



POLICY BRIEF

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Inclusive Gender Representation in Governance in Nigeria: The need to strengthen women representation through Political Party Nominations.

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Summary

- Statistics have shown that women constitute half of the world's population, yet their representation in the political and socio economic development and policy making of many developing countries, including Nigeria is still very low.
- There is a growing acknowledgement of the need to include women, minority groups, and the disabled and disadvantaged people in governance for any democracy to thrive and for stable peace and development to be achieved.
- The experiences of some countries, developing and developed, however show a gradual increase in the number of women in politics. For example, Finland has achieved 62.5%, Seychelles (43.8%), New Zealand (31.4%), Guyana (31.3%) and Cameroon (31.1%) women representation in politics. Nigeria needs to follow the steps of these and similar other countries to increase the number of women in politics in the country.
- The Nigerian government needs to review existing laws or enact a law that would make it compulsory for political parties to nominate female candidates for elective and appointive positions.
- The National Assembly may ensure that the quota system in Nigeria is fully adopted and used by political parties.

Introduction

Women representation and participation/inclusion in politics has been an issue of discussion in the world and Nigeria as well. This is because of a growing acknowledgement of the need to include women, minority groups, and the disabled and disadvantaged people, among others, in politics and governance for democracy to thrive and for peace and development to be achieved. The presence of more women in politics has a positive impact on governance, and can encourage other women



to become leaders¹. Statistics have shown that women constitute half of the world’s population, but their representation in the political and socio economic development, and policy making of developing countries, including Nigeria, is still very low². Efforts have been made by the Nigerian government, as a member of the United Nations, to eliminate gender discrimination and ensure gender equality and human dignity of all men and women with the formulation of a National Gender Policy in 2006, which promotes a 35 percent affirmative action for women in governance processes. Despite this policy, the involvement of women in governance processes in the country is still very low due to the fact that there are still no structures in place to ensure implementation and smooth running of the policy. As such, instead of an increase in women’s presence in politics there is a decrease, for example, at the federal level, as shown in the table below:

Table showing women representation in Nigeria

S/N	YEAR	POSITION	Number/Percentage
1	2015	Senators	8 out of 109 members
2	2019	Senators	7 out of 109 which represents 6% of the Senate
3	2015	House of Representatives	22 out of 360 members
4	2019	House of Representatives	Between 12 to 15 women out of 360 members which represents 3-4 percent of the representatives

Source: Authors compilation, 2021

This low level of women representation in politics in Nigeria, according to the Head of European Union Election Observation Mission to Nigeria, Maria Arena, can be attributed to “lack of promotion of women by political parties.” She said, “Nigeria has the lowest rate of women in parliament in Africa, with the number steadily decreasing since 2011³.”

¹ Hinds, 2015

² Election Commission Nepal, 2013

³ <https://www.dailytrust.com.ng/how-female-lawmakers-lost-ground-in-9th-assembly.html>).



Based on the analysis above, there is a serious need to ensure representation of the views, interests and needs of all citizens—both women and men—⁴, which is critical for good governance and the political process. Achieving gender equality and empowerment of women is beneficial and leads to the inclusion of all in society. This can be done through the political parties because they are gatekeepers of elections, and they can play a critical role in promoting women in political processes. As they nominate candidates, provide campaign funding to candidates, rally voters, and create national platform⁵. This brief, therefore, highlights the important role political parties can play to ensure and promote female candidates quotas among their nominees, and train and support female candidates at all levels. It also examines institutional barriers to women’s political participation and representation and involvement in decision making processes in Nigeria.

Issues on the need to strengthen Women’s Political Representation in decision making

Gender equality and women’s involvement in politics and political empowerment are fundamental human rights of women; and they are necessary for the achievement and, equitable inclusion and for sustainable development⁶. They also have the right to be part of governance, that is, to vote and be voted for as provided by chapter 4 of the Nigerian constitution. Therefore, the right of women to participate in political life is guaranteed by the constitution. But transforming this abstract right into a reality requires hard work. One way of achieving this is through the political parties, because of their role in the recruitment and selection of candidates for elections. Their role will ensure women have access to established networks of influence, role models and mentors, and support that will enhance their representation in Nigeria⁷. Political parties as it is shown above play critical roles in ensuring female candidates are selected and recruited, meaning, their roles cannot be overemphasized.

To tackle the low representation and participation of women in politics, the National Gender Policy was formulated to promote a 35 percent affirmative action for women in order to ensure the involvement of women in all governance processes. However, implementation of the policy has been slow and poor because of the absence of structures and processes that can ensure the conscious involvement of women in politics. Some of the challenges are shown below:

- i. Failure of political parties to create a supportive internal party environment for women;
- ii. the dominant masculine model of exercising power in political life and within parties;
- iii. existence of some barriers : legal, political and cultural which prevents women from taking their place within the political arena.

