



2023 ELECTIONS

FOGGY MIRRORING OF WOMEN, CHILDREN, GIRLS, AND YOUTH ISSUES

CONTEXT

As of December 2021, the female population of Nigeria was put at 49.47% of the total population[1], and they also account for 47.50% of registered voters for the 2023 General Election in the country[2]. Apart from the fundamental rights of individuals enshrined in the Nigerian constitution, this population of female voters should ideally make them a constituency of interest to political office seekers. For such a large constituency with enormous numerical strength, another assumption would be that this would translate to greater space for women, children and girls in the political sphere and, that issues affecting them will be in the mainstream of electoral issues. In spite of this seeming advantage, women's overall political representation and participation in government is less than 7%[3].

In recent times, issues of equal gender rights have been at the front burner of national discourse. The National Assembly's rejection of the Gender Equality bills drew global attention to Nigeria and gave rise to protests, with the media and commentators condemning the Assembly's decision. The Country's leadership represented by its legislators, given the country's space in the comity of nations and prime place in the African continent, was severally condemned for their aversion to gender equality. With the approach of the 2023 general elections, a major issue that has also emerged is the place of girls and women in the consciousness of the political parties, the candidates and the leadership of their parties. This is also not far from the issue of the place of women, children and girls in the national polity.

PLACE OF WOMEN, CHILDREN, GIRLS AND THEIR ISSUES ON PARTIES' PRIORITY LIST

The practice of relegation of women, children and girls and their issues to the background in the national discourse, national development and other spheres of decisions having subsisted for so long, is now taken as the norm. This is in spite of the country's commitment to all of the goals of the SDG and assent to, as well as ratification of other relevant global, and regional conventions related to girls and women's rights. While the country is not in want of paper works and impressively articulated assurances and promises very little has been done in terms of implementation of the obligations contained in the instruments. This failure to prioritise issues affecting girls and women has been adduced to several reasons. A major reason often cited is the lack of gender inclusiveness in the electoral process and in the appointment of people into offices. This closes the gate against women's candidature and the prospect of being elected into office, and invariably makes the prioritising of issues concerning women, children and girls, impossible due to the lack of representation.

The situation has not changed as only 8.9% of the total candidates (381 out of 4,259) in the forthcoming (2023) election for the Presidential and the National Assembly seat are women candidates.[4] While all political parties appear to have women, children, girls and youth issues in their manifestos, the details of these raise questions about their understanding of the issues or the level of importance they attach to them.

WOMEN, GIRLS AND THEIR ISSUES: WHAT THE POLITICAL PARTIES HAVE ON OFFER

Nigeria elections are based on the Party system, which requires that the electorates vote for the political parties[5]. As is the practice, political parties and their aspirants have manifestoes, which is the element establishing their social contract or pact with the people.

[1] [https://tradingeconomics.com/nigeria/population-female-percent-of-total-wb-data.html#:~:text=Population%2C%20female%20\(%25%20of%20total%20population\)%20in%20Nigeria%20was%20reported,compiled%20from%20officially%20recognized%20sources.](https://tradingeconomics.com/nigeria/population-female-percent-of-total-wb-data.html#:~:text=Population%2C%20female%20(%25%20of%20total%20population)%20in%20Nigeria%20was%20reported,compiled%20from%20officially%20recognized%20sources.)

[2] <https://twitter.com/inecnigeria/status/1613216804268134400?s=20&t=YbsTTCVp3wO57PT59Mhldw>

[3] https://unstats.un.org/unsd/gender/Finland_Oct2016/Documents/Nigeria_paper.pdf

[4] <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2022/09/2023-election-only-8-9-of-candidates-are-women-report/>

[5] The Nigerian Electoral System | Electoral Systems and Processes (nigerianscholars.com)

It is in such a document, therefore, that citizens gain insight into the programme of the parties and what they have on offer if elected into office. It is also in the manifesto that their grasp of the issues of interest, or that affect different layers of society is seen. The response to gender issues in the country, specifically, issues affecting women, children and girls are encapsulated in the parties' manifestoes and even though they are different in terms of political ideologies, they are all focused on social infrastructure, economy, security and are well aligned to both the Fundamental Objectives and States Principles and the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. However, a detailed review of these documents reveals a lack of clear understanding of the issues affecting these subpopulations in the country.

Our analysis of their manifestos based on the four pillars of development, protection, survival and participation, shows that the parties are not gender-specific or child development-focused enough as shown below:



SURVIVAL

While it is the inalienable human right of every woman, girl and child to survive in every and any condition they find themselves in, and codified in Chapter 4 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria as a Fundamental Right, this right does not exist in isolation. It is predicated on other rights, which are embellished within the provision of the fundamental objectives and state principles. The key components of survival for women, girls and child development as contained in the manifestos of the political parties are analysed below:

● LIVELIHOOD

In ensuring girls and women can decide, lead and thrive while upholding section 18 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, all the political parties have planned to increase economic activities, boost the livelihood of citizens and increase the GDP of the country. They all have different approaches and blueprints which are hinged on liberal political ideology. However, all the political parties except African Action Congress (AAC) propose to build their offer on the same neo-liberal principle and failed to recognise the traditional, cultural and structural issues which affect the economic activities of women. The AAC, on the other hand, projects what it calls Eco-Socialism which is an ideology merging aspect of socialism with that of green politics, ecology and alter-globalisation or anti-globalisation.

