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Accountability Brief

A Policy Brief from Beyond Voting: Increasing Women's Participation in the Political Process

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Increasing Women's Participation in Politics and Governance

Executive Summary

Nigeria's return to democracy in May 1999 rekindled hopes of having greater women participation in politics and governance. Unfortunately, in the last two decades, not much has been achieved in terms of an expansion of the political space in ways that would allow for the women to insert and assert themselves as active participants. Even though women represent a significant proportion of the voting population of the zone, they have been very negligible in terms of occupying elective and appointive positions. Political, economic, social, cultural and institutional factors are some of the major constraints generally holding women back in politics in the zone. Compared to other states, however, Plateau and Anambra have distinguished themselves in both elective and appointive political positions for women.

This policy brief identifies key challenges to women participation in politics, including the highly monetised political process, 'Godfathers' and party patrons syndrome, societal prejudices and absence of mentorship programme for women. Other challenges include the closed democratic space, neglect of women in the rural areas and weak reform agenda for women.

On the basis of the foregoing this policy brief recommends, among others, the de-monetisation of the electoral process, introduction of mentorship programmes and bridging the gaps between women in rural and urban areas.

Background and Context

The Fourth World Conference on Women: Action for Equality, Development and Peace, otherwise called the Beijing Conference, convened by the United Nations in September 1995 in Beijing, China, culminated in the adoption on September 15, 1995 of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (UN, 1995). The Declaration, which promulgated a set of principles concerning the equality of men and women, set the tone for the increasing agitation for the expansion of the political space to include the full participation of women in politics.

Before and since the return to democracy, Nigeria has made several efforts to ensure the rights and full participation of women in politics and decision-making structure.¹ Despite the existence of these instruments, women participation in politics over the past decade

remains abysmally low. Statistics show that women have not reached 15 per cent representation in elective positions in Nigeria since 1999. In order to meet the requirement of gender balancing and mainstreaming, each party tends to have a Woman Leader at the federal, state, local, and ward levels".²

Since 1999 the percentage of women elected into the National Assembly has been on the decline. A report by the Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre (PLAC) revealed that Nigeria achieved the highest percentage (7.0 per cent) of women's representation in the lower parliament (the House of Representatives) in 2007 after the dismal record of 3.4 per cent and 4.9 per cent in 1999 and 2003, respectively. However, the figures declined to 6.8 per cent and 5.6 per cent in 2011 and 2015. Following the conclusion of some election petition cases by 2017, the figure went up to 6% (22 in the House of Representatives and 7 in the Senate) (PLAC, 2018). This is far below the global average of 22.5 per cent, Africa

¹ These include, but are not limited to, Section 40 of the 1999 Constitution, Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) 1987, the African Union's Protocol on the Rights of Women 2003, the National Policy on Women 2000, and the National Gender Policy 2006

² Interview with a governorship aspirant in the November 18, 2017 governorship election in Anambra State, 12th July 2018.

regional average of 23.4 per cent and West African sub-regional average of 15 per cent.

The reality of Nigeria's democratic experience demonstrates that Nigeria thus suffers an inclusivity deficit. For instance, in the 2015 general election, 45,888,984 registered voters were women, while 22,944,984 were men. Despite constituting the larger block of the electorate, "women occupy less than 7 per cent of positions in elective and appointive positions in the country".³ Thus, a crucial challenge in the practice of democracy in Nigeria remains how to translate women's numerical and voting strengths into opportunities for them to occupy more elective and appointive positions.

One success story from the North Central zone is Plateau State, which remains the only State that has produced a female Deputy Governor and two female Ministers at the Federal level. It is also the only State that between 1999 and 2015, came close to meeting the 35 per cent Affirmative Action of the National Gender Policy 2006 in both elective and appointed political positions.⁴ Furthermore, Plateau is also the only State in the zone where female politicians have had the opportunity of being elected more than twice into political offices. For instance, Hon. Beni Lar has been elected thrice (2007 to date) to the House of Representatives; Hon. Dina Lar was elected twice (2003-2011) to the State House of Assembly, first as a member of the ruling Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and second as a member of the opposition party, Alliance for Democracy (AD).⁵ This represents a success story on women participation in both politics and governance.

