

A close-up portrait of a Black woman with short, dark, curly hair, smiling warmly at the camera. She is wearing a black and white checkered top, a thin silver chain necklace, and small hoop earrings. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with a reddish-brown wall and a white door.

POLICY BRIEF

ON

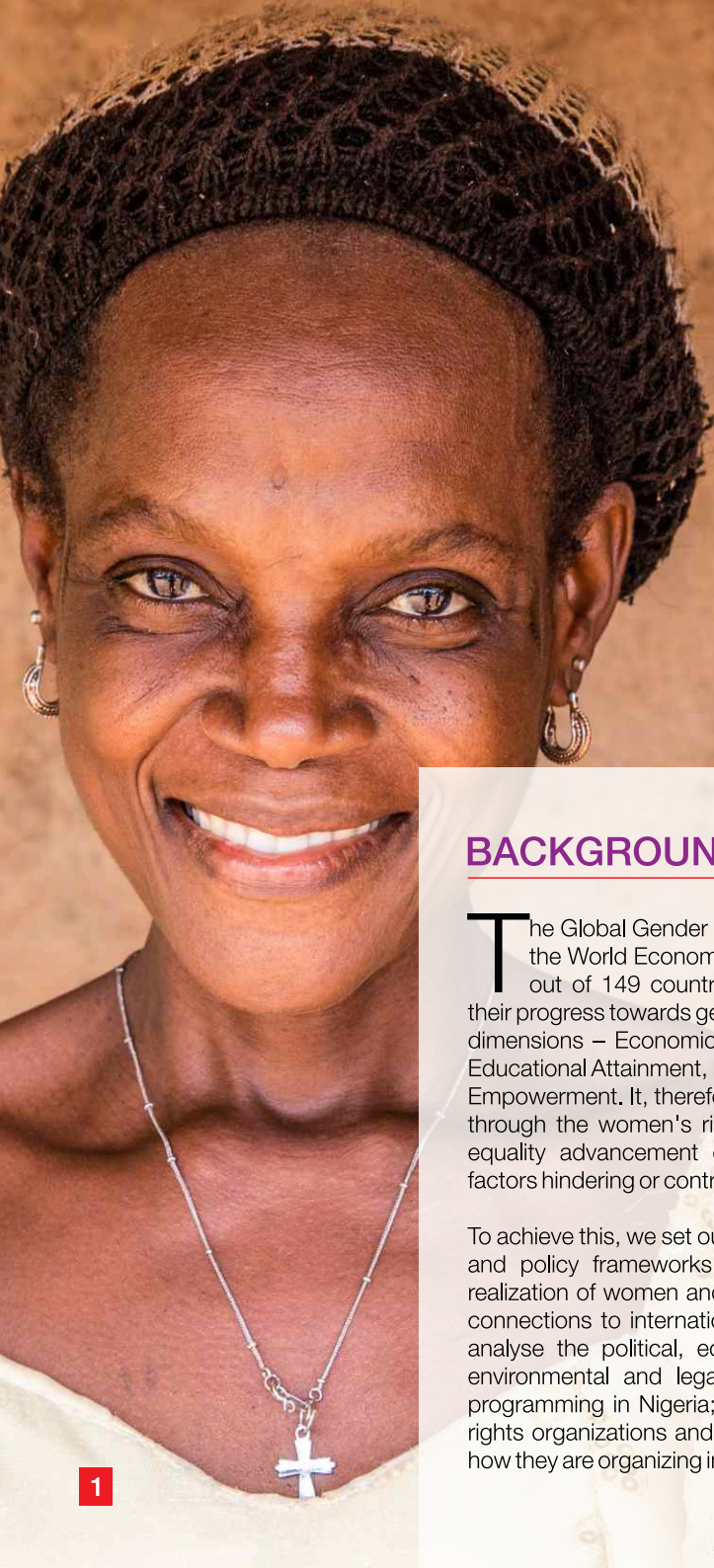
POLITICAL ECONOMY ANALYSIS
(PEA) OF GENDER EQUALITY AND
WOMEN'S RIGHTS PROGRAMME
IN NIGERIA