- While some parties' manifestos recognise agriculture as one of the major drivers of the livelihood and sustenance of the country's economy, they fail to recognise that while 70-80% of agricultural production output is attributable to women[6], these women lack ownership and control of land and other means of production and thus made no provisions towards addressing this imbalance.
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[6] Women Lead Agriculture In Nigeria – CIRDDOC

- While all the political parties emphasized an economic environment that will enhance business activities, increase the livelihood of Nigerians and reduce poverty, through government loans and intervention schemes, there are no gender transformative economic plans that pay attention to the realities of women and girls in the traditional and cultural setting which may inhibit their accessing these schemes.

PROTECTION

While acknowledging that every woman, girl and child has the right to protection from oppression, violence and harm, available data shows that women and girls are more affected in emergency and other humanitarian settings. In 2020, 54% of internally displaced persons (IDP) in Borno, Adamawa and Yobe states were females[7]. These are exposed to various forms of domestic and gender-based violence and are also vulnerable to other forms of exploitation yet no parties' manifestoes outlined detailed plans and strategies for the protection of women, girls and children.

- **Peace Building, Conflict Resolution and Security:** All the political parties have prioritized security through social re-engineering, however, the lofty ideas failed to outline how they will intentionally include women and young people in peacebuilding processes as they are the major burden bearers of the crisis. This fails to meet with the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 which affirms that peace and security efforts are more sustainable when women are equal partners in the prevention of violent conflict[8].

DEVELOPMENT

The right to develop at one's pace, without any form of bias, discrimination and with access to basic amenities is the right of all girls, women & children and political parties have outlined in their manifestos how they intend to meet the deficiencies confronting the development process of Nigerians in the following areas:

● EDUCATION

While all political parties indicated an interest in education development, the approach of many is traditional and familiar and they are not specific to the gender needs of women and girls in the education system. The agendas do not reflect thoughts of a gender-transformative education system and they appear oblivious to the vast deficiency in girls' education and the high level of adult female illiteracy in Nigeria. Some, including African Action Congress, APC, Labour Party etc. have articulated the relevance of the Tsangaya educational reforms in Nigeria. This we find comforting in the face of the reality of the country having as many as 13 million out-of-school children[9].

● HEALTH

All the political parties prioritise the construction of primary healthcare centres, and hospitals and some political parties further commit to providing health insurance for all citizens. The parties include the People's Democratic Party of Nigeria, African Action Congress, All Progress Congress, and National Rescue Movement, while the Socialist Democratic Party of Nigeria states free health services for all. Although the scope of the political parties' commitment to health is broad, the African Action Congress' candidate, Omoyele Sowore, has articulated an aspect of Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) namely abortion rights and neglected others. Health for girls and young women should be holistic - SRHR, Menstrual Hygiene and Management, and HIV/AIDS should all be included.

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

The issue of political participation by women, girls, persons with disability and young people has been in the mainstream of public discourse for several years. From the Gender Rights bill to the clamour for implementation of the Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act, 2018, there have been issues around rights and inclusions. In the runup to the 2023 general

[7] RAPID GENDER ANALYSIS: NORTH EAST NIGERIA | UN Women – Africa

[8] Security Council Resolution 1325 - UNSCR

[9] Education | UNICEF Nigeria

elections, these were expected to be taken on board by the political parties in their manifestoes:

- Though political parties have included within their party structures women leaders' roles, to ensure women's participation in decision-making within the party system, this has remained a tokenistic and minimalist response to the issue of women's rights to decision-making spaces. While it is noted that the political parties in the response to observations about this rather unacceptable minimalist response have stated that women will be given roles in the party administration when elected to ensure due representation, the mechanism for the implementation of this, is not stated in all parties' manifestos except for three of the political parties and their candidates.

● PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Inclusion of People with Disabilities (PwD) by political parties at the level of manifestoes and real implementation can best be described to be at a toddler level. It is noteworthy that the concept of inclusion exists because of the existence of exclusion. Many of the candidates included PwDs in their campaign committees just to tick the box[10]. They often do this, so that they would be seen as doing it; just as a token. Many PwD on these committees are not being carried along in the scheme of things. These people are just there so that the world can see that Persons with Disabilities are listed. It's tokenism at its best. The campaign grounds are inaccessible to them neither are the publications for campaigns made accessible to PwD.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In the face of the deficit in the political parties' manifestoes as well as the articulated programmes of their candidates, we recommend and urge political parties to;

- Develop gender-transformative education in crisis plan to ensure inclusivity in educational development for all children and all Nigerians, irrespective of the situation of birth or environment.
- Develop women's economic and livelihood development plan that will include economic recovery for women in the humanitarian context also. This should also have women driving such initiatives as owners of the issues.
- Develop a youth, women and children peace-building mechanism plan that will be all-inclusive and will ensure sustainability.
- Have integrated SRHR and primary health care agenda, that will ensure adolescent girls' health as well as the sexual and reproductive health of women.

CONCLUSION

The increase in the number of women, youths and young girls' participation in the recently concluded voters' registration exercise increased the number of voters in the forthcoming elections. It is, therefore, imperative that all political parties prioritize the meaningful and active participation and engagement of these sub-population groups in governance process as they constitute about 50% of the populace. This is in addition to their inalienable rights to protection, safeguarding, livelihood, survival and full participation in social, political and economic activities, within Nigeria.

We thus request that in the few days remaining before the 2023 general elections, the political parties and their candidates across the country reconnect with the electorate, especially adolescent girls, women, people living with disabilities and all minorities and articulate in clear and unambiguous terms their programme in response to their peculiar issues. We also demand that the parties and their candidates at all levels with the collaboration of their constituencies, develop a scorecard of their promises as part of the accountability framework and their commitment to the people. These should include civil society organisations, youth platforms, persons with disability, trade unions, women groups, girls-led platforms and minorities.

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