



A Compendium of Stories on
Legal Policies and
Frameworks Influenced

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**Advancing Gender
Equality in Nigeria:
Impact of Women’s Rights
Organizations and
Movements on Policy Reform**



Advancing Gender Equality in Nigeria: Impact of Women's Rights Organizations and Movements on Policy Reform

Background

Nigeria, like many countries, has made significant strides in advancing gender equality through the establishment of legal frameworks, and policies. Gender equality, a critical component of human rights, ensures that all individuals, regardless of their gender, have equal access to opportunities, resources, and rights. In Nigeria, the journey towards gender equality has been marked by efforts to address systemic discrimination and to promote the empowerment of women and girls. However, despite these efforts, challenges persist, requiring ongoing advocacy and reform.

Issues

One of the primary challenges in advancing gender equality in Nigeria is the significant gap between policy formulation and implementation. Despite Nigeria's ratification of international conventions such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the enactment of various gender-focused policies, enforcement remains inconsistent. Cultural norms have entrenched patriarchal structures, and inadequate resources frequently obstruct the effective implementation of these gender laws and policies.

Moreover, there is a pressing issue of lack of awareness and the non-implementation of existing and domesticated policies. Many stakeholders, including communities and institutions, are often unaware of the existing policies, which are often neglected or wrongfully applied. This lack of awareness, combined with weak enforcement mechanisms, perpetuates the gap between policy and practice.

Additionally, legal frameworks sometimes fall short of addressing the complex and multifaceted nature of gender inequality. Persistent issues such as gender-based violence, unequal access to education and healthcare, and economic disparities between men and women remain pervasive. The absence of comprehensive legal protections for women's rights, along with insufficient awareness and education on gender equality, further exacerbates these challenges. To effectively tackle gender inequality, there must be a concerted effort to raise awareness, strengthen policy enforcement, and address the underlying cultural and structural barriers.



Progress

Despite these challenges, there have been notable advancements in gender equality in Nigeria. The Nigerian government has made efforts to strengthen its legal and policy frameworks, including the adoption of the National Gender Policy, which aims to promote gender equity in all spheres of life. Additionally, the passage of the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act (VAPP) in 2015 marked a significant step forward in addressing gender-based violence. States across Nigeria are gradually adopting the VAPP Act, as a result of continuous advocacy and lobbying by women-led organizations, networks, movements and activist-though full nationwide implementation is still a work in progress.

Furthermore, there is an increasing recognition of the importance of women's participation in governance and decision-making processes. Policies aimed at increasing women's representation in politics and public service have gained traction, although the realization of these goals remains uneven. The Women's Voice and Leadership (WVL) project played a pivotal role in advancing gender equality in Nigeria. Funded by Global Affairs Canada and implemented by ActionAid Nigeria, the WVL project seeks to strengthen the capacity of women's rights organizations (WROs) to influence policy and advocate for gender equality. The project supports WROs through funding, capacity building, and networking opportunities, enabling them to become more effective in their advocacy efforts.





Legal Frameworks, Strategy, and Policy Actions by WVL-Nigeria Organizations Networks/ Movements



Legal Frameworks, Strategy, and Policy Actions by WVL-Nigeria Organizations Networks/Movements

- Advocated to the National Assembly for a plenary session on Gender Equal Opportunity Bills.
- Supported 5 Gender Bills for Constitutional Amendment addressing indigeneship, equal citizenship rights, 35% Affirmative Action for women in party administration, political appointments, and 111 legislative seats.
- Advocated and pushed for the 35% Affirmative Action for women at both national and state levels.
- Actively led the legal action against the Buhari government for non-implementation of 35% affirmative action.
- Supported and developed gender policies for 5 Nigerian universities.
- Supported the implementation of gender and disability policies in Federal Capital Territory schools through advocacy, capacity building for teachers, and technical support for disability inclusion strategies in 5 schools.
- Advocated for a cattle damage insurance policy to cover smallholder women farmers.
- Organized forums with CSOs and media to advocate for the adoption of the Maputo Protocol, ratified by Nigeria in 2005, to eliminate discrimination against women, especially the elderly.
- Advocated for the implementation of the National Gender Policy on Agriculture.
- Participated and supported the update of the INEC Gender Policy at the national level.
- Campaigned, advocated, and lobbied for the passage of the Electoral Act Bill in 2022.
- Provided technical input for the development of a Gender Policy Amendment for the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC).
- Submitted a draft gender representation bill by the Women in Politics Forum to the Speaker of the Abia State Assembly on February 12th, 2024.
- Supported the development of a gender policy for the University of Calabar, resulting in approval by the university senate and leadership.
- Advocated for the implementation of a land rights act to give women farmers access to land.