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Published by:
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Gwarinpa, Abuja

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ISBN:

2020



BACKGROUND

The Global Gender Gap Report 2018, published by the World Economic Forum, ranked Nigeria 133rd out of 149 countries benchmarked in relation to their progress towards gender parity across four thematic dimensions – Economic Participation and Opportunity, Educational Attainment, Health and Survival, and Political Empowerment. It, therefore, becomes important to scan through the women's rights programming and gender equality advancement environment to determine the factors hindering or contributing to the current realities.

To achieve this, we set out to identify and review the legal and policy frameworks that promote or impede the realization of women and girls' rights in Nigeria, making connections to international and global frameworks; to analyse the political, economic, social, technological, environmental and legal contexts of women's rights programming in Nigeria; to identify how local women's rights organizations and movements are organized and how they are organizing in projects states and in Nigeria.

GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS PROGRAMME IN NIGERIA

There is existing gender specific legislations that are geared towards the achievement of gender equality globally and locally, yet the impacts of these legislations have not translated to better living experiences for the Nigerian women. The ICESCR, for instance, guarantees the right to work, the right to form trade unions, rights relating to marriage, maternity and child protection, the right to an adequate standard of living, the right to health, the right to education, and rights relating to culture and science. These provisions were also adopted for the regional human rights instruments.

There is also global specific protection to women in laws which prohibits discrimination based on sex and ensures the equal right of men and women to the enjoyment of all rights contained in them (United Nations Human Rights, 2014). The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), adopted in 1979 and ratified on 3 September 1981, is the most unique among existing human rights instruments because it is concerned exclusively with promoting and protecting women's human rights and because it operates from the premise that patriarchy is a global reality.

These disadvantaged positioning of women affect them from rising to decision-making positions such as Assistant Inspector Generals (AIGs) or Deputy Inspector Generals (DIGs), etc. Regulation 127 of NPR which provides that an unmarried woman police officer who becomes pregnant shall be discharged from the force, affects the decision-making right of the women in their family and health matters. Commendably, however, Regulation 124 of NPR which requires women police to apply for permission to marry has been declared to be unconstitutional by a Federal High Court sitting in Lagos.

Furthermore, married women in the public sector are taxed based on the wrong assumptions that they have no family responsibilities and are maintained by men. The men are entitled to tax relief for children and dependents, whereas the women are not. Spouses and families of the men in management-level jobs are entitled to medical treatment, yet spouses and families of women are not entitled to medical treatment by their employers. Sections 34 and 44 of the Labour Act provide for a right to be accompanied by one's family at the employer's expense. However, the term family is explained to mean a husband, wives and children, and there is no room for a woman to enjoy such benefits.

In the final analysis, it becomes apparent that there are a few laws that seemingly provide for the rights of women not to be discriminated upon and for them to participate freely in key processes of their choice. However, these laws are not adequate and are not effectively being implemented. The existence of several discriminatory laws also portrays the lack of sincerity in guaranteeing women's rights generally as they hinder the actualisation of these rights with specific provisions. These hindrances are further amplified by cultural and religious preferences as are discussed here.

¹ See Article 18

WOMEN IN POLITICS AND POWER IN NIGERIA

The rights of women to participate freely in electoral processes in Nigeria are supposedly guaranteed under the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Section 77 (2) provides for citizen's right to vote and be vote for, on attainment of 18 years and once resident in Nigeria. Section 40 guarantees the right to assembly and association, including participation in political party of one's choice. Further, S. 42 prohibits discrimination based on sex against a citizen of Nigeria amongst others, while S. 14 promotes the principles of democracy, social justice and federal character. Going by The Provisions, it seems like women are given the freedom to participate actively in the electoral processes. However, these provisions are not given effect, and are often overshadowed with religious and cultural inclinations. Therefore, there is need to give effect to these provisions, with strict obligations on the part of government, in the realization of these principles.

