




NATIONAL GENDER IN NIGERIA REPORT





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An updated Research Document Addressing the complex and multifaceted gender dynamics prevailing within the country

iPrint Hub Innovations

 Suite A2 Extension, Murg Plaza,
Area 7 Garki Abuja Nigeria

 +2348038002813
+2348026739053

 iprinthub247@gmail.com

 @iprinthub1

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FOREWORD

The advancement of women’s rights is fundamental to Nigeria’s national development aspirations and to its commitments under regional and global frameworks, including the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Progress on Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5: Gender Equality is closely interconnected with outcomes across SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being), SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions). Despite these commitments, deep structural inequalities continue to limit women’s full participation in Nigeria’s economic, political, and social life.

This report makes a timely and important contribution to Nigeria’s gender equality agenda by foregrounding equity as a pathway to inclusive development. It builds on existing national evidence, including the National Gender in Nigeria Report produced by the Nigerian Women Trust Fund, which documents persistent gender gaps in political representation, access to productive resources, freedom from violence, and participation in governance and decision-making. By generating intersectional, policy-relevant facts, this research reinforces the vital role of feminist inquiry in shaping accountable institutions and responsive public policy.

A central focus of the report is women’s access to land and productive assets as a foundation for economic security, agency, and leadership. Although the Land Use Act of 1978 provides a statutory framework for land administration, women continue to face legal, cultural, and institutional barriers to ownership and control. Addressing these constraints is critical to the implementation of the National Gender Policy (2021–2026) and to strengthening women’s economic empowerment as a pathway to leadership and political participation, consistent with SDG 5 on gender equality and empowerment, and SDG 8 on inclusive growth and decent work.

The report also examines women’s political participation and representation, echoing long-standing advocacy for affirmative action, inclusive governance, and electoral reform. Despite Nigeria’s commitments under CEDAW, the Maputo Protocol, and the ECOWAS Gender Policy, women remain significantly underrepresented in both elective and appointive positions. The evidence presented here strengthens the case for reforms that deepen democratic inclusion and advance SDG 16 on partnerships.

Equally compelling are the findings on gender-based violence, reproductive health, and women’s access to STEM and digital education. The report underscores the urgency of fully implementing existing legal and policy frameworks, including the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act (2015), the Child Rights Act (2003), the National Action Plan on UNSCR 1325, the National Health Act (2014), and the National Digital Economy Policy and Strategy, to protect rights, expand opportunities, and ensure that technological and social progress benefits all women and girls.

I commend the research team and partners for their rigor, integrity, and values-driven approach. I encourage policymakers, development partners, civil society organizations, and the private sector to engage with this report as a tool for accountability, policy reform, and collective action. It is my hope that its findings will advance women’s leadership, rights, and participation, and contribute meaningfully to Nigeria’s progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals.

Amina Salihu, PhD, mni
MacArthur Foundation
Africa Office

Acronyms

| | |
|-------|--|
| AGILE | Adolescent Girls Initiative for Learning and Empowerment |
| APC | All Progressives Congress |
| APM | Allied Peoples Movement |
| AWE | Academy for Women Entrepreneurs |
| AWIP | Adamawa Women in Politics |
| BHCPF | Basic HealthCare Provision Fund |
| BOI | Bank of Industry |
| CBO | Community Based Organization |
| CEDAW | Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women |
| CEO | Chief Executive Officer |
| CSO | Civil Society Organization |
| DAWN | Development Agenda for Western Nigeria |
| EFinA | Enhancing Financial Inclusion and Advancement |
| EKHIS | Ekiti State Health Insurance Scheme |
| ESG | Environmental, Social, and Governance |
| EWAP | Ekiti Women Arise Platform |
| FCT | Federal Capital Territory |
| FGD | Focus Group Discussion |
| FGM | Female Genital Mutilation |
| FIDA | International Federation of Women Lawyers |
| FMWA | Federal Ministry of Women Affairs |
| GBV | Gender-Based Violence |
| GDP | Gross Domestic Product |
| GEO | Gender and Equal Opportunities (Bill/Law) |
| GLOW | Guaranteed Loans for Women |
| GMS | Gender Management System |
| GPI | Gender Parity Index |
| ICT | Information and Communication Technology |
| IFC | International Finance Corporation |
| INEC | Independent National Electoral Commission |
| IPV | Intimate Partner Violence |
| IPU | Inter-Parliamentary Union |
| JSS | Junior Secondary School |