⁴ IDEA, 2016.

⁵ (www.iknowpolitics.org).

⁶ Ballington and et al, 2012, pp.6.

⁷ (Ballington and et al, 2012, pp.6



- iv. Low level of education and training;
- v. Lack of resources
- vi. Violence

These problems are some of the issues facing Nigerian women and even when they make efforts to go into politics, dominance and superiority of one gender over the other is making it more challenging for women to belong and participate in politics and leadership positions. In some situations men and women face similar challenges, but women remain as the most disadvantaged because of the ways in which society is interconnected thereby leaving them as the most marginalized. Also women's political underrepresentation should be a question of discrimination against women, rather than that of women's lack of resources, locating the responsibility for dealing with the issue of political underrepresentation of women squarely with the political institutions⁸. Therefore, for an increase and any meaningful political participation of women there is a need to address the issues of institutional inequality and cultural barriers in Nigerian society.

Cross country/International analysis of the level of women participation in politics

Governments around world are recognizing and making conscious efforts to increase and include more women in decision making. This has been by harnessing the potential of women and encouraging them through making policies and ensuring its full implementation. The diagram below presents a few examples of African countries and the level of women participation in their parliaments:

⁸ Ford Foundation 2018, p.

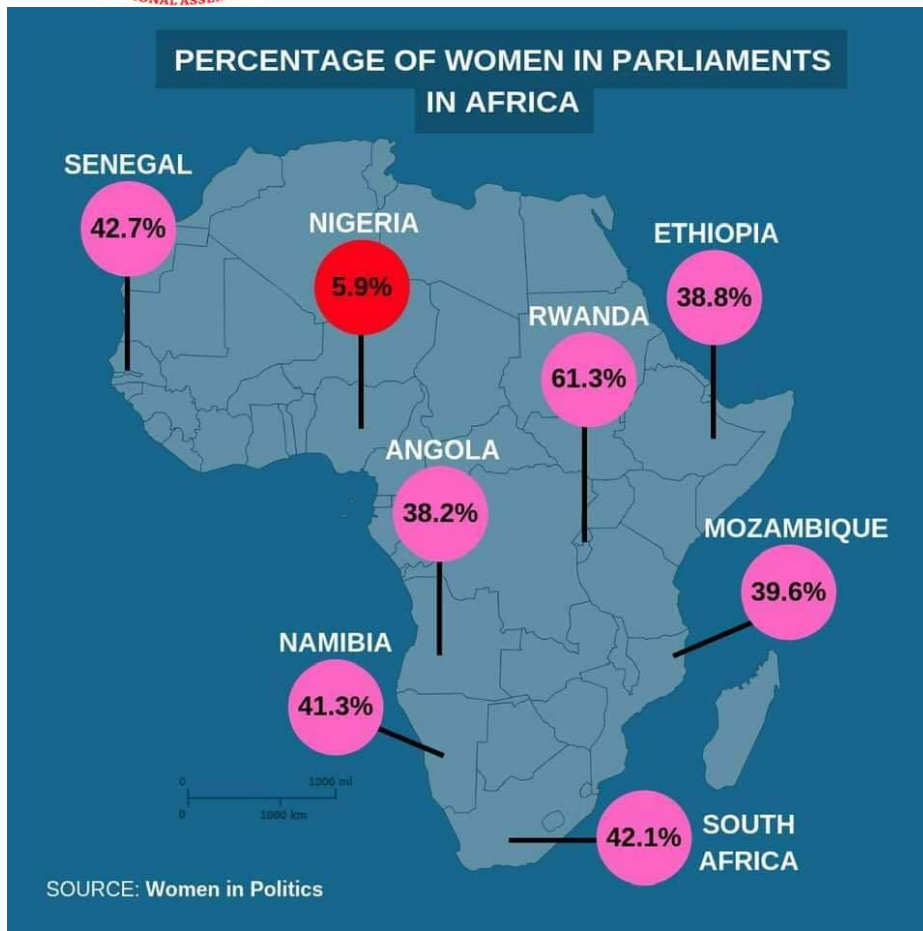
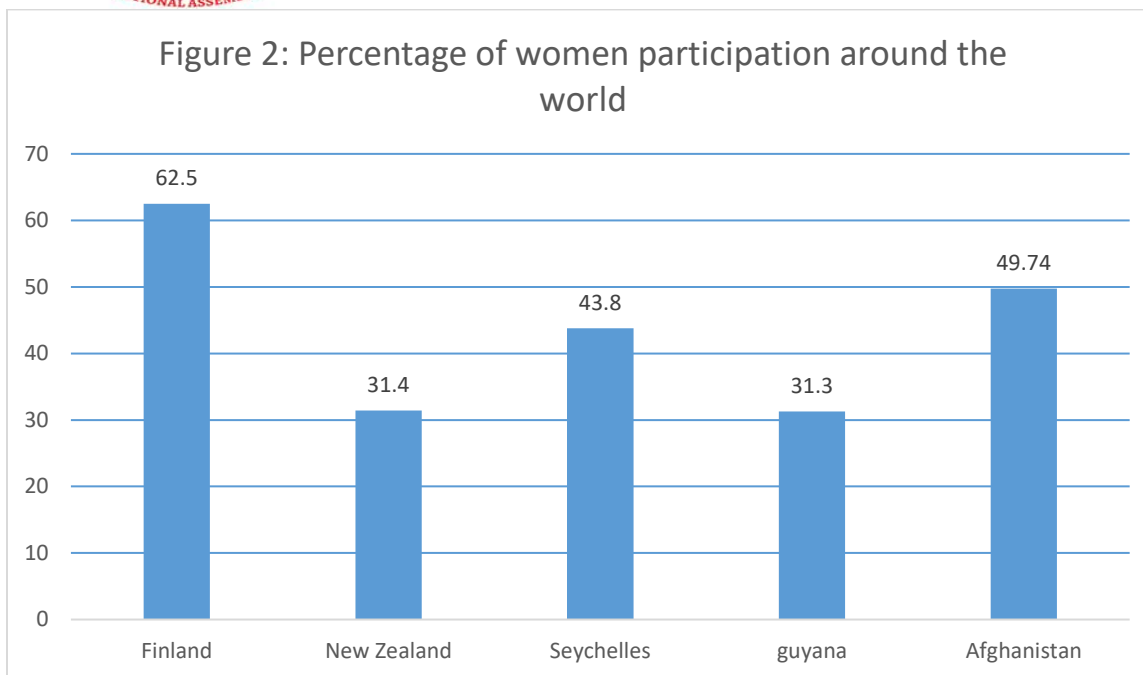