Furthermore, a gendered analysis of the Electoral Act reveals that it is not a gender sensitive legislation. Unfortunately, only one section mentions anything on women and about the maintenance of two separate lines on the day of election. This is merely gender specific in form and not in substance. Widely expected affirmative action or proportional representation that will increase female representation is absent (Joy Ngozi Ezeilo, 2015). This has necessitated the Women Participation in Elections Support Bill 2018 which is pending before the National Assembly. The bill requires political parties to ensure that at least one-third of the total number of candidates from all the three senatorial zones, federal constituencies of the state, and the area councils of the FCT must be women. Several women leaders and activists have commended the provisions of this bill. For instance, a former majority leader of the House of Representatives suggested that additional seats should be reserved exclusively for women – one seat per state for the senate and two seats per state for the House of Representatives. Such could also be done in other elective and appointive positions. More so, policies should be in place to guide this action as such gender-sensitive decisions cannot be imposed on the political parties, especially where such is not in conformity with the extant constitutional and electoral framework.

Realistically, therefore, political participation in Nigeria is significantly skewed against women in the three arms of government and the three tiers of government. Research has shown that even with the affirmative action of 35% representation of women for political and non-elective positions in Nigeria, the number of women in the elective and appointed positions in Nigeria is not encouraging. For the executive and at the federal level, statistics from the 2017 National Bureau of Statistics reports have revealed that from 1999 through to 2019 elections, a woman has never been the President or the Vice President of Nigeria.

The fact remains that the marginalisation of women cuts across almost all sectors in the Nigeria – both public and private. Though the number of women in the corporate sector has increased after the CBN directive in 2014, there is still paucity of women in senior executive positions and on company boards (only 11.7 % of board directors in the country are women). This is shocking considering that research has shown that there is a positive correlation between women in senior corporate roles and a company's financial performance. Interestingly, the markets across Nigeria are the only places where female representation is of predominance and equal to men.

BARRIERS TO WOMEN PARTICIPATION OR REPRESENTATION IN POLITICS AND OTHER DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES

Multiple barriers prevent women from taking their place within the political arena, including legal, political, and cultural constraints. These barriers — which are often rooted in exclusionary traditional gender norms — bring additional challenges for women who belong to marginalized groups (Tatiana DiLanzo et al, 2018). Some of the specific barriers include the following:

- a. Most men misunderstand 'gender and human rights' and misconstrue it to be liberation, and competition by women.
- b. A male former gender officer of the GTU identified the mind-set of some elected legislators as a challenge as some of them argue that since women did not send them to the National Assembly, they have not come to the legislature do women's agenda there.
- c. Frequent turn-over of staff of FMWA from and to other sectors truncates knowledge, capacity and experiences gained.
- d. Cultural and Religious beliefs: it is believed in most tribes that women do not make better leaders, while some religions believe that women are the weaker sex and should not take up leadership roles. The founding Chairperson of the Muslim Women Cooperative, Abuja, stated that the Islamic doctrine teaches that women are not supposed to lead, but to assist and support men. Therefore, women are encouraged to vote and support during campaigns. Some others believe that women should only lead women not men. These beliefs are among the factors that serve as a barrier to women's participation in politics in Nigeria.
- e. The stigmatization on women that participate in politics as 'political prostitutes' also discourages women from political participation.
- f. The Nigerian society is patriarchal in nature; hence, women are always relegated to the back during politics and decision-making processes.
- g. Gender-based violence, especially violence in elections, is also one of the factors militating against women participation in politics.
- h. The insignificant number of female legislators makes it difficult for them to galvanise to push women agenda.
- i. God-fatherism also hinders the involvement of women in politics.
- j. The economic situation, especially the lack of funds to purchase the pricy tickets and carry on campaigns, serves as barriers to women's participation in politics.

³ Oral interview conducted with the Former Majority leader House of Representatives on 29 April, 2019.

