



POLITICAL FINANCE AND WOMEN'S POLITICAL INCLUSION IN NIGERIA

POLICY BRIEF



Funded by
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PLAC
POLICY AND LEGAL ADVOCACY CENTRE

Overview:

Political representation of women has historically been abysmally low in Nigeria. As several studies suggest, gender inequality in political representation in Nigeria is the result of a complex mix of sociocultural, economic, and political factors. Among the factors, limited access to funds by women politicians, excessive use of money in Nigerian politics, and the increasing cost of election campaigns appear to be the most critical.

The debate about women's political representation in Nigeria is evolving from being conflated among the very many drivers of gender inequality to one that is focusing squarely on the role of money. Increasingly, civil society organizations are encouraging female politicians to speak up about the challenges they face regarding fundraising and spending during their campaigns. Some women who ventured into politics have taken the initial step by sharing or documenting their experiences to provide a basis for learning by other female politicians or intending politicians and advocacy by activists and civil society organizations.

To add to this body of knowledge, PLAC, via a research study, investigates the relationship between political finance and women's political inclusion in Nigeria. It examines the impact of limited access to funds and the rising cost of elections – worsened by galloping inflation, a culture of vote buying, extortion by party leaders, prodigious cost of election petition/litigation, and failure to enforce political finance regulations – on the political careers of women, especially in terms of their decision to run as candidates, their ability to win nominations, and their capacity to launch effective electioneering.

The objectives of this study are to:

01

Describe the experiences of men and women contestants regarding access to funds for election purposes and highlight any gender dimensions identified;

02

Examine how access to funds and the cost of elections are connected to the decision of women to contest elections;

03

Assess how access to funds and the cost of elections affect chances of winning party nominations by women;

04

Ascertain how access to funds and the cost of elections are connected to the ability of women to effectively conduct election campaigns;

05

Review the legal framework governing political finance to identify challenges with implementation and gender implications of the regulations;

06

Develop relevant evidence-based recommendations for election stakeholders (including women aspirants and candidates, political parties, the election management body, the National Assembly, civil society groups, and development partners).



Methodology

The study was conducted using a mix of methods. In the first place, a review of published sources focusing on the challenges faced by women and men in successfully running for elections was carried out. Furthermore, the political finance regulations in Nigeria were reviewed as part of an analysis of how existing political party and campaign finance regulations affect the political careers of women and men.

A major input to the report is based on research conducted through interviews of women and men who contested in past elections to enable a deeper understanding of how political finance shapes the political career of women. The analysis of the interview responses followed a basic framework that looked at how political finance affects the decision of women to contest elections, the chances of winning nominations by women, and the prospects of launching effective election campaigns by women.

In appraising the legal framework for political finance in Nigeria and in eliciting inputs from the field research, the study also focused special attention on suggested legal reforms, and more importantly, on measures that can moderate the behaviour of politicians, political parties, and the institutions mandated to enforce political finance regulations and other electoral laws.



Findings

a. The decision to run

Women tend to be reluctant to contest for political offices when they are aware of the financial cost associated with running for office. The financial burden associated with political participation plays a fundamental role in eroding the interest and motivation of many women to participate in politics. This denies Nigerian citizens the opportunity to elect women with good leadership potential.

Political parties have not made sufficient efforts to support female contestants. The only tangible measure political parties have taken to support women contestants is to reduce or sometimes waive the cost of Expression of Interest and Nomination Forms for women candidates.

None of the respondents argued that money was the only factor in Nigerian elections. If a candidate is not nominated by the strongest political party in a constituency, the chances of success are generally small even if she has a lot of money or wealthy and powerful sponsors.

b. Winning a nomination

Women's performances in the early stages of campaigning for nomination will to a great extent define the number of women running and being elected. Building reputation and recognition among constituents, as well as party members require continuous work with significant amounts of time and money spent by potential candidates. Aspirants are expected to dole out cash and other gifts to endear themselves to the party leaders, party members, and influential stakeholders. All these expenses are a hindrance to many women aspirants in Nigeria and elsewhere.

Most respondents who had participated in elections in party strongholds (and some who had participated in other areas) stated that they spent more money during the party primary campaign than in the general election campaign. In this case, winning the nomination from the dominant party equates to success in the election

Supporting the campaigns of women candidates who are running on the platform of a party with little chance of electoral success, or indeed where the popular support of the party that nominated them means that they are all but guaranteed victory, is likely to have a minimal impact on the outcome. It is only in constituencies where the election outcome is uncertain that financial support for a female candidate is likely to make a difference.

c. Conducting an election campaign

Women were generally less successful than men in mobilizing financial resources for elections. This is not surprising considering that men have more social capital and networks they can leverage to raise funds.