- Supported legislators' retreat and public hearing for the Kogi State VAPP Bill, which was passed and signed into law in 2020.
- Conducted advocacies, lobbying and supported the drafting and public hearing passage of VAPP and Child Rights Law in Kwara, Kebbi, Bauchi, Imo, and Cross Rivers State.
- Provided technical support to ensure women's interests were reflected in the All-Progress Congress (APC) National Constitution.
- Supported geo-political advocacy efforts for the national constitutional amendment committee.
- Advocated for the implementation of the HIV and AIDS anti stigma/discrimination act in schools, hospitals, and workplaces.
- Supported the development of a gender strategy for the African Democratic Congress.
- Supported the developed of gender strategy in 5 schools in Kebbi State.
- Advocacies for Enugu State Gender and Equal Opportunities Bill
- Advocated for Enugu State Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities Prohibition Law
- Partners advocacy actions contributed to the declare of a State of Emergency on Gender Based Violence/Rape by the Nigerian Governor's Forum in 2020 which led to states considering the VAPP law.
- Supported capacity building and provided financial and technical support to the State Ministry of Women Affairs for domestication of 1st State Action Plan for Implementation of United National Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women Peace and Security in Kwara State.
- Domestication of the Maputo Protocol on women's rights in Africa.
- Lagos State Health Insurance Scheme (LSHIS) "Ilera Eko" (Elderly individuals enrolled in the scheme can access a range of healthcare services).
- Facilitated the registration of the elderly with the Lagos State Residents' Registration Agency (LASRRA) – (This agency is responsible for registering all residents of Lagos State, which helps in identifying and providing targeted social services to elderly individuals. Registered elderly residents can benefit from various social welfare programs and health schemes provided by the state government).
- Influenced the inclusion of the informal sector in the reviewed Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) National Policies. This will ensure that microbusinesses, like petty traders, are included in various government plans.





**SUCCESS
STORIES**

35% Affirmative Action Signed Into Law in Kwara State



Despite the persistent advocacy from CSOs, women lawyers (FIDAs), women's rights activists about the low participation and non-inclusion of women in state politics, since the Beijing conference of 1995 for 35% Affirmative action, Kwara state has had no legislative framework or legal support for women vying for elective and appointive positions. The state did not also integrate the Affirmative action into its laws. The scenario, however, changed when a LWRO called CONCED paid an advocacy visit to the State's House of Assembly to lend their voice through the WVL-N project to demand for signing into law the 35% Affirmative action in Kwara state. With CONCED's advocacy to the House Committee on Women's Affairs agitating for 35% Affirmative action and support for women, Affirmative action was finally passed into law leading to an increased number of women in elective and appointment positions within the cabinet. During the last governor's administration, about women were appointed to 9 out of the 16 positions available.



Passage of the Violence Against Persons Prohibition Law and Child Rights Law in Kwara, Kebbi, Bauchi, Cross River, Kogi and Imo



After the COVID lockdown, WVL partners and ActionAid conducted a series of advocacies and pushed for the passage of the VAPP and Child Rights Law in the above states through the provision of financial and technical support for drafting of the policy, capacity building for state gender machineries, retreat for legislators to understand the policies, public hearing and publicity for the policies. These efforts contributed to the passage of both laws in the six states above. These policies are helping to address VAWG in these states.



Strengthened SGBV Justice System in Kwara State



Despite the political will and efforts by state and non-state actors in the prevention and response to VAWG in Kwara State, legal aid and justice for survivors was very weak in the state. Survivors only received psychosocial and economic empowerment but hardly got justice for the violence perpetrated against them. Perpetrators were hardly brought to book. For instance, from 2020-2022, out of the 204 survivors that had received support from GLOHWOC, only 1 survivor had received justice. Women left the shelter and returned to their abusive environments. It then became a critical issue to strengthen the justice arm of GBV response in Kwara State. Consequently, GLOHWOC through the Strategic Opportunity Fund on the WV-L-N Project, received funding to strengthen the justice arm of the State level SGBV Committee set up by Her Excellency, the First Lady of Kwara State. This intervention supported the inauguration of the SGBV Prosecution subcommittee comprising the Ministry of Justice, Police, National Human Rights Commission, State Judiciary, NSCDC amongst others and the subsequent institution of a bi-monthly meeting for the committee. A capacity building session on GBV response and collaboration was conducted for the committee after their inauguration, and so far they have facilitated the prosecution of 40 SGBV cases within one year, resulting in 5 life imprisonment convictions, 28 cases settled out of court and 7 cases currently in court.