⁴ Center for Africa, Women Make up 49 % of Population but only 4% of Law

Makers<<https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/africaatlse/2016/03/08/women-in-nigeria-make-up-49-per-cent-of-the-population-but-only-four-per-cent-of-lawmakers/>>

⁵ Center for Africa, Women Make up 49 % of Population but only 4% of Law Makers

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WOMEN AND ECONOMY IN NIGERIA

Women's economic empowerment is the process of achieving women's equal access to and control over economic resources and ensuring they can use them to exert increased control over other areas of their lives (Abigail Hunt and Emma Samman, 2016). It is observed that there are so many constraints to women economic participation such as education (formal or informal), access to properties, access to financial services, lack of medical services which may lead to maternal mortality, cultural practices, child marriage, child labour social protection, legal, regulatory and policy frameworks, gender norms and discriminatory social norms.

Sixty-four percent of Nigerian women reside in the rural areas (MICS5, 2016/17). Women in Nigeria are predominately engaged in the informal sector including petty trading, subsistence to middle scale farming, as artisans, beauty services, etc. This means that interventions should be targeted at the rural areas and in women predominant occupation. However, these interventions should be strategic and seek to significantly empower them and not come as menial packages. When women are empowered, they can afford better health care for themselves and provide more for their families.

⁶ Oral interview conducted with a Deputy Director at the FMWA on 29 April 2019.

⁷ Oral interview conducted with a Former majority leader HOR on 29 April 2019.

⁸ UN Women, 'It's election season in Nigeria, but where are the women?'

⁹ <http://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2019/2/feature-women-in-politics-in-nigeria> accessed 27 April 2019

ECONOMIC VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Economic violence is a form of violence being experienced by women in Nigeria and elsewhere in the world. This form of violence in Nigeria includes but not limited to access to funds and credit and means of production for livelihood sustainability. It extends to the control and restriction of women access to employment, education, economic and agricultural resources, and financial decision-making as well as discriminatory traditional laws on inheritance, property rights, and use of communal land. At work, women experienced receiving unequal remuneration for work done equal in value to the men's, were overworked and underpaid, and used for unpaid work outside the contractual agreement. At the home front, some were barred from working by partners; while other men totally abandoned family maintenance to the women. Economic violence results in deepening poverty and compromises educational attainment and developmental opportunities for women.

According to a World Bank Report, over 2.7 billion women are legally restricted from having the same choice of jobs as men globally. Of 189 economies assessed in 2018, 104 economies still have laws preventing women from working in specific jobs, 59 economies have no laws on sexual harassment in the workplace and in 18 economies; husbands can legally prevent their wives from working.

WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

Financial inclusion is very important for women. In teaching women empowering skills for livelihood, there is need to also build their capacity in marketing skills, how to engage in meaningful cooperatives and how to access soft loans. It is good to ensure accountability and documentation of soft loans and find out what they will use the funds for. There is also a need to monitor and follow through with participants after skills acquisition.

Cooperative groups are a good place to revolve funds as they act as guarantors for each other. It may also be better to purchase land, equipment or seedlings and provide such requirements for women than to give them cash, as their husbands may force them to use such soft loans for family matters.

Training and economic empowerment of women should be on the front burner, as most gender-based violence is as a result of women's low economic status and inability to access and afford legal options to enforce their rights. The need for counselling and rehabilitation of victims of SGBV is also important, as this will encourage other victims to seek help. A former Minister for Women Affairs identified the need to fund safe shelters for women and other groups, like FIDA, that provide pro bono services, for sustainability. Where the perpetrators of SGBV are adequately and timely punished, it will encourage victims of SGBVs to speak out.

There is also need to fund media platforms that are gender sensitive as this gives women a platform to voice their views and challenges and also steers discussions on women rights and issues. One of the ways to achieve this is through women coalitions. However, women coalitions within the country have been riddled with all sorts of challenges over time.