| | |
|--------|--|
| LGA | Local Government Area |
| LP | Labour Party |
| MICS | Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey |
| MSMEs | Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises |
| MWA | Ministry of Women Affairs |
| MWASD | Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development |
| NACA | National Agency for the Control of AIDS |
| NBS | National Bureau of Statistics |
| NCCG | Nigerian Code of Corporate Governance |
| NDE | National Directorate of Employment |
| NDHS | Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey |
| NFWP | Nigeria for Women Program |
| NGO | Non-Governmental Organization |
| NGP | National Gender Policy |
| NGX-30 | Nigeria Exchange Group 30 (Top30 listed companies) |
| NWC | National Working Committee |
| NWTF | Nigerian Women Trust Fund |
| OOSC | Out-of-School Children |
| PDP | People's Democratic Party |
| PHC | Primary Healthcare Centre |
| PTSD | Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder |
| PwC | PricewaterhouseCoopers |
| SARC | Sexual Assault Referral Centre |
| SDG | Sustainable Development Goal |
| SEC | Securities and Exchange Commission |
| SMEDAN | Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria |
| SSS | Senior Secondary School |
| STEM | Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics |
| TF-GBV | Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence |
| UBE | Universal Basic Education |
| UNESCO | United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization |
| UNFPA | United Nations Population Fund |

| | |
|--------|---|
| UNICEF | United Nations Children's Fund |
| VAPP | Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) |
| VAW | Violence Against Women |
| VAWG | Violence Against Women and Girls |
| W.TEC | Women's Technology Empowerment Centre |
| WAGs | Women Affinity Groups |
| WARDC | Women Advocates Research and Documentation Centre |
| WDES | Women's Development and Empowerment Strategy |
| WEE | Women's Economic Empowerment |
| We-Fi | Women Entrepreneurs Finance Initiative |
| WPEL | Women's Political Empowerment and Leadership |
| WPS | Women, Peace and Security |

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2025 Revalidation of the National Gender in Nigeria Report reveals a defining paradox in Nigeria’s development trajectory. The country is witnessing a sharp divergence in the status of women. On one path, women have achieved historic gains in the private sector, breaking leadership barriers and sustaining one of the highest female labour force participation rates globally. On the other, women are experiencing a severe regression in political representation and public office, resulting in near exclusion from formal decision-making structures.

This divergence is structural rather than accidental. It reflects contrasting incentive systems: a private sector shaped by global capital flows, regulatory pressures, and Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) standards, versus a political sphere dominated by entrenched patriarchal gatekeeping and monetized access to power. The 2023 - 2025 period is therefore characterized by a paradox of **“High Economic Participation, High Vulnerability”** where women drive economic activity, particularly in the informal sector, yet remain politically marginalized and structurally insecure.

Key Findings by Thematic Area

The report identifies a systemic collapse in women’s political inclusion, describing the situation as a Public Sector Representation Crisis.

Legislative Regression:

Following the 2023 general elections, women’s representation in the National Assembly fell to a historic low of 4.2%, ranking Nigeria 178th out of 182 countries globally. Women occupy only 3 seats (2.7%) in the Senate and 17 seats (4.7%) in the House of Representatives.

Gender Deserts:

At the sub-national level, exclusion is even more pronounced. Fifteen out of 36 State Houses of Assembly have zero female legislators, creating expansive “gender deserts” where legislation is enacted without a single female voice.

Barriers to Access:

The report identifies the “dollarization” and monetization of politics as a central barrier. High nomination fees and financially driven party primaries have effectively priced women out. Patriarchal party structures further reinforce exclusion through opaque internal processes, late-night meetings, and limited internal democracy.

Additionally, the persistent “indigeneity dilemma” disenfranchises married women who are often rejected as political contenders in both their natal and marital states.

Appointive Volatility:

While women constituted 17.6% of ministerial appointments in 2024, such gains remain volatile and dependent on executive discretion rather than institutionalized affirmative action mechanisms.

2. Economic Empowerment: The Participation–Vulnerability

Paradox

Economically, Nigerian women demonstrate high levels of engagement but remain structurally disadvantaged.

High Participation:

Nigeria records a female labour force participation rate of 80.7%, approaching parity with men.

High Vulnerability:

This participation is largely survival-driven. Approximately 96.4% of working women are concentrated in the informal sector, with 78.9% engaged in vulnerable employment lacking social protection and job security.

Private Sector Milestone:

In stark contrast to public sector stagnation, women now hold 31.1% of board seats in Nigeria’s top 30 listed companies (NGX-30). For the first time in history, none of these companies has an all-male board. This demonstrates that when merit-based systems and regulatory frameworks are enforced, women achieve measurable leadership gains.

