



CENTRE FOR DEMOCRACY AND DEVELOPMENT

# **WOMEN AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN NIGERIA**

A Policy Brief from the 2019 Elections



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## A development that is not engendered is endangered.

Nigeria's 2019 election, the sixth in a series of elections in twenty years of unbroken democracy, has returned a regression in the representation of women in public life. This policy brief, which emanates from a study on women's political participation in the 2019 elections, shows why this situation persists, what is changing and what can be done to increase women's participation in public life. The brief is a call to action for critical players across all spheres to effectively re-imagine how to include women in public life. The players include: governments, election management bodies, political parties, women politicians, the community, religious and traditional institutions, professionals across the private, and informal sector and industries, development partners, the women's movement, and men and women, boys and girls.

For women, everything is political, and everything is local. Politics for women does not start when they choose to run for office. It begins from birth when they are labelled in families and then socialised into girls/ women much as boys are in society. Poverty has a woman's face because 60% percent of the poor are women (IMF). Poverty is even more severe for a woman with a disability because she suffers a triple challenge of being female, poor, and having a disability.

Poverty and wealth are, however, multi-faceted. As women experience poverty of income and voice, they still have tremendous social capital at the family and community level that can be converted into a resource for amplifying participation and voice. Women's labor is appropriated and sometimes misappropriated across all of these spheres. They are the mothers, the homemakers and tea ladies, the dancers at political rallies, the tokenist few in the corporate sector that are upheld to prove affirmative action exists on paper. Women are 50% of voters, the cog without which the wheel cannot turn, but they are shunned once the wheel begins to turn.

In 20 years of democratic dispensation (1999 – 2020), little has changed for women. They remain politically underrepresented. The numbers continue to dwindle, or at best, fluctuate. Seven percent is the highest national average of women elected into public office, recorded in 2011. By 2019, the cumulative average statistics was 4.5% (Women Fund, 2019).

A representation of women as 4.5% of all elected officials is at odds with voter turnout figures and 42 million female registered voters i.e., half the 84 million registered voters (INEC, 2019). At the political party level, more women aspirants were recorded but fewer candidates emerged, and by import, fewer were elected. This situation shows that the challenge of lack of respect for the value of a female candidacy persists. Female candidates are not yet attractive enough to the ordinary voter or the political party stalwarts who determine the direction of voting and candidates' selection. This realisation leads to some critical conclusions about the gaps in how we plan for and with women, the quality and consistency of participation, and the nature of the political field, all of which reinforce the persistent structural obstacles in women's path.

## What we are learning

When we compare the electoral landscape across a decade through three elections, 2011, 2015, and 2019, the trends show us an incremental rise in awareness of women's right to participate and the value women can bring to politics. This fact is evident in an increased number of women aspirants despite the challenges facing women in the political-economy ecosystem. There is cause for celebration and also caution. While we affirm the agency of the women who chose to run for office, we must understand other extraneous factors leading to this trend to avoid a regression like that experienced in 2015, after a climb in 2011.

**Table 1: Number of women in public office by percentage and year**

Number of Women by Percentage and Year														
SN	Position	Seats	1999	%	2003	%	2007	%	2011	%	2015	%	2019	%
1	Presidency	1	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
2	Senate	109	3	2.7	4	3.6	9	8.2	8.	7.3	8	7.3	8	7.34
3.	House of Reps	360	12	3.3	21	5.83	26	7.2	26	6.4	19	5.27	11	3.06
4.	Governorship	36	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
5.	Deputy Governorship	36	1	2.78	2	5.56	6	16.67	3	8.33	4	11.11	4	11.11
6.	36 State Houses of Assembly	990	12	1.21	38	3.84	55	5.25	62	6.26	57	5.76	41	4.14

Source: WARD, Women Trust Fund, 2019

More female candidates aspired for higher executive and legislative offices in 2019. The increase in the number of female guber candidates and presidential candidates is unprecedented. More political parties had female presidential or vice-presidential candidates than in previous years. Compared to 2011 when we had two vice presidents, 2019 had five female VPs (NWTF, 2020).