The culture of private donations as a source of election fundraising is not yet established in Nigeria. The respondents who recalled setting up crowdfunding schemes and other methods of private fundraising stated that the outcome was below expectation. In most cases, personal resources constituted the most important source of election funds, and self-financing is often a major obstacle for women in particular.

Although not prevalent, the issue of reversed prejudice was observed where male party leaders, party members, and constituents refused to accept cash and other gifts from female contestants despite making high demands on the male contestants. This largely lowered the campaign expenses of the female contestant, but was interpreted as reflecting the perception that the outcome of the process is predetermined against the female contestant and that they would not need to further impose financial burdens on her.

On the issue of vote buying, it was found that access to funding is essential in electoral environments where such is rife, such as Nigeria. While vote buying is not limited to only one gender, this practice can indirectly disadvantage women by heightening the impact of the existing financial inequalities between women and men.

d. Election petition expenses

Candidates often devote huge sums of money to prosecute or defend election petitions and this forms a substantial part of their expenses. The prohibitive cost of election petitions therefore contributes to the bloating of the cost of participating in the electoral process. This has the potential to delegitimize the electoral process and frustrate less financially resourced contestants, especially women.

The massive costs of election petitions imply that as long as free, fair, and credible elections remain unattainable in Nigeria, moneybags will continue to dominate the political landscape either as godfathers or as contestants.

e. Political finance regulations

The view that campaign finance regulations in Nigeria are immaterial, unrealistic, and poorly enforced is widely shared among politicians. Most of the respondents called for greater enforcement of the existing rules by relevant authorities and for reforms to make the regulations more in tune with time, considering the current economic situation in Nigeria.

Adopting political finance regulations that address the challenges faced by women can be seen as a progressive measure by state authorities. However, in Nigeria, the political finance regulations are designed to be “gender-neutral.” This means that the legislation does not seek to directly address gender inequalities.

f. Public funding

Public funding of political parties may contribute to levelling the field, ensuring that smaller parties gain recognition and that all political platforms are communicated to voters. The provision for public funding of political parties in Nigeria’s Fourth Republic was first introduced in the Electoral Act, 2001 but was abolished in the Electoral Act, 2010 following criticisms of its mode of implementation.

Arguing from a gender perspective, public funding can be reintroduced in Nigeria and used to promote gender equality as evidence suggests that the countries with the largest share of women in parliament implement direct public funding of political parties. One approach is to directly tie the amount of public funding to gender equality among party candidates as an incentive to parties. However, in adopting this sort of reform, deep consideration would have to be given to Nigeria’s electoral system and the type of primary used for candidate selection by most parties.

g. Limits on the campaign period

Long campaigns can be particularly problematic for less financially resourced contestants, especially women. Long campaign periods have a particular effect on women because they involve long hours and extended periods away from home. This could deter women who might otherwise consider becoming a candidate or could affect their ability to campaign because of caring and family responsibilities (particularly if partners or spouses are absent or unwilling to support the candidacy or assume household and care duties). Candidates (male and female) have argued that the extension of time for campaigns in the 2022 Electoral Act further imposes severe financial burden by increasing the amount of funds and other resources they require to mount an effective campaign.

Recommendations

Women aspirants and candidates

1. Early planning, preparation and early fundraising efforts
2. Network with other women to provide opportunities for in-kind contributions
3. Adopt cost-effective, high-impact, campaigning methods

Political parties

1. Conduct gender audits of party activities to provide a basis for reforms
2. Be more gender-sensitive and nurture potential women leaders
3. Help women become candidates in “secure constituencies”
4. Consider a candidate-supported campaign fund to support women candidates

The National Assembly

1. Make political finance regulations gender-sensitive by adopting gender-targeted political finance regulations
2. Lower nomination fees to a level that would improve the chances of more candidates, particularly those with more limited financial means.
3. Adopt regulations that limit incumbency advantage by legislating measures that limit the use of state resources and excessive spending
4. Closely monitor the implementation of donation and spending limits regulations by regulatory and enforcement agencies
5. Amend the law to unbundle INEC to enable effective monitoring and enforcement of political finance regulations

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC)

Ensure compliance with relevant campaign laws and regulations by political parties and candidates.

Civil society organizations, development partners, and other champions of women's political participation

1. Support women aspirants even before they are nominated by their parties
2. Strengthen the capacity of women to raise funds
3. Provide legal aid to female contestants, especially in election petitions
4. Engage with political parties and parties' women's wings
5. Support effective monitoring and enforcement of political finance regulations



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