The Collateral Trap:

Women own 41% of micro-businesses in Nigeria but face a financial exclusion rate of 36% double that of men. Formal financial institutions often require land as collateral, yet customary land ownership norms restrict women’s property rights. In the South East, 88% of respondents reported that women have limited or no property rights, reinforcing the structural “collateral gap.”

3 Human Capital: Resilience Amid Structural Barrier

The report highlights a nuanced “Access vs. Resilience” dynamic in education. Nigeria has 10.5 million out-of-school children, more than 60% of whom are girls. Adult female literacy stands at 52.7%, compared to 71.3% for men.

The Resilience Advantage:

However, girls who overcome initial access barriers are outperforming boys in retention and completion. Completion rates for girls exceed those of boys at both Junior Secondary (69% vs. 67%) and Senior Secondary (57% vs. 51%) levels.

The Emerging Digital Divide:

A structural gap is widening in the digital economy. Women constitute only 22% of Engineering and Technology graduates and approximately 20% of the ICT workforce. This growing “STEM deficit” risks segregating women into lower-wage analogue sectors while men dominate high-growth digital industries.

4. Health, Safety, and Social Norms

Maternal Mortality Emergency:

Nigeria’s maternal mortality ratio remains critically high at 512 per 100,000 live births. This is driven by weak primary healthcare systems, particularly in rural areas, and inadequate access to skilled birth attendants.

The Shadow Pandemic (GBV):

Gender-Based Violence remains wide spread. Although 35 states have domesticated the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) (VAPP) Act, enforcement gaps persist. A growing concern is the rise of Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence (TF- GBV), where digital platforms are used to harass, intimidate, and silence women, particularly those in public life.

Pushback Against Rights:






The report identifies a coordinated ideological backlash against efforts to eliminate Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and child marriage, complicating progress toward ending harmful traditional practices.

The 2025 revalidation confirms that Nigeria is not experiencing uniform gender progress, but rather a structural divergence. Women are advancing in spaces governed by institutional incentives and regulatory accountability, yet regressing in arenas dominated by patronage, monetization, and patriarchal control.

Bridging this divide will require institutionalized affirmative action, political finance reform, strengthened enforcement of gender-related legislation, investment in girls’ education and digital inclusion, and comprehensive social protection mechanisms for women in vulnerable employment.

Nigeria stands at a crossroads: the data demonstrates that when structural barriers are dismantled, women thrive. The central challenge is whether the political and governance systems will evolve at the same pace as the private sector.

Table 1: Trend Analysis 2023 vs. 2025

| Indicator | 2023 Status | 2025 Revalidation Status | Verdict |
|---|--|---|---|
| Political Representation (National Assembly) | 4.2% (Post-2023 Elections) | Remains at 4.2%; Nigeria ranked 178th out of 182 countries globally |  Critical Stagnation |
| State Assembly Representation | Low female representation across states | 15 States have zero female legislators, creating “gender deserts” |  Systemic Exclusion |
| Private Sector Board Representation (NGX-30) | ~21.8% women on boards | Increased to 31.1% (historic high); no all-male boards |  Significant Progress |
| Educational Completion (Secondary Level) | Boys perceived to have higher completion rates | Girls outperform boys (Senior Secondary: 57% vs. 51%) |  Positive Reversal |
| Maternal Mortality Ratio | Critically high | Remains at 512 per 100,000 live births |  Persistent Crisis |

Conclusion

The 2025 revalidation confirms that while Nigeria has largely constructed the policy architecture for gender equality, the political will to operationalize and sustain it remains insufficient. The priority for the 2025 - 2030 period must therefore shift decisively from policy formulation to effective enforcement, adequate financing, and measurable accountability. Without this transition, Nigeria risks entrenching a bifurcated society in which women serve as the engines of economic productivity yet remain invisible within the structures of political power and governance.

Strategic Recommendations

To close the widening gap between policy ambition and lived reality, the report proposes the following structural and time-bound interventions:

1. Institutionalize Gender Quotas in Political Representation

The National Assembly should enact binding legislation to operationalize the 35% affirmative action benchmark across all appointive positions. In addition, constitutional and legislative reforms should introduce special legislative seats or reserved mechanisms for women to dismantle the entrenched barriers that continue to restrict access to elected office. Without institutional guarantees, representation gains will remain discretionary and reversible.

