening and sustaining the interest of civil society and women's organisations in particular in monitoring democracy generally for gender responsiveness. That project also sought to assist women politicians to build partnerships and networks that will strengthen their capacity for negotiations, lobby and advocacy. Through that project, potential female politicians and change agents were identified, and their capacity was strengthened to make a difference and position them properly to participate more in elective politics. A corps of democracy watchers was also produced to audit gender issues in the 2003 elections.

The Women Law and Development Centre, WLD Nigeria under the leadership of Professor Jadesola Akande of blessed memory institutionalised the National Democratic Equality project (NADEV) in 1998 and the Democracy through the Education of Women project in 1999. The Female Parliamentary Caucus was formed in 2000 and the testimonies of female political aspirants and forms of irregularities they experienced were documented. In spite of these and all other efforts, the situation has not changed for the better.

## **Threats and Opportunities in Current Climate to Engendering Political Agendas**

**OPPORTUNITIES:** That the government of Nigeria is a state party to all international and regional conventions on gender equality including CEDAW, Vienna Programme of Action, Beijing Platform for Action, and the AU Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality and the AU Protocol to African Charter on the Rights of Women in Africa is an open window to hold it accountable on its commitments and advocating for engendering political agenda.

The traditional mechanisms that exist for women to enter the public arena of elections and policy-making and influencing include ministerial positions. Traditionally women when included in cabinets have been given charge of ministries perceived as being 'soft' such as women and children affairs ministry, education, Social welfare and so on. Lately, some of the core ministries have been headed by women. In the Obasanjo government, a woman occupied the important Finance Ministry, Foreign affairs and lately Petroleum and information. This could be tapped into to get the women's agenda on board.

### **State responsiveness to gender issues**

#### **Political features shaping state responsiveness to gender issues/ delivery on gender commitments**

As a State Party to the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), Nigeria has the responsibility to submit periodic reports to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, for consideration by the Committee, on the measures which they have adopted to give effect to the provisions of the Convention and on the progress made in this respect at least every four years. Nigeria has been fairly regular in meeting this obligation although the CEDAW Committee's summary of comments and recommendations regarding implementation of the Convention arising from Nigeria's report always indicted the country for non domestication of the treaty.

Government has committed a lot of funds to achieve the MDGs by 2015. MDG 3 is achieving gender equality. Not much progress has been made in the area electoral politics.

#### **Political trends with regard to state responsiveness to gender issues/ delivery on gender commitments**

The government most often pays lip service to issues of gender. There is no deliberate effort to engender the budgeting process of the government and the budget itself making nonsense of commitments made in the policy documents. The budget does not reflect the promises of gender equality in the PRSP documents including NEEDS, SEEDS etc.

#### **Organized efforts to hold the state accountable on gender commitments/ responsiveness**

Gender budgeting is increasingly being used by NGOs as a tool to hold government accountable on its gender commitments. Some of the groups focus on building capacity of government officials on gender responsive budgeting while others track government resource allocation and expenditure for gender sensitivity. The Women's Committee of the House of Representatives recently collaborated with Civil Society organizations and UNIFEM in a Gender Budget

Statement Project in which committee members were trained on gender responsive budgeting and they monitored government expenditure for gender gaps. At the end of the budget year, a Gender Budget Statement was released highlighting the gender gaps and calling for improvement in the next budget cycle. A press conference was organized to disseminate the Gender Budget Statement.

Activists target the CEDAW Committee every four years to hold government accountable on their delivery on gender commitments through presenting a Shadow report and providing the Committee with information on the State party's compliance in implementing the substantive rights outlined in the CEDAW Convention. This is to 'force' government to strengthen the mechanism for effective implementation of the provisions of the convention.

### **Relevant key actors/ stakeholders/ access points**

The negative portrayal of women in the media fuels the gender discrimination. This is most often out of ignorance and lack of understanding of issues of women's rights. There is need to train journalists to bring gender perspectives into political reporting. The Nigerian media tends to give disproportionate prominence to reports of negative activities while news of important milestones achieved by women is tucked away in the inner pages of the newspaper.

Civil society lacks both the capacity and the resources to effectively hold government to account for international and regional commitments. Government institutions have not established meaningful partnerships with citizens or the private sector and lack the capacity to carry out their own mandates.

Among the most significant governance challenges facing Nigeria is the dominance of its politics by an oligarchy – a small elite spread across the country – which excludes the majority of Nigerians from civic participation.

### **Threats and opportunities in current climate to state responsiveness to gender issues**

**Threats:** The society is patriarchal and the legislature is male dominated. Issues concerning women's rights hardly make it on the agenda.

The lack of national legal framework for gender equality in political participation will make the achievement of the goal of equality difficult.

The role of money in politics, especially the funding of political parties and election campaigns, has recently become a topic of increased interest and concern. The emerging evidence suggest that there are two key stages in the electoral process where money in politics has a direct bearing on women as potential representatives: (a) the party nomination and recruitment stage, and (b) campaign financing.

**Opportunities:** The responsibility to submit reports to the CEDAW Committee every four years presents civil society the opportunity to prepare and submit a shadow report to the committee to highlight the gaps in the government report and hold it accountable on its commitments.

The First lady of the Federation has put in place a “Women for Change” Project and has been going round the country to preach the message of creating political spaces for women in Nigeria. The Virtual Poverty Fund and the MDG funds in Nigeria are opportunities for CSOs to access funds for awareness creation on gender equality issues.

**Available research and highlighting of questions that have not been asked**

A study by Barbara and Schildrout (1986) among women in the predominantly Muslim-Northern Nigeria underscores the extent to which childhood indoctrination can color people’s understanding of social phenomena, including their own oppression. According to the study most Muslim women in Northern Nigeria believed that God decreed that they should remain submissive to their husbands irrespective of their behaviours. Their research reveals that most women believed that the woman is only a *subject* of the law, and that the interpretation and use of the laws were the prerogative of the men.

Little attention has been paid in either the WID or the feminist political economy literature to the relationship between the media and women. Of particular concern were the “trivial images of women in the media.” The conclusions, substantiated by an ATRCW research project on the mass media in Africa (ATRCW 1985b), indicated that Western images of women as housewives and dependents, reinforced by appeals to a reconstructed and false African “tradition,” were common. Clearly, the media trend undermines an accurate perception of the real position of African women in society and hampers efforts to have women taken seriously by policymakers.

Debates about regulating the financial conduct of political parties, from setting campaign limits to introducing disclosure laws, have assumed increasing significance. However, these debates rarely focus on the gender implications of party funding. The extent to which party funding regulations affect women and men differently is not well researched, and is often overlooked.

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