An increase in the number of political parties from 63 in 2011 to 91 for the 2019 elections was an advantage for women – they had a bigger canvas to work from. Although a late start to campaigns and weak party infrastructure counted against them, women gained valuable experience in organising and running for office (FGD, CDD 2020). The Not Too Young to Run Movement (#NTYR) created space for younger persons to aspire. While the gendered character may not be equitable, the wrong assumption that 'youth' refers principally to the male sex saw male contenders' dominance even though young women were also part of the movement. However, the #NTYR trend remains a platform for young women to build their political strength and a legal framework to push for gender equity from a generational perspective.

There may no longer be 'big' or 'small' political parties. Each party can pitch its tent within the scope of its resources, anticipating a defined number of local, state, or federal level sets it can win on its platform, the same as any other political party.

We are learning that making the desired change happen for women in public life will take pulling together across all spheres of human interaction. Therefore, this policy brief is not directed at one particular audience but rather takes a broad view of the dimensions and sources of inequality women experience from birth, which culminates in exclusion from effective participation in public life, especially politics.

Technology has changed the way elections, and public engagement is conducted. Women do not have access to technology. They lose a potential tool to sell their candidature to and influence the larger active audience with fewer resources than a regular physical campaign would require.

The change we seek does not begin with, nor should it revolve around election cycles. It should start long before then, so elections become only the milestones of change. We need to guard against regression and keep a firm view of progress for women, even in movements that appear to include women; for example, the #NYTR movement lacks a strong gender equity character. Women's rights must be framed not just as a matter of justice – which it is - but also as common sense and as a pathway to sustainable, transformative change. Investing in women and girls has been shown to have the desired multiplier effect on all other sectors and spheres of life.

## Policy Recommendations

### The Executive: Be the Catalyst for Change

Strong national machinery for the advancement of women and promoting a culture of gender equality is required at the state and federal levels. This is evidenced by political commitment and the availability of necessary human and financial resources to catalyse gender equality, at the highest level. The Federal Government of Nigeria should:

1. Implement the National Gender Policy (2021-27), activate its action plan, and evaluate funding and key performance indicators
2. Ensure all Ministries, Departments and Agencies have gender equity and social inclusion (GESI) indicators in their programming and budgets
3. Ensure equitable representation of women in all appointive positions with at least 35% of the numbers or as the NGP may propose.

4. Practice gender twining in the leadership of political offices where the chair and deputy are of different gender and popularise the same approach in other public spheres, for example, the bureaucracy.
5. Disaggregate data on sex and social inclusion to show how opportunities are reaching women and men, persons with disabilities, and hard-to-reach communities
6. Lead a review of national curriculum to enhance gender equity and social inclusion and ensure school curricula show GESI in modules, practice and all learning.

### **The Legislature: Laws must touch lives, to be useful**

Both at the Federal and State levels, actions are required to expand the space for women and girls; the legislature should specifically:

1. Pass an affirmative action law which gives 50 – 50 equal participation to women and men in political office
2. Enact laws that protect women, girls, and boys, such as the Violence Against Persons Prohibition ( VAPP) Act, of 2015. Where such laws exist, they play a very effective oversight function by assessing the effectiveness of the response of community protection officers
3. Ensure gender-responsive constitution reforms addressing issues of citizenship, indigineship and other rights protection for women and girls
4. Demand regular gender equity and social inclusion (GESI) re-training for legislators and staff, and the executive with annual reporting on the status of capacity
5. Ensure that appropriation laws demonstrate GESI key performance indicators
6. Demand that all Ministries, Departments, and Agencies have gender and social inclusion indicators included and funded in programming.

### **The Judiciary: How does Law lead to Justice?**

1. Strengthening alternative dispute resolution and community-level justice systems
2. Strengthening the institution of justice and efficient judiciary
3. Promote accountability within the bench for quick dispensation of justice
4. Ensure access to justice for women and a gender-responsive and conscious judiciary



### **Community: It still takes the Collective to Protect Everyone**

1. Show an awareness of, and acknowledge changing roles due to socio-economic dynamics.
2. Proclaim the equal rights of all persons regardless of gender
3. Audit community resources to find avenues to demonstrate gender justice
4. Review social norms for an audit of those norms that uphold justice and those that do not advance justice
5. Promote life-changing opportunities for both gender, including education, work, and public life
6. Demand that women, girls and boys are protected by all