2. Enforce Gender-Responsive Economic Policy

The Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) should strengthen and enforce gender-inclusive financial regulations by scaling innovative financing models such as cash-flow-based and asset-light lending frameworks. These mechanisms can address the structural “collateral gap” that excludes women; particularly those without formal land ownership from accessing capital. Gender-disaggregated lending data should also be publicly reported to enhance accountability.

3. Accelerate a National STEM Inclusion Strategy

The Federal and State Governments, in partnership with the private sector, should implement a coordinated STEM inclusion strategy that includes targeted scholarships, mentorship pipelines, digital skills boot camps, and internship quotas for girls and young women. This intervention is critical to prevent long-term gender segregation in the emerging digital and knowledge economy.

4. Move from Legal Adoption to Operational Protection

State Governments must transition from merely domesticating the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) (VAPP) Act to fully financing and implementing it. This includes establishing and adequately funding Sexual Assault Referral Centres (SARCs) in every senatorial district, training law enforcement and judicial officers, and creating specialized GBV courts or fast-track mechanisms to ensure timely prosecution and survivor-centred justice.

5. Address Norm-Based Barriers through Strategic Cultural Engagement

Sustainable gender reform requires dismantling deeply embedded social norms. Government and civil society actors should adopt a structured engagement framework with traditional and religious leaders positioning them as strategic partners in reshaping narratives around child marriage, Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), and women’s leadership. Transforming cultural gatekeepers into reform champions will be pivotal to shifting community-level attitudes and behaviours.



CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Introduction

1.1 Background

Nigeria faces a notable development paradox. While women continue to demonstrate strong economic participation and have achieved significant leadership successes within the private sector, their representation in formal political structures remains limited. This situation reflects a “High Participation, High Vulnerability” dynamic, in which women contribute substantially to economic growth but remain underrepresented in decision-making and governance structures.



Addressing this imbalance presents an opportunity for targeted policy interventions that translate women’s economic contributions into broader political inclusion and structural empowerment, reinforcing Nigeria’s commitment to inclusive and equitable development. Nigeria boasts one of the world’s highest female labour force participation rates, with 2024 data showing 80.7% of women as economically¹ active, nearly matching the 84.4% rate for men. This surface parity, however, masks a reality of uncertainty. This participation is survival-driven, channeling women into the economy’s most vulnerable segments: 78.9% of working women are in vulnerable employment, and 96.4% are in the informal sector. This is compounded by severe financial exclusion; 36% of women are financially excluded, double the rate for men (18%), and the 22.1 percentage point gap in account ownership is one of the region’s largest.

Additionally, a significant new occurrence identified in this study is the divergence in female leadership pathways. The 2023-2025 period has seen women’s representation in Nigerian politics collapse to a historic low. Following the 2023 general elections, women hold a mere 4.2% of seats in the 10th National Assembly, with 15 of 36 State Assemblies electing no women at all. This regression places Nigeria 178th out of 182 countries globally for parliamentary representation. Simultaneously, and in contrast, the private sector has seen unprecedented progress. As of 2025, women now occupy 31.1% of board seats in Nigeria’s 30 largest listed companies, and for the first time, there is at least one female on the NGX-30 company board.

This divergence is driven by differing incentive structures: global Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) and regulatory pressure in the corporate world versus localized, patriarchal gatekeeping in politics.

The chronicle of female educational disadvantage is split. While Nigeria faces an acute access crisis; with 10.5 million children out of school, over 60% of whom are girls⁶ new 2023 data on completion reveals a story of female resilience. Among students who remain in the system, girls now complete both junior (69% vs. 67%) and senior (57% vs.51%) secondary school at higher rates than boys.⁷ This progress is endangered by a new structural segregation in STEM, where women constitute only 22% of engineering and technology graduates.⁸

These outcomes are built on a foundation of invisible, structural burdens. The COVID-19 pandemic inflicted lasting economic scars, acting as an "inequality accelerant" by devastating the informal, self-employed sector where 86% of working women are concentrated.⁹ Female employment, unlike that of men, has not fully recovered even two years after the pandemic. This situation is further compounded by the largely unrecognized economic contribution of unpaid care work: Nigerian women spend over three additional hours per day on domestic responsibilities compared with men. This "time tax" constrains women to flexible but often precarious informal employment, limiting their access to stable, protected, and higher-paying opportunities. Addressing these structural constraints is essential to fostering equitable economic participation and sustainable growth.