Figure 1: Percentage of women in Parliaments in Africa



Source: Authors compilation, 2021.

Also in other part of the globe there have been efforts to ensure the inclusion of women in decision making. As shown in the figure above. Finland topped the rankings of countries with women holding positions at 62.5 per cent, and other countries with more women parliamentarians include Seychelles (43.8%), New Zealand (31.4%), Guyana (31.3%) and Cameroon (31.1%) (Commonwealth, 2015, pp. 14). The Norwegian Government, also supported political parties to take innovative steps to advance gender equality in politics and the economy⁹. The examples above show that a significant number of women are participating in politics and decision making in other parts of Africa and Europe while the situation in Nigeria remains very poor.

Areas for Legislative Consideration

For an increase in women's political participation and inclusion, there is need to put in place an institutional mechanism that will check, report and ensure the enforcement and implementation of gender-equality commitments in the country. The brief therefore recommends as follows:

- i. There is need for a review of the existing laws by the National Assembly in a way that would make it compulsory for political parties to nominate female candidates for

⁹ <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/10692NORWAY%20HLPF%20REPORT%20-%20full%20version.pdf>



- elective and appointive positions. If this law is enforced and adhered to, it will increase the participation of women in politics and also advance gender representation in decision making.
- ii. A gender equality policy should be put in place to provide a clear direction to help political parties reduce gender gaps in political participation and promote gender equality.
 - iii. Also, there is a need to ensure that political parties strategize, train and encourage female candidates to vie for elective positions rather than for appointments only. This will increase their participation.
 - iv. There is a need for the National Assembly to ensure that the quota system is fully adopted and used by political parties in Nigeria. This will force the government and political parties to nominate and appoint more women for political and decision making offices, which will promote their representation, inclusion and empowerment in the political landscape in Nigeria.

Conclusion

The barriers that women face to their meaningful political participation and inclusion occur at many levels such as institutional, individual and socio cultural. Change may happen differently at the different levels, however, these levels must be addressed by creating an enabling environment for women to ensure their inclusion and promote their equal political participation that is sustainable. Therefore, there is need to break barriers and create opportunities at all levels by collaborating with other government agencies like, political parties, legislature, government agencies, civil society, religious groups and traditional leaders amongst others to bring about the necessary change, and address the issue of women inclusion and participation in politics.



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