### **Security Agencies: True security is built on trust and yields safety**

1. Implement the national action plan on the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security
2. Provide and nurture a secure environment for women and girls, and female politicians to engage in the public space, particularly during election campaign season. Ensure affirmative action in participation at peace roundtables and critical decision-making processes.
3. Ensure gender mainstreaming in the security architecture, including sex-disaggregated data and employing more women in the sector to build trust and engender community policing
4. Investigate threats and attacks on women and take them seriously by acting on reports. This will help to prevent potential harm to female politicians and ensure their safety
5. Security sector players should also sign peace pacts to uphold the tenets of duty ahead of elections
6. Prosecute erring members within the ambits of the rule of law
7. Adopt regular training and awareness engagements including sponsoring public service announcements that speak to protection of women and girls and support for female politicians

### **INEC: Be an Inclusive Umpire**

1. Implement the INEC gender policy, 2014
2. Make a case for a change in the electoral system from a simple first past the post to a proportional representation, and quota system which has women high up on the list
3. Demand that political parties operationalise equity and inclusion clauses in their

constitutions

4. Work with security agencies to ensure safe spaces for all citizens around election cycles

### **Political Parties: Quality People Build the Party**

1. Implement the GESI clauses in your constitution
2. Practice affirmative action to bring equity to political opportunities on the party platform
3. Have a gender policy that considers the vulnerabilities facing women, including time use.
4. Like all legitimate work, do your business by the light of day; avoid midnight meetings
5. Strengthen the political leadership schools where politicians can learn to be public servants
6. Educate the public about the value of women's candidature
7. Adopt the twinning approach where the heads of committees, panels etc., are not of the same gender

### **Women Political Candidates: Resources are Roses**

1. Join political parties and invest in the parties long before seeking an elective post
2. Bring your resources ( networking, energy, intellect) as a resource to the party and insist it is recognised
3. Seek offices within parties and support women who do
4. Form a caucus of women, and develop your skills and political knowledge through training and the exchange of ideas
5. Keep a strong link and connection to women in the women's movement for support, solidarity, and strategy development, including testing the party rules and constitution
6. By all means, seek elective positions at the national level but also think about building a community base and capital by starting the political climb from contesting at community levels
7. Seek leadership positions outside of political parties to expand your network

### **Religious Institutions: Uphold Justice**

1. Promote objective stories of gender relations that show the equal values of worship of the female and male.
2. Promote the importance of education for both girls and boys
3. Punish any abuse of power by religious leaders found violating the rights of vulnerable
4. Uphold the importance of women playing a leadership role
5. Speak up via the pulpit on the value of women's leadership in the private and public sphere
6. Encourage justice within families towards girls and boys, women and men



## **The Media: Speak Truth to Power**

1. Bring a gender-responsive lens to reporting
2. Give equal coverage to female and male candidates
3. Create deliberate policies to have women and men who understand equity, diversity and inclusion principles in management
4. Create policies to encourage a new generation of women to join journalism
5. Set and evaluate training and re-training goals for staff and management on centring GESI in the media outlet
6. Have zero tolerance for Gender-Based Violence, and sanction members who violate the rights of others
7. Conduct research and due diligence. Verify news before propagating it

## **Entertainment Industry: Life Can Imitate Art**

1. Review storylines and scripting to tell stories of women's agency rather than stereotypical stories
2. Create a fund for women's stories, accessible to women producers
3. Sanction members of the industry who trivialise the lived experiences of women and girls, for example, comedians who make jokes about rape
4. Celebrate members who use innovative ways to shine the light on gender-based discrimination with a broad reach and impact

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7. Adopt the twinning approach where the heads of committees, panels etc., are not of the same gender

## **Women's Movement: We Are Stronger Working Across Differences**

1. Strategise to build a broad-based movement of women across class and geography and generation
2. Design a sustainable framework for mentoring which gives values, knowledge, and opportunity to girls and boys with spaces for young women to aspire to lead within organisations, schools, party structures and in all spheres of public life

3. Continue to design, implement and test the impact of local and global spaces where skills and experience can be shared across generations
4. Build data, use data for evidence-based advocacy, demand that data is sex and inclusivity disaggregated in all spheres
5. Demand, document, and disseminate women's stories to showcase their efforts and the difference their agenda can make across all spheres
6. Enable the use of technology to amplify women's candidature, including reducing the time use burden of women and girls in other spheres
7. Cultivate the media as a critical friend that understands and reports women's issues, be prepared to call out the media when they err
8. Speak up. Organise rallies and symposia. Continue to provide learning spaces for women and girls in public life
9. Think creatively about new ways to enhance women's candidature, including raising and keeping social and economic resources
10. Organise to review the implementation of the national gender policy and all other relevant institutional gender policies
11. Affirm men who stand with and enable women to reach their potential