Finally, the social norms that underpin these statistics remain deeply entrenched. Nigeria has the third-highest number of child brides¹⁰ and FGM survivors in the world. A new and alarming 2024 trend identified by development partners is the emergence of a growing, systematic and persistent pushback against FGM elimination, linked to a broader anti-gender backlash.¹¹

1.2 Diagnosis of Women's Political Participation in Nigeria

The current landscape of women's political participation in Nigeria reflects a complex paradox of policy advancement alongside political underrepresentation. While the country has developed robust frameworks, including the National Gender Policy (2021–2026),¹² and achieved widespread domestication of the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act, actual women's representation in governance reached a historic low following the 2023 general elections.

This gap between policy intent and political reality underscores the need for targeted interventions to translate legislative and institutional progress into meaningful inclusion of women in decision-making structures.

The data from the 2023 electoral cycle indicates a systemic contraction of the civic space available to women, contradicting the demographic reality where women constitute approximately 49.3% of the population.¹³

The diagnosis of this problem reveals a crisis of presence. In the 2023 general elections, the percentage of female candidates fell to 10.1% of the total 15,307 candidates vying for various positions, a decline from 12.9% in the 2019 elections.¹⁴ This statistical regression is not merely a fluctuation but signifies an entrenchment of patriarchal gatekeeping within the political party structures. The outcome of the elections solidified this exclusion: women secured only 3 seats in the Senate (2.7%) and 17 seats in House of Representatives (4.7%), resulting in a 10th National Assembly where 96% of lawmakers are men.¹⁵

This underrepresentation is symptomatic of a political culture that monetizes candidacy and valorizes violence, effectively barring women who, due to systemic economic inequality, often lack the financial war chests of their male counterparts. The diagnosis suggests that the problem of representation in Nigeria is not a lack of female agency or interest evidenced by the high participation of women as voters and mobilizers, but a rigid structural blockade at the point of candidates election and party primaries.¹⁶

1.3 Historical and Political Factors Positively Influencing Participation

While current trends indicate a decline in women's political participation, historical precedents and targeted interventions demonstrate that progress is possible. The trajectory of Nigerian women in politics is not one of absence but of persistent struggle and resilience. Pre-colonial societies, for example, often employed dual-sex political systems; such as the *Iyalode* in Yorubaland and the *Omu* in Igboland which provided women with recognized spheres of political authority and influence. These historical models highlight the potential for institutional arrangements that ensure meaningful inclusion of women in governance. The erasure of these structures during the colonial era laid the foundation for the current male-centric model, yet the legacy of resistance from the Aba Women's War of 1929 to the Abeokuta Women's Union—remains a potent historical factor inspiring modern advocacy.¹⁷

In the Fourth Republic (1999–present), the establishment of the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and the adoption of the National Gender Policy (NGP) in 2006 (revised in 2021) provided the institutional scaffolding for gender mainstreaming. The NGP explicitly mandates a 35% affirmative action quota, creating a benchmark against which government performance is measured. Furthermore, the role of the "First Lady" at both federal and state levels, though constitutionally unrecognized, has historically functioned as a critical pressure point. In states like Ekiti and Kebbi, the offices of the wives of governors have been instrumental in pushing for the domestication of the VAPP Act and initiating health and economic empowerment programs that indirectly build women's political capital.

The recent trend of creating Gender Desk Officers within the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and the establishment of the Inter-Departmental Advisory Committee on Gender also represent positive administrative factors. These mechanisms have improved the collection of gender-disaggregated data,²⁰ which is essential for diagnosing the scale of exclusion and formulating evidence-based interventions.

1.4 Goal

The main goal of the study is to revalidate and update Nigeria's National Gender Report. This involves conducting new research to gather gender-disaggregated, multi-sector data and statistics. The report focuses on women's leadership and political participation, set against the broader socio-economic conditions of women in Nigeria, and also identifies emerging trends and developments in this area. Additionally, the findings from this study are intended to stimulate discussions and policy actions to enhance women's representation in decision-making roles and improve the overall living standards for women and girls in Nigeria.

1.5 Objectives

The objectives of the study are to:

- a). Produce physical or digital research tools for conducting the research.
- b). Coordinate the multi-sectoral regional research on gender equality and women's empowerment.
- c). Cover an area of research that includes, but is not limited to, women's political participation, representation in elected positions, representation in appointed positions, education and illiteracy, economic empowerment and opportunities, the effect of the Covid-19 pandemic, private-sector leadership, traditional leadership and community development participation, traditional practices and social norms, among others.

