

# FACTSHEET

## CONSTITUTION AMENDMENT BILL TO CREATE ADDITIONAL NATIONAL ASSEMBLY AND STATE ASSEMBLY SEATS FOR WOMEN



Despite decades of democracy, women make up less than 5% of Nigeria's National Assembly. With a ranking of **177 out of 181 countries**, Nigeria has one of the poorest records on women in parliaments worldwide. This persistent gender gap is not due to a lack of capable women, but to entrenched socio-political, cultural, and economic barriers that systematically exclude women from electoral competition and decision-making spaces.

### The Special Seats Bill (a.k.a Additional or Reserved Seats Bill)

This is a Constitution Alteration Bill that seeks to remedy the low representation of women in Legislative Houses by providing for the creation of an additional number of legislative seats to be contested and filled by women in the National Assembly and State Houses of Assembly as a **temporary measure** to boost the numbers of women in decision making.

The Bill proposes the creation of one Special Seat for Women per Senatorial District and one per Federal Constituency, to be contested by women in general elections. It **does not reserve** any of the existing seats or constituencies for women. The new seats would exist alongside the current constituency seats and will be in place for a limited number of election cycles, after which they would be reviewed. This measure is designed to complement existing efforts to strengthen women's political inclusion.

## Implications if passed as proposed

- ◆ Amendment to **Section 48: 37 additional Women Senators (one per State & FCT)**
- ◆ Amendment to **Section 49: 37 additional Women Representatives (one per State & FCT)**
- ◆ Amendment to **Section 91: 108 additional Women in the State Houses of Assembly nationwide (three per State)**
- ◆ The bill does not create a superior or inferior legislative status for the women seats as women occupying such seats will contest election and have the same privileges and responsibilities as existing members.

### Quick Fact

Women's representation in the National Assembly has **steadily declined** since 2007, when 36 women held seats — 9 in the Senate and 27 in the House of Representatives.

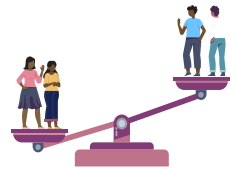
### Current Facts

- 4** Number of Women in the 10th Senate
- 16** Number of Women in the 10th House of Representatives
- 54** Number of women currently in the 36 State Houses of Assembly of 990 seats
- 14\*** State Houses of Assembly with no female legislator.

\* **Abia, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Imo, Jigawa, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Osun, Plateau, Sokoto, Yobe and Zamfara.**

## Why this Particular Proposal?

To correct historical imbalances in electoral politics



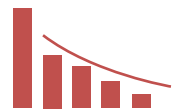
Voting rights for men and women attained at different times – 1922 for men vs. 1979 for all women, a difference of 57 years (shortly before 1979 only women in the old eastern and western regions could vote).

### Temporary measure, not a permanent arrangement



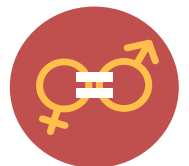
It is a temporary corrective measure aimed at building a foundation for long-term gender parity in politics. It will not end inequality overnight, but will help to begin to shift the system toward fairness.

### Inclusive Growth



- ◆ Increased women's political representation helps drive **inclusive** and sustainable development.
- ◆ Unlocks the **economic** and **leadership potential** of half the population by ensuring women participate in decision making

### Global best practice



- ◆ Up to **132 countries** worldwide use one form of gender or electoral quota to elect women or appoint them to political structures. This includes Saudi Arabia, which as of 2015, was the last country to grant women voting rights.
- ◆ The additional seats proposal is a measure in use by other African countries such as Kenya and Tanzania and it is proven to work.

# Best-Fit with Nigeria's Electoral System



Nigeria uses the first-past-the post/plurality electoral system, which is widely known to be **unfavorable to women candidates** because each party can only nominate one candidate per constituency. Political parties tend to go for male incumbents who are seen as the safest and most broadly accepted candidate. In essence, because of the "winner takes all" system, there is little incentive for political parties operating in this system to change the status quo to nominate more women. To avoid this, countries using first-past-the-post system use special measures such as seat reservations in the form of additional women-only seats to ensure that female candidates not only make it to the ballot, but can win.

## Contrast this with the Proportional Representation (PR) Electoral System

More women are elected in countries with Proportional Representation (PR) electoral system where political parties win legislative seats in accordance with the proportion of votes they receive at elections. In such countries, it is easier to nominate both men and women for elections and share seats accordingly.

# Legislated Measures: a Fast-track to Improved Women Representation

Constitutional or legislated quotas are the **fastest and most effective way** of achieving increased female representation. Political parties in Nigeria often promise voluntary quotas i.e., numeric targets for underrepresented groups such as women, youths or persons with disabilities in their party constitutions and manifestoes, but they are never implemented. Country experiences show that to ensure that affirmative action targets/quotas are applied, they need to be legally binding via legislation.

## Quick Facts

- ◆ The lowest representation of women parliamentarians and councillors in African countries is in First-Past-the-Post countries with no special measures or quotas. E.g., Nigeria
- ◆ The **top 10** countries in the African ranking of women in parliament use special measures/gender quotas.
- ◆ Countries using PR or mixed electoral systems such as South Africa and Namibia consistently lead Africa in women's parliamentary representation, often **exceeding 35%**.

## Quick Fact

The 2008 Uwais Electoral Reform Panel Report recommended the creation of **108 additional legislative seats** to be filled on a proportional representation basis, 30% of which would be for women.

## 41 African Countries using Special Measures to Elect Female Legislators

Up to **41 out of 54** African countries have constitutional, legislated or voluntary party quotas.

**Algeria, Angola, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cabo Verde, Cameroon, Cote d'Ivoire, Djibouti, Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Guinea, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Libya, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Mauritius, Morocco, Mozambique, Namibia, Niger, Republic of the Congo (Brazzaville), Rwanda, Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Africa, South Sudan, Sudan, Tanzania, Togo, Tunisia, Uganda, Zimbabwe.**

## Addressing Concerns

- ✦ **Cost Implications:** The cost of a temporary increase in seats is marginal relative to the democratic gains. Gender-based discrimination costs Sub-Saharan Africa up to USD 95 billion annually
- ✦ PLAC conducted a study on the cost and benefits of the special seats bill. Our finding reveals that the **cost of the additional members in the National Assembly being sought will amount to less than 1% increase in the annual national budget.**



- ✦ **Merit and Competence:** The Bill ensures electoral competition among women; it is not an appointment mechanism.
- ✦ **Constitutionality:** The proposal is being introduced as a constitutional measure.
- ✦ **Creating “Super legislators”:** There are no added privileges or advantages to this seat.
- ✦ **Tokenism:** Reserved legislative seats provide actual political power. Numeric presence of women help normalise their participation in decision making spaces.

## CALL TO ACTION

### Please support the Special Seats for Women Bill!

We urge Members of the National Assembly to support the Special Seats Bill. The passage of this Bill is not just a matter of representation, it is a **legacy opportunity for the 10th National Assembly** and an opportunity to deepen Nigeria's democracy by opening the door to inclusive leadership.

*This is not about giving women power on a platter. It's about removing the concrete ceilings that block them from competing fairly.*

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Funded by  
the European Union