Similarly, in the South East geopolitical zone, women have dominated the Anambra House of Assembly position of speaker since the return to democracy. Honourable Rita Mmaduagwu, who represents Nnewi South II constituency, is the current Speaker of the Sixth Assembly. She is the third female Speaker to be produced by the House, as the immediate past Speaker, Honourable Chinwe Nwaebili, was the second. The first female speaker was Mrs Eucharia Azodo, who was elected in 2003 but was impeached a month later for her alleged role in the illegal removal of Dr Chris Ngige as then Anambra State Governor.

Women in Anambra State have continued to be trailblazers at national level in terms of elective

positions over the years and appointive positions since 1999. Some of these women include Hon. Lynda Chuba-Ikpeazu was the first elected female politician, representing Onitsha South Federal Constituency from 1999-2003. Mrs Joy Emordi of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) was elected as the Senator representing Anambra North Senatorial zone during the April 2003 election. She got re-elected in the 2007 general elections but was sacked in 2010 following an appeal by Alphonsus Igbeke. In 2007, Iyom Uche Ekwunife was elected into the Federal House of Representatives and was re-elected in 2011. She ran for the Governorship seat of Anambra State in 2010 and 2013, although she lost narrowly at both times. Hon. Eucharia Azodo was elected in 2011 to represent Aguata Federal Constituency in the National Assembly and was re-elected in April 2015 for another four-year term in the House of Representatives. Similarly, Mrs Margery Chibuogu Chuba-Okadigbo was in July 2012 sworn in as the Senator representing Anambra North Senatorial District in the Senate of the Seventh National Assembly. Also notable at the national level is Princess Stella Oduah, who was in April 2015 elected as Senator to represent Anambra Central in the eighth National Assembly.

In terms of appointive positions at the National level, Anambra produced the likes of late Prof Dora Akunyili and Iyom Josephine Anenih. Prof Akunyili was the Director General of National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC) and, from 2008 to 2010, Minister of Information and Communications. Iyom Josephine Anenih was a Special Adviser on Women Affairs to President Obasanjo until 2006. She was appointed Minister of Women Affairs on 6 April 2010, by then Acting President Goodluck Jonathan. President Jonathan also appointed Princess Stella Oduah-Ogiemwonyi and Mrs Joy Emordi as the Minister of Aviation and Special Adviser on National Assembly Matters, respectively. Princess Oduah was later elected as Senator to represent Anambra Central in the eighth National Assembly.

Compared to other regions and states, these two-Plateau and Anambra have distinguished themselves. Notwithstanding there is still the challenge of low representation of women in these states.

Key Challenges to Women Participation in Politics

i. Highly Monetised Political Process: Monetisation is a major impediment to women participation in politics in Nigeria. The fact that women participation in politics is insignificant is not unconnected with the monetisation of the electoral process, which places access to power on the basis of the highest bidder, which starts with the party primaries, where participation is often dependent on

³ Oduah, Stella. (2018), "Youth and Women Empowerment Essential", 247ureports.com, 9 July, <http://247ureports.com/youth-and-women-empowerment-essential-stella-oduah/>

⁴ Interview with Dr. Chris Kwaja, 12th July, 2018, Jos, Plateau State.