- d). Employ diverse appropriate formats of research, including surveys, Key Informant Interviews, desktop research, literature reviews, etc.
- e). Produce a synthesized draft report from the regions using information and data from the research.
- f) Work with the NWTF team on several phases of reviews of the research document.
- g) Convene a stakeholder consultative workshop or focus group discussion where necessary.

1.6 Methodology

This study employed a robust mixed-methodology approach, integrating both qualitative and quantitative research techniques to ensure a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the issues surrounding the National Gender Report in Nigeria. This approach allowed for the triangulation of data, enhancing the validity and reliability of the findings by cross-referencing information obtained through different methods.

Data for this research were sourced from both primary and secondary sources. Complementing the primary data, a comprehensive desk review was undertaken. This involved a thorough examination of existing literature, reports, policy documents, and data from relevant national and international organisations to explore gender perspectives within Nigeria's broader socio-economic landscape for women, identifying new trends and developments in this field.

The primary data collection phase involved direct engagement with various stakeholders and community members, utilizing a combination of in-depth qualitative and broad quantitative methods:

- **Focus Group Discussions (FGDs):** To capture community-level perspectives and facilitate interactive discussions, 6 Focus Group Discussions were conducted across six strategically selected states: Nasarawa, Kebbi, Adamawa, Ebonyi, Cross River and Ekiti. These states were chosen to ensure geographical representation and to capture diverse socio-cultural contexts. The FGD participants comprised a broad spectrum of community members, including: women from different age groups, men, youth, community elders, persons with disabilities, etc.

These FGDs allowed for the exploration of shared experiences, perceptions of gender disparity, and the identification of community-specific challenges and opportunities related to gender equality.

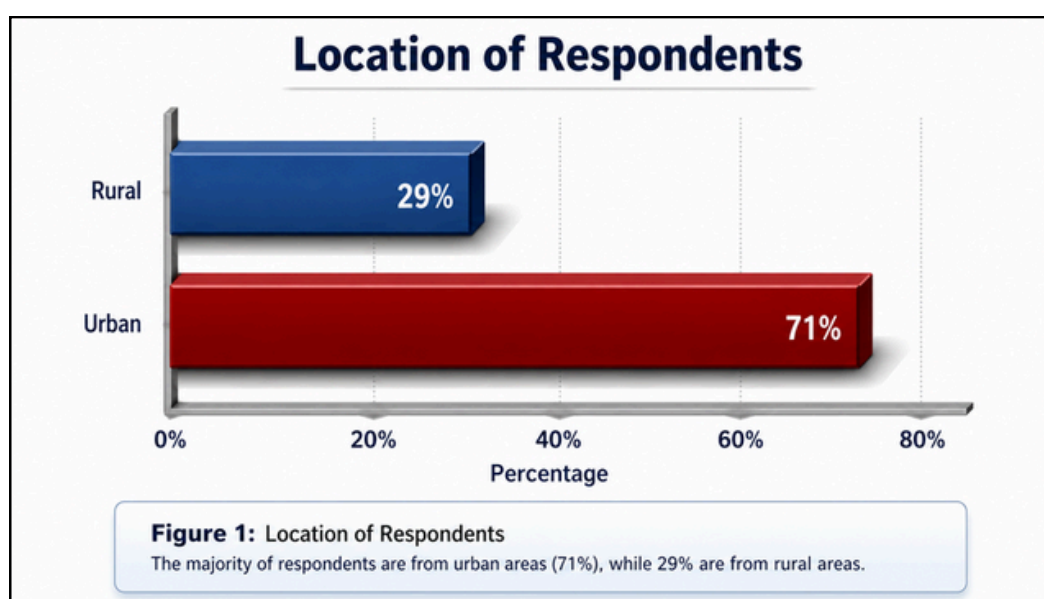
- **Quantitative Survey:** A quantitative survey was administered to 511 individuals, carefully selected using a random sampling methodology. This ensured a representative sample that cut across various demographics, including men, women, adults, and youths. The survey was designed to systematically gather data on a range of critical indicators, including:
 - Perceptions of gender disparity within respondents communities, states and nationally.
 - Assessments of progress made towards achieving gender equality.
 - Identification of significant barriers faced by women in accessing equal opportunities in education, employment, leadership, and other vital sectors.
 - Understanding listening habits and preferences among community members, particularly regarding information related to gender equality and empowerment. The survey also aimed to gauge the effectiveness of different communication channels in reaching diverse populations.

The data collection process commenced in the six designated states on the 13th October 2025 and was successfully finalised on the 27th October 2025. Throughout this period, the research team maintained a rigorous monitoring system, meticulously tracking the daily status of data collection across all sites. This proactive approach ensured data quality, addressed any logistical challenges promptly, and guaranteed the timely completion of the data collection phase.