### **Development partners: Raise the Bar!**

1. Give long-term, sustained support to women's political participation especially political participation and election planning
2. Encourage the inclusion of GESI indicators as a precondition for development grants and aid
3. Track and evaluate GESI indicators as a condition for further grants
4. Continue to hold governments accountable wherever funded
5. Support initiatives that allow women to participate and thrive in public life
6. For every support to the government make a similar grant to civil society players for independent evaluation

### **The Academia: Town and Gown is Sustainable Partnership**

1. Strengthen gender units and encourage the mainstreaming of gender studies into all curriculum
2. Develop a sexual harassment policy that is implementable and attracts penalties when violated
3. Develop curricula that create a link between academia, society, and the state. For instance all faculties of law should be encouraged to give students the option of a Gender and Law/Constitutionalism course.
4. Faculties should encourage dissertations that examine broader lived realities in society, across all fields of study. For example, pay attention to legal instruments with import for inclusion, not yet domesticated or implemented in Nigeria. Women's candidature, internal

political party democracy, poverty of time, and how technology can alleviate the situation, etc

5. Academics and administrative staff should make more effort to protect female students from GBV
6. The leadership of academia should design and consciously implement strategies to encourage and retain more women in academia.

### **Professionals: You Can be the Bridge that Ushers in New Opportunities**

1. Cultivate principles of respect for diversity, equity, and inclusion in your various spaces and demonstrate your commitment by living these values. Let the numbers and positions of women relative to men in your areas of influence speak for commitment to these values
2. Recognise the organic link between women's reproductive and productive roles and shape policies that demonstrate that awareness, for example, flex work hours, paternity leave, and maternity leave kept separate from annual leave.
3. Create safe spaces for colleagues regardless of gender or disability and enable an opportunity to seek redress when rights are violated.
4. Encourage women to take up leadership roles the same as men
5. Contribute to women's political campaigns and aspirations through financial, legal, and other forms of support.

### **Youth and Students: Positive Energy and Momentum Can Help Build a Resilient Future**

1. Document and operationalise a student rights doctrine that is informed by gender and equity lens
2. Investigate the background of leadership for any known misogynistic tendencies or corruption
3. Hold debates on, and question a public policy that is exclusive and does not offer equal participation across generation, gender, geography, class, and disability
4. Collaborate within and outside the walls of learning at the secondary and tertiary level to build solidarity across purported differences
5. Run for public office with a people-centred agenda and hold yourselves and others accountable.
6. Ensure affirmative action is practised in all spaces with equitable participation and representation of all gender
7. Revitalise and/or energize student unions where this is necessary in order to provide students with platforms for engaging in the practice of democracy through elections, selection of representatives and officials, debate, etc.

### **Men and boys: Your Strength is for Protecting Others and Yourself**

1. Make no excuse for violence in any form, including sexual harassment. Respect the rights of survivors and victims and never blame the victim
2. Ensure equal opportunities for all children, whether boys or girls
3. Respect women—mothers and wives matter. Do not elevate one and denigrate the other.
4. In whatever role you may find yourself, be just and equitable and support the development of policies that allow full integration and affirmation of all regardless of gender
5. Speak up in the family and protect the rights of all children, especially girls
6. Speak up, speak out, and prevent abuse. where you see it happening to anyone of any gender
7. Keep an open eye to sexual abuse that can diminish the confidence of girls or boys and their dignity
8. Make political choices and/or support political causes for improving women's representation in public life
9. Raise socially and politically conscious children from an early age encouraging community service, debating government policies and supporting causes.

### **Women and girls: You are a Strong Breed, not the Weaker Sex**

1. Speak up in the family and protect the rights of all children, especially girls
2. Speak up, speak out, and prevent abuse. where you see it happening to anyone of any gender
3. Keep an open eye to sexual abuse that can diminish the confidence of girls or boys and their dignity
4. Raise children that are gender-responsive and understand the value of partnership and the importance of women and men working together
5. Support women who seek public office and speak up about the value of such endeavours
6. Find harmony between the many parts that make you female. It is alright to put family first, but remember, you are more than just a vessel that satisfies others.
7. Make political choices and/or support political causes for improving women's representation in public life.

