



Amplifying voices and ensuring accessibility for full participation of women in politics in Nigeria



Background

Traditions, customs, sexual stereotyping of social roles and cultural prejudice continue to militate against the rights and full participation of women on an equal basis with men in politics and national development in Nigeria. In line with the National Gender Policy (2006), there is a national commitment to gender equality and empowerment of women in Nigeria that promotes the full participation of women, men, girls and boys by involving both the public and private sectors as agents of development.

Under its 'Communication and Visibility Actions for Gender Equality Awareness and Advocacy in Nigeria' project, the EU Delegation to the Federal Republic of Nigeria and to the Economic Community of West African States has been facilitating evidence-based activities that will help women learn how they can improve their lives and promote gender equality.

These activities are designed to contribute to raising and discussing gender equality issues in Nigeria and are expected to change the public's perception of the roles of women, promote respect and protection for women rights and support empowerment for women and subsequently reduce the overall poverty index of women. The activities include seminars, gender equality focused competitions and radio programmes.

On 21 September 2015, the EU launched a second Gender Action Plan (GAP II) Nigeria Gender Analysis, 2016-2020. The report provides data on priority gender inequalities in Nigeria, and a summary of what the key actors are currently doing to address those inequalities.

GAP II 'provides reliable information on gender equality and women's empowerment issues which will contribute to EU programming at all levels from country strategies and EU responses to project levels'. Some of the key issues identified in the report are presented below.

The European Commission defines a gender analysis as 'the study of differences in the conditions, needs, participation rates, access to resources and development, control of assets, decision-making powers, etc. between girls/women and boys/men in their assigned gender roles.'

Nigeria's Gender Overview

The National Bureau of Statistics in its Statistical Report on Women and Men in Nigeria (2014) reports the following key findings:



Nigeria's population in 2013 is estimated at 184 million people



Women constitute 49.5% and men 50.5%

3%

Population growth rate is estimated at 3% every year

Sex ratio has dropped from 103 men in 2006 to 102 men in 2013 per 100 women



5.5 In 2013, the total fertility rate was 5.5 births per woman.

Gender Development Index (GDI)	0.847
Adolescent birth rate (births per 1,000 women ages 15-19)	110.6
Estimated gross national income per capita, female (2011 at purchasing power parity \$)	4,132
Estimated gross national income per capita, male (2011 at purchasing power parity \$)	6,706
Expected years of schooling: female (years)	9.2
Expected years of schooling: male (years)	10.8
Human Development Index (HDI): female	0.482
Human Development Index (HDI): male	0.569
Labour force participation rate: female (% ages 15 and older)	48.4
Labour force participation rate: male (% ages 15 and older)	64.0
Life expectancy at birth: female (years)	53.4
Life expectancy at birth: male (years)	52.7
Maternal mortality ratio (deaths per 100,000 live births)	814
Mean years of schooling: female (years)	4.9
Mean years of schooling: male (years)	7.1
Share of seats in parliament (% held by women)	5.8
Unemployment rate (total): female to male ratio	1.2
Youth unemployment rate: female to male ratio	1.3

Key Issues Identified

Although child marriage constitutes one of the major abuses of the rights of young girls, it is not perceived as such in the states where the practice is prevalent.

The multiplicity of laws within the legal system means that women, men, boys and girls have different levels of enjoyment of their rights depending on their ethnic group, culture, location and/or religion.

Eleven years after the roll-out of Nigeria's National Gender Policy (2006), this target is far from being realised. Not many states and institutions have adopted the policy.

A key issue for European Union Delegation/Member States (EUD/MS) is the relatively weak database for implementation of gender equality and women's empowerment activities in all sectors. This applies to both statistical and qualitative data. This points not only to a need for more surveys in specific areas of concern noted, but also for the development of a system for capturing, assessing and storing as a basis for action.

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) was established as an independent body for the promotion and protection of human rights. In its 2015 report, issues around inheritance rights constituted the highest category of cases received in relation to women's rights. Regarding issues related to children's rights, child marriage was the least reported.

Nigeria has also signed the Maputo Protocol, an international treaty on women's rights, and the African Union Women's Rights Framework.

There has been a surge in reportage of sexual abuse of females, especially of children.



Source: Annual Report, 2015 National Human Rights Commission.

The overall goal of Nigeria's National Gender Policy (2006) is 'to build a just society devoid of discrimination, harness the full potentials of all social groups regardless of sex or circumstance, promote the enjoyment of fundamental human rights and protect the health, social, economic and political well-being of all citizens in order to achieve equitable rapid economic growth, and evolve an evidence-based planning and governance system where human, social, financial and technological resources are efficiently and effectively deployed for sustainable development'.

The legal environment for the protection of the rights of women and girls received a boost in 2015 with the passage of the Violence Against Person Prohibition (VAPP) Act. Unfortunately, because of the way the legal system is structured, the law is only applicable in the Federal Territory. Unless it is adopted in at least 23 of the 36 states of the federation, only then can it become national law. Efforts need to be geared towards advocating the passage of VAPP by State Assemblies in order for it to be of benefit to the lives of all Nigerian people.

On 15 March, 2016 a Gender and Equality Opportunity Bill was turned down by the Nigerian Senate, adding to a series of progressive bills rejected by the male-dominated National Assembly. At State level, the Gender and Equal Opportunities bill has been passed in Imo, Anambra (not yet assented to), Kogi, Ekiti and Plateau states, though still pending in Lagos, Edo, Ebonyi, Rivers, Enugu and Kaduna states. The Gender and Equal Opportunities Bill was reintroduced in the Senate in the fall of 2016.

Islamic opponents of gender equality refer to the Shari'a, which is an important source of regulation for the Muslim population because of the power that customary or Shari'a courts have obtained in Nigeria. Due to this, even if the Nigerian constitution states that men and women have equal rights, Islamic instances can exert the Nigerian legal system to increase their own legal power, or even block laws that might overrule traditional, religious beliefs.

Most sources report that up to a third of women in Nigeria have been subjected to some form of violence including battering, verbal abuse, emotional and psychological abuse, marital rape and sexual exploitation within the home. Much, but not all of the physical, sexual and psychological violence experienced by women is reported.

Important Issues for European Union Delegation/Member States attention under GAP II



The relatively weak capacity of relevant government institutions to deliver on Nigeria's commitment under various international treaties e.g. United Nations/Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women, the United Nations Security Council resolution 1325 and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.



Limited participation of women in governance and decision-making processes at all levels.



The need to review and revise the National Gender Policy (2006).

S/N	Women's Rights			Children's Rights		
	Category	Number of cases	%	Category	Number of cases	%
1	Abandonment	1,391	2.95	Child Abandonment	449	8.5
2	Denial of Access to Children	10,078	21.4	Child custody	4,292	81.3
3	Domestic Violence	1,311	2.78	Child Labour (Commercial formal sector)	10	0.2
4	Forced Marriage	29	0.06	Child Marriage	3	0.06
5	Gender Based Discrimination	430	0.91	Child Trafficking	14	0.3
6	Harmful Cultural Practices	1091	2.31	Right to Education	22	0.41
7	Inheritance	30,668	65	Right to Survival and Development	177	3.4
8	Reproductive Rights	1,015	2.15	Sexual Abuse	48	0.9
9	Sexual Violence	1,055	2.24	Other Child Abuses	262	4.96
10	Trafficking of Women	14	0.02	-	-	-
	TOTAL	47,082		TOTAL	5,277	

Source: Annual Report, 2015 National Human Rights Commission.