1.7 Key Demographics

This section presents key demographic insights from the quantitative data collected across the five geopolitical zones. The study surveyed 511 respondents across five states, representing a diverse range of demographic characteristics.

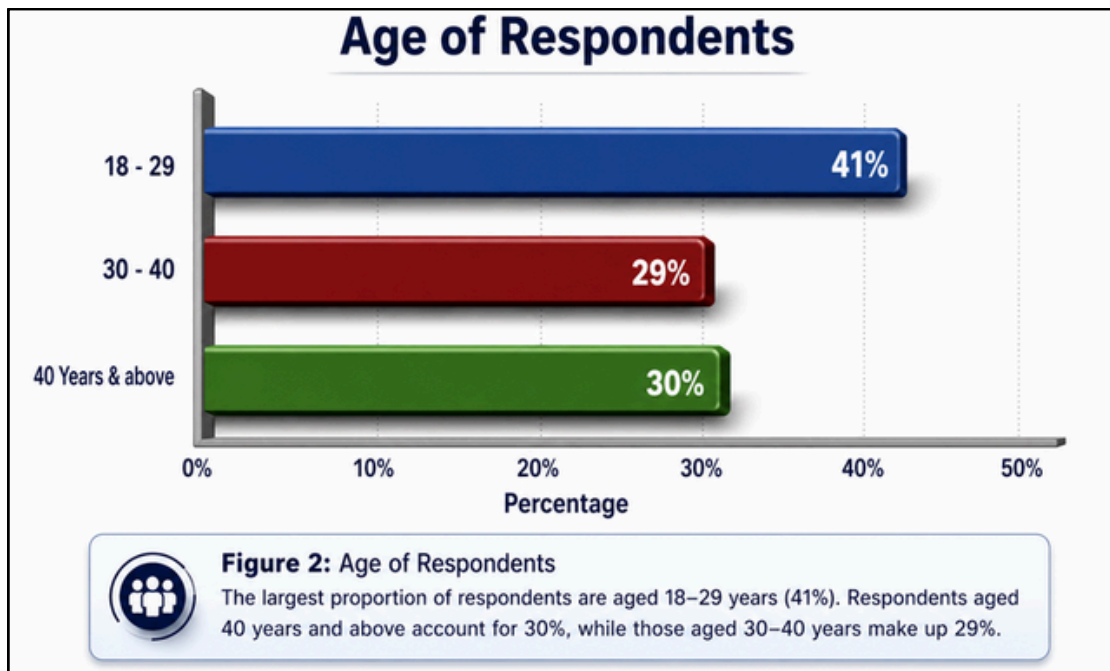
Analysis of respondent locations reveals a notable urban-rural imbalance. Seventy-one percent (71%) of participants reside in urban areas, while only 29% are from rural communities. Consequently, the survey captured the perspectives of more than twice as many urban respondents as rural respondents, which may influence the representation of experiences and challenges across different community contexts.



This urban-centric skew limits the report's conclusions. The findings predominantly reflect the experiences and perspectives of semi-urban and urban women as well as rural women. The lived experiences, socio-cultural norms, economic challenges, and access to services (like healthcare, education, and justice) differ profoundly between Nigeria's urban centres and its diverse rural communities.