⁵ Interview with Hon. Dina Lar, two-term Member of the Plateau State House of Assembly (2003-2011) and currently, Commissioner, Plateau State House of Assembly Service Commission on 13th July 2018.

the ability to mobilise fees and to win support through financial favours.⁶ Hence, meeting the conditions for contesting or gaining elective positions is extremely challenging for most women. As queried by a respondent, “how many women out of the very few political aspirants will be able to bring out N10m to obtain a form for the presidential election, or N5m to obtain a form for the governorship election?”⁷

Cost of Expression of Interest and Party Nomination Forms for the 2019 Elections⁸

S/No	Elective Position	Amount fixed by the Party	
		APC	PDP
1	President	₦45,000,000:00	₦12,000,000.00
2	Governor	₦22,500,000:00	₦6,000,000.00
3	Senate	₦7,000,000:00	₦3,500,000.00
4	House of Representative	₦3,850,000:00	₦1,500,000.00
5	State House of Assembly	₦850,000:00	₦600,000.00

ii. **‘Godfathers’ and Party Patrons Syndrome:** Another obstacle to the effective participation of women in politics is the existence of powerful political godfathers, who are averse to sponsoring women candidates in elections. These godfathers or gatekeepers are not mere financiers of political campaigns; they are also individuals whose power derives not just from wealth, but from their ability to manipulate the electoral process in support of their politically ‘ordained’ candidates. According to a respondent, “women politicians seeking the highest office in the state have always been challenged by the seeming reluctance of men who dominate the politics of the state to allow for the emergence of a woman as the chief executive of the state”.⁹ Hence, “these godfathers who finance or invest heavily in this enterprise prefer male candidates and want them to win at all cost in order

to make returns”.¹⁰ Only those who are ready to win at all cost get the party tickets, leading politicians to approach elections as do-or-die contest.¹¹

iii. **Societal Prejudices:** Two of such notable and interrelated prejudices are the idea of politics as a ‘dirty’ game, and more importantly peddling of stories or images of female politician as ‘prostitutes’. The first derives partly from the violent nature of Nigerian politics while the second partly emanates from the predominantly nocturnal nature of political meetings that are held at night, in ways that do not afford women an opportunity to effectively participate. Given this situation, a respondent noted the fact that “women who venture into politics are usually viewed as dirty and prostitutes in the society”.¹²

iv. **Closed Democratic Space:** The percentage of women participation in politics in Nigeria has remained very low. Till date, no state in the country has been able to meet 35 per cent affirmative action in elective and appointive political positions for women. Except Plateau State, which has signed into law and gazetted the Gender and Equal Opportunities Law, there appears to be an evident lack of political will by State Governments in the zone to put legal, institutional or policy frameworks in place to encourage increased women participation in politics beyond voting. The lack of political will may be due to the absence of political and economic incentives attached to the global campaign for increased women participation in politics by the UN Women, which can motivate states and national governments to work towards achieving the goal.

v. **Absence of Mentorship Programme:** The absence or lack of political mentorship among women politicians remains a key challenge. This creates the possibility of the absence of successors and continuity in terms of level of women participation in politics in the zone. There is a sense in which the vulnerability of women to manipulation and exclusion from the political process is exacerbated by the very condition where many of them have to rely on the men for favours in order to be recognised politically.

vi. **Weak Reform Agenda on Women:** Political parties have not developed deliberate legal, institutional and policy frameworks that are geared towards encouraging increasing participation of women in politics beyond voting. For instance, while

⁶ Emereonye, Livy-Elcon (2017) “The Role of the Youth in Credible Elections”, Elombahnews, 19 June, <https://elombah.com/index.php/politics/the-role-of-the-youth-in-credible-elections/>

⁷ Interview with Obodozie, Oby, President National Council for Women Society, Anambra State, interviewed on 1st August 2018 Awka, Anambra State.

⁸ Compiled from <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/282541-2019-apc-releases-timetable-presidential-aspirants-to-pay-n45m-governorship-n22-5m.html>, and <http://peoplesdemocraticparty.com.ng/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/sale-of-forms-for-the-2019-general-elections-2.pdf>

⁹ Nwoye, Ifeanyi (2017), “Anambra 2017: Why are the women taking the back seat?”, *Daily Trust*, 15 August, <https://www.dailytrust.com.ng/news/opinion/anambra-2017-why-are-the-women-taking-the-back-seat/210131.html>

¹⁰ Interview with Obiorah Chidozie, Lecturer, Department of Political Science, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra State, 2nd August 2018.