⁹ Fawole, O. I. (2008). Economic Violence To Women and Girls: Is It Receiving the Necessary Attention? *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, 9 (3), 167 – 177. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1524838008319255>; IMF (2018), Pursuing Women's

Economic empowerment, Electronic copies of IMF Policy Papers are available to the public from <http://www.imf.org/external/pp/ppindex.aspx>

¹⁰ *ibid*

¹¹ World Bank, Women, Business and Law 2018, (Washington, D. C., 2018), available at <http://wbl.worldbank.org/>

¹² Amina Mohammed via a recorded Skype call to the AWLN, Nigerian Chapter launch on 2nd May, 2019.

¹³ Oral interview conducted with a former majority leader HOR on 29th April, 2019

¹⁴ Oral interview conducted with a former majority leader HOR on 29th April, 2019

¹⁵ Oral interview conducted with a former majority leader HOR on 29th April, 2019

CHALLENGES ON SUSTAINABILITY OF WOMEN COALITIONS

A former Minister for Women Affairs identified suspicions on mismanagement of funds as a challenge. Women management is very difficult. Some women will believe that the hard work of other women is not for nothing and therefore allege that funds have been mismanaged in favour of the most hardworking ones.

- According to a feminist activist and the national Chairperson of TMG, Dr Abiola Akiyode-Afolabi, the key challenge of coalition building is trust, transparency and accountability as building trust takes time.
- A former majority leader of HOR notes that sometime in the past, women sabotaged themselves, but this seldom happens now as women are realizing that is part of designed strategy to keep them away from organizing for change.
- A former member of House of Representatives identified internal caucusing interests as a challenge to women coalition sustainability. Since the women come from different political parties, they are more politically aware and look out for how their interests are protected in the coalition.
- Since most coalitions are dependent on the member NGOs to fund them, it becomes a challenge.

Sustainability for donor-driven coalition is also a problem, especially if the agenda, strategy or donor priority shifts.

RECOMMENDATIONS

General recommendations have been put forward concurrently with the challenges we have highlighted in this piece. Based on the challenges on sustainability of women coalitions, the following recommendations could be useful:

- i. A former Minister for Women Affairs identified shared interest (on women's rights and issues) to be agreed on; trust and openness – need to shun competition and the desire that everyone must be a leader in the group – as qualities that sustain coalitions. Although women groups are beginning to imbibe these cultures and are beginning to work better, this study recommends that leadership can be rotated amongst the member groups.
- ii. A former majority leader of HOR recommended adequate communication between the management of the coalition and the women groups/members, to keep them informed on what is going on.
- iii. Sincerity of purpose and integrity are also important, especially for leadership of such coalitions, in order to reinforce vital aspects of trust building.
- iv. Coalitions should discard the NGO models and structures, avoid membership and provide flexible platforms with no strict attendance, where interactions are issue dependent, not donor dependent.
- v. Coalitions and networks should be allowed to evolve or engendered and driven by people with collective interests at all levels, especially at the Local Government level closest to the people.

¹⁶ Oral interview conducted with a former majority leader HOR on 29th April, 2019



CONCLUSION

Unarguably, the global movement for the advancement of gender equality and women's empowerment has caught up with Nigeria as women's rights activists and gender focused organizations are pushing daily across sectors, ethnic, class and religious divides to mainstream critical issues of concern to women and girls in Nigeria into national political and development agenda, as well as policies and programmes in order to create enabling environment for women to enjoy their human rights and be economically empowered like their counterparts elsewhere in the world.

It is the power of coalitions, institutional mechanism and capacity building of women's organizations, including provision of much needed funding/resources that will propel the long desired and overdue transformation of mainstreaming women's interests in the political economy of Nigeria. For now, where the power is, Nigerian women are not. Access to capital including land which is an important means of production has continued to elude women, contributing to feminization of poverty and women's low status.

¹⁷ Oral interview conducted with a former member of HOR on 2nd May, 2019

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Women's Voice and Leadership-Nigeria
(WVL) Project is funded by

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