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WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND LEADERSHIP ASSESSMENT

Nigeria

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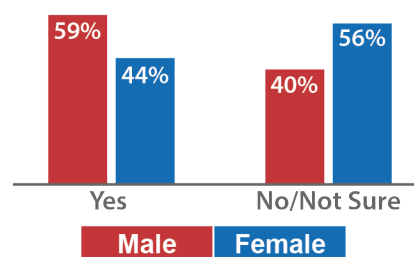
The women's political participation and leadership (WPPL) assessment in Nigeria, one of an eight-country pilot under USAID's Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance (DRG) Learning, Evaluation, and Research (LER) II activity, uses the latest iteration of USAID's [WPPL Assessment Framework](#). The Nigeria WPPL assessment investigates the barriers to and opportunities for expanding women's participation and leadership in Nigeria along socio-cultural, institutional, and individual dimensions. Despite a nominal quota, women in Nigeria are underrepresented at all levels of government, the number of women elected has declined since 2015, and while disaggregated voter data is not available, women face significant barriers to full and meaningful participation in politics. The assessment findings discussed in this report are derived from a desk review of relevant literature and USAID documents, a survey completed by 116 politicians unevenly spread across the six geopolitical zones in Nigeria, 29 KIIs, and 11 FGDs with men and women politicians, CSOs, and media in Abuja, Akwa Ibom, and Gombe States. The Nigeria WPPL Assessment Report can be used by the relevant stakeholders to identify priority areas where their investments in programs and initiatives to support women's political participation and leadership are likely to have the greatest and most meaningful impact.

FINDINGS

BARRIERS TO WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND LEADERSHIP

- Prevailing gender norms and stereotypes, driven by patriarchal systems informed by conservative religious interpretations, shape the ability of women to participate in public and political life, and vary considerably across the country's diverse geographic, religious and economic strata. Women across Nigeria face stronger barriers accessing politics due to compounding discrimination, particularly in the North. Because women still do the majority of caregiving and are still expected to adhere to traditional gender roles, they have less time and opportunities than men to participate in politics.
- There is no legal framework to meaningfully promote women's political participation, or provide protections against rampant violence against them in the personal, public, and political spaces. Legislators have consistently resisted implementing gender equality measures and rejected five key bills that had the potential to bolster women's equal rights and promote their participation and representation in politics.
- Political parties lack internal democracy, meaning that the leaders of political parties, who are mostly men, often make decisions behind closed doors and intentionally exclude women members, making it difficult for women party members to be part of that process. In addition, political party leaders do not provide women candidates or leaders equal resources or opportunities and women lack resources to participate.
- Violence against women in politics (VAWIP) often comes from men in their own parties feeling threatened if women become too popular and attempting to undermine their leadership. Contributing to this, the media often reproduces false and harmful narratives about women leaders that are promoted on social media.

DO MEN AND WOMEN HAVE EQUAL VOICES AND INFLUENCE IN POLITICAL DEBATES IN NIGERIA?



OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND LEADERSHIP

- The legal framework around women's political participation could be revisited now that national elections are completed and there is a reasonable timeframe to manage a serious legislative reform process. INEC has a gender policy that could be used by election authorities to incentivize party reforms in the inter-election period and parliament could reconsider measures on gender equality.
- Due to their long exclusion from the political space, women have developed a strong presence in civil society and have successfully advocated for legislation to promote WPPL, among other gains for women's rights.
- Primary and secondary schools provide an important space for girls and boys to begin engaging in politics, though these institutions are not without some similar challenges to political parties. In addition, higher education is more accessible for women than ever before.
- There is openness amongst some traditional and religious leaders on the benefits of women's participation and leadership and the demerits of women's exclusion from political spaces.

“...It is not the people that repress women's political participation but the prevailing culture and the political set up. Because in some cultures women are not even allowed to go out. They are strictly in their homes as housewives and mothers. For her to even come out to vote, is a problem.”

—Woman CSO member



SELECTED RECOMMENDATIONS

SOCIO-CULTURAL FACTORS

- The Ministry of Education, in collaboration with local stakeholders, should support gender transformative education programs in primary and secondary schools.
- Donors and CSOs should develop programming that engages men gatekeepers and allies, including in political parties and INEC, to shift harmful views and behaviors.
- Donors should support locally-led WPPL public information campaigns, rooted in cultural values, that name and take on patriarchal behavior, including partnering with leaders of religious organizations to show how religious views and gender equality can coexist.
- CSOs should train a diverse groups of media workers (e.g., regional/national, print, television, digital) to cover WPPL, VAWP, and Gender Based Violence (GBV) to transform harmful gender norms, prevent gendered disinformation in their platforms, and promote women candidates.

INSTITUTIONAL FACTORS

- Stakeholders both in the government and civil society should regroup and reignite advocacy efforts for the passage of gender equality bills, such as the quota bill that ensures that women constitute at least 35 percent of federal and state executive councils or ministerial and commissioner positions.
- In partnership with CSOs, INEC should act on its existing authority to advocate for gender equality in political parties, which are key to promoting WPPL.

INDIVIDUAL FACTORS

- International and local CSOs should provide consistent and proactive capacity building of women party members and support for existing young leaders, not only around important elections. Capacity building should include campaigning, media engagement, and knowledge of the legal framework.
- Donors should design and implement a mentorship program for women politicians to teach them the formal and informal rules needed to deepen participation and leadership and deepen a peer network.