¹¹ Adebayo, M. (2007) “2007: It’s do or die – Obasanjo”, Sun, 11th February.

¹² Interview with Eucharia Akanife, former Councillor, Ward 3, Ezinifite, Anambra State, 2nd August 2018.

some degree of tokenism such as free nomination of tickets for women exist, the financial cost of electioneering campaign is beyond the capacity of the average woman in the zone to foot, nor have political parties made any provisions in their constitutions that specifically seek to address the disadvantageous positions of women in the political process.

vii. **Neglect of Women at the Rural Areas:**

There is an active and sustained campaign by women organisations such as Nigerian Council of Women Society (NCWS), International Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA), National Association of Women Journalist (NAWOJ), Federation of Muslim Women's Associations in Nigeria (FOMWAN), the National Coalition on Affirmative Action (NCAA),¹³ among others, for increased women participation in politics. However, their activities have been limited only in the urban and semi-urban areas to the exclusion of the rural areas and the grassroots. The consequence of this has been the absence of proper lack of access to adequate information by the women at the grassroots level on their participation in the political process beyond voting.

Recommendations

- i. **De-monetisation of the Electoral Process:** Programings designed to advocate for the de-monetisation of the electoral process in ways that afford women an opportunity to effectively participate should be encouraged. Such programmes should target INEC and the political parties with attention paid not just to issues around expression of interests. Campaigns, payments to delegates during party primaries, as well as payment to party agents during the elections are so expensive to the extent that most women get excluded from the electoral process at such stages.
- ii. **Reduce the influence of Godfathers and Party Patrons:** Strengthening internal party democracy in the conduct of political parties represents one of the most potent ways of reducing the influence of godfathers and party patrons in the electoral process. If internal party democracy is respected, members of the party would have a say in terms of determining how the parties are to be governed and through such processes, there would be an organic relationship between the parties and their members.
- iii. **Women for Women Mobilisation and Campaign:** Women's groups should develop a peer-support strategy where women in positions

of corporate and political influence would synergise with women-led organisations to produce a more unified and influential 'critical mass' of women movement to support female political candidates contesting or aspiring for elective and appointive positions in the zone. The existence of the He-For-She campaign, UN Women's Funds for Gender Equality, *Idikacho* – Women in Governance (I-WIG), and gradual inclusion of women in cabinet positions of some traditional rulers offer prospects for increasing women participation in politics in the states.

- iv. **Shift from Bedroom to Boardroom:** Organisations need to develop corporate policies that seek to empower women by including more women in the board of management of key state corporations, agencies and organisations, as part of a deliberate system or programme of mentorship. Such policies would help align women economic empowerment strategy within the framework of a broader political strategy to have greater effect.
- v. **Mentorship Programme:** A platform for mentorship, coaching and talent management, particularly targeting young girls in schools, colleges and universities, as well as the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) the need to be created. This strategy will leverage the achievements of women icons to positively influence women and young girls into actively participating in politics.
- vi. **Bridge the Gulf between the Urban and Rural Women:** Since the majority of the women reside in the rural areas, there is a need to bridge the gap that exists between these categories of women and their counterpart in the urban areas. Political education and economic empowerment programmes are key tools that can be used to achieve this goal. Engaging community-based women groups and associations would make it easy to reach the majority of the rural women, since they recognise and appreciate the importance of such platforms in articulating their voices.

Conclusion

This brief has demonstrated that several factors including economic, political, cultural, and legal, constitute hindrances to women participation in politics in the Plateau State and the North Central Zone. This has occasioned a very low percentage of women participation in politics compared to men in the zone. However, the degree of impediment caused of these factors varies from one State to another.

¹³ The Plateau State Chapter of these organisations played prominent role in the passage and gazetting of the Gender and Equal Opportunities Law in the State