Eradicating Patriarchal Potency in Nigerian Tertiary Institutions - Legal Frameworks to curb SGBV

In Nigerian universities, patriarchy, gender discrimination and harassment are rife leading to several unreported cases of SGBV, low female student enrolment as well as low female staff employment. In 2019, the University of Nasarawa State Keffi, recorded a case of SGBV involving a student and her lecturer (which was not openly announced), where the lecturer used his influential social status to evade punishment. Due to the prevalence of SGBV in Nigeria's tertiary institutions, the 100 Women Lobby Group in 2022 with funding from the WVL project worked with 5 universities (University of Abuja, Nasarawa State University, Michael and Cecelia Ibru University (MCIU), University of Benin and Delta State University) to influence and contribute to the development of their organizational Gender Policy. So far, both the MCIU and University of Benin have developed their gender policies and the draft document of the latter awaiting Senate approval.

The creation of this policy process coupled with sustained advocacy and sensitization meetings, have increased students' awareness of the whistleblowing apparatus set in motion by their school authorities to report any form of intimidation or sexual harassment by lecturers. In the words of the Vice Chancellor of the Nasarawa state University, Professor Suleiman Bala Mohammed 'perpetrators of these heinous crimes no longer have a hiding place in the University; any lecturer found culpable will face the full wrath of the law'. The significance of the intervention is that there now exists a legal framework with which disciplinary actions can be taken against SGBV perpetrators in tertiary institutions. Punishment of perpetrators will serve as deterrent to others and reduce the incidences of SGBV.



Constitutional Reform for Inclusive Leadership



Since 2014 when Women in Politics Forum (WIPF) got registered as a Non-Governmental Organization with the Corporate Affairs Commission, the organization has struggled to secure stable funding needed to position itself for impact. In 2020, through the WVL project, WIPF received funding and technical support from ActionAid Nigeria which helped the organization to recruit staff, develop organizational policies and its 5-year strategic plan as well as restructure its Board and management. With strengthened institutional capacity, WIPF was able to tackle the issues that women face within political party structures which appear to limit the number of female party members who can be elected to decision-making roles. In Nigeria, most political parties lack gender transformative policies needed to promote women's political participation.

The WVL project supported by ActionAid Nigeria and Global Affairs Canada enabled WIPF to carry out advocacies and provide technical support to the All-Progressives Congress (APC) and African Democratic Congress (ADC), to review each party's constitution to promote women's political participation. As a result of this intervention, the legal frameworks of these two political parties were strengthened to create opportunities for more women in leadership. A clear example is the constitution of the All-Progressives Congress which was reviewed during its 2022 convention for the first time to introduce 2 women on the party's National Working Committee NWC. The constitutional changes were as a result of WIPF's recommendation. By increasing the number of women on the NWC, the offices of the National Woman Leader and Deputy National Woman Leaders were able to



jointly advocate and lobby for more women to emerge as candidates in the party.

Today, Nigeria records 83 female elected officials, 44 of which are from the APC. This is an improvement from the 70 women elected in 2019, 26 of which were from APC. ADC supported and produced 23 female candidates. The words of Hajia Zainab Ibrahim best describe the transformation - *“Today I stand before you, not only as the Deputy National Woman Leader of the APC, but also as a member of the National Working Committee of the party and this was made possible by my party’s constitutional reform championed by Women In Politics Forum. I am confident that this will contribute to an increase in the number of women my party will support to win elections in the 2023 electioneering cycle”*. Haj. Zainab Ibrahim, Deputy National Woman Leader APC.



Strengthening Women Peace and Security in Kwara State



An analysis of the Banditry in North Central Nigeria research report, in the last decade shows that there were 1,412 incidents of conflict and 7,399 deaths reported across the North Central region. Kwara State is in the North-Central geo-political zone of Nigeria and the region is volatile, highly susceptible to militia attacks and sectarian crises. There had been frequent clashes between pastoralists and sedentary farmers. From December 2020 to March 2021; Kwara State witnessed a disturbing rise in kidnapping for ransoms, gang clashes, farmers-herders clash, targeted killings, trafficking in persons of which most of the victims of this insecurity were women and girls.

To enable the state to be proactive and have a coordinated approach for the prevention and response to issues of women in the context of insecurity, OCDI and ActionAid engaged the Kwara State Ministry of Women Affairs on the need to domesticate the United Nations Resolution 1325 on Women Peace and Security. Through the multi-year grant, Strategic Opportunity Fund and capacity building on the UNSCR 1325 provided via the WVL Project, the OCDI further conducted capacity building for the Kwara State Ministry of Women Affairs, non-governmental organizations as well as 16 desk officers in the state. The multi-stakeholder group eventually worked together with the ministry to develop the first State Action Plan (SAP) on Women Peace and Security. OCDI also supported the ministry with technical support (via a consultant) and funds to organize consultative forums, document review and validation meetings. Consequently, on May 8, 2022, the Kwara State Government launched its first SAP on Women Peace and Security providing a framework for the State to establish systems, policies and structures for conflict and SGBV prevention, disaster preparedness and response regarding women peace and security issues within the state.





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