Analysis of Respondent Gender

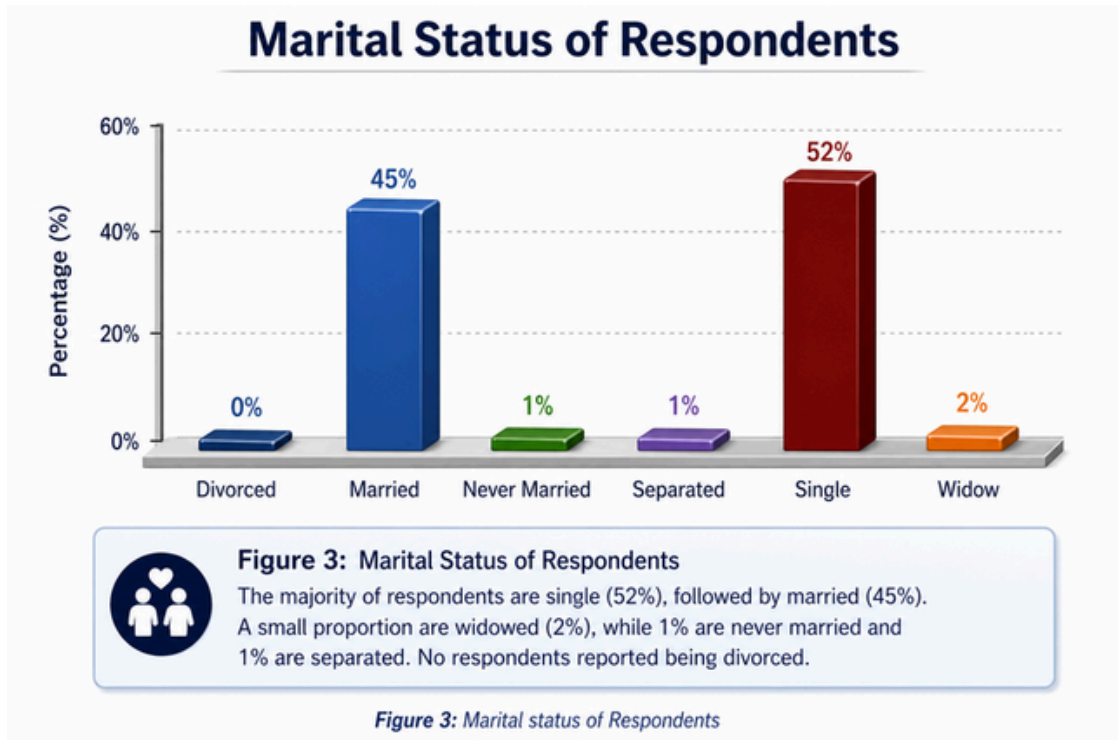
The data on respondent gender reveals a relatively balanced, though not perfectly equal, participation rate. Female respondents constitute the majority of the sample, accounting for 56% of all participants. Male respondents make up the remaining 43%. This 13-percentage-point difference indicates a greater, but not overwhelming, representation of female voices in the dataset.



This gender composition provides a strong foundation for a comprehensive gender analysis. The 56% female majority ensures that the report thoroughly captures the experiences and perspectives of women, a primary focus for any gender-related study. More importantly, the substantial 43% participation rate from men is a significant analytical asset. This robust male sample allows the report to move beyond a singular focus on women and enables a powerful, comparative analysis.

Analysis of Respondent Marital Status

The marital status data shows a near-even split between "Single" and "Married" individuals, who together represent 97% of the respondents. Specifically, 52% of participants are single, with married individuals making up a significant 45%. This indicates that the sample is predominantly composed of individuals who are either single or married.



The dataset benefits from a strong and balanced representation of "Single" and "Married" individuals. Other categories, such as "Widow" (2%), "Separated" (1%), and "Never Married" (1%), are statistically negligible. This robust demographic distribution enables a thorough comparative analysis, allowing the report to directly contrast the experiences, challenges, and perspectives on gender issues between these two primary groups.



CHAPTER TWO

KEY FINDINGS

Key Findings

2.1 Women's Participation and Leadership in the Public and Private Spheres

Nigeria's commitment to the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995) remains the primary international instrument guiding its gender agenda. The 2021-2026 National Gender Policy aims to align Nigeria's domestic laws with the Beijing principles and Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5,²¹ which advocates for gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls.

However, the trend analysis from 2019 to 2024 reveals a significant implementation gap. While SDG Target 5.5 calls for women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership, Nigeria ranks among the lowest globally in female parliamentary representation. The 2024 Global Gender Gap Report²² placed Nigeria 136th, highlighting a parity score of only 6.6% in political empowerment. The rejection of five gender-related constitutional amendment bills by the 9th National Assembly in March 2022 - bills that sought to grant citizenship to foreign husbands of Nigerian women, indigeneity rights to married women, and 35% affirmative action in party administration- demonstrates²³ a legislative hostility that directly contravenes the spirit of the Beijing Declaration and the SDGs.

Nigeria is currently experiencing a "Great Divergence" in women's leadership, with contrasting trends in the public and private sectors between 2023 and 2025. While women's representation in elective office has drastically declined, pushing Nigeria to the bottom of global rankings, their participation in corporate leadership has seen unprecedented growth, exceeding 30% board representation in top-tier companies. This disparity suggests two distinct sets of incentive structures influencing pathways to leadership.

2.1.1 Public Sector Crisis

Historically, appointed executive positions, at the discretion of the President or Governors, have been the primary means of female inclusion. However, recent data (2024-2025) on these roles is inconsistent and unreliable as a systemic pathway. For instance, one UN Women report indicated an increase in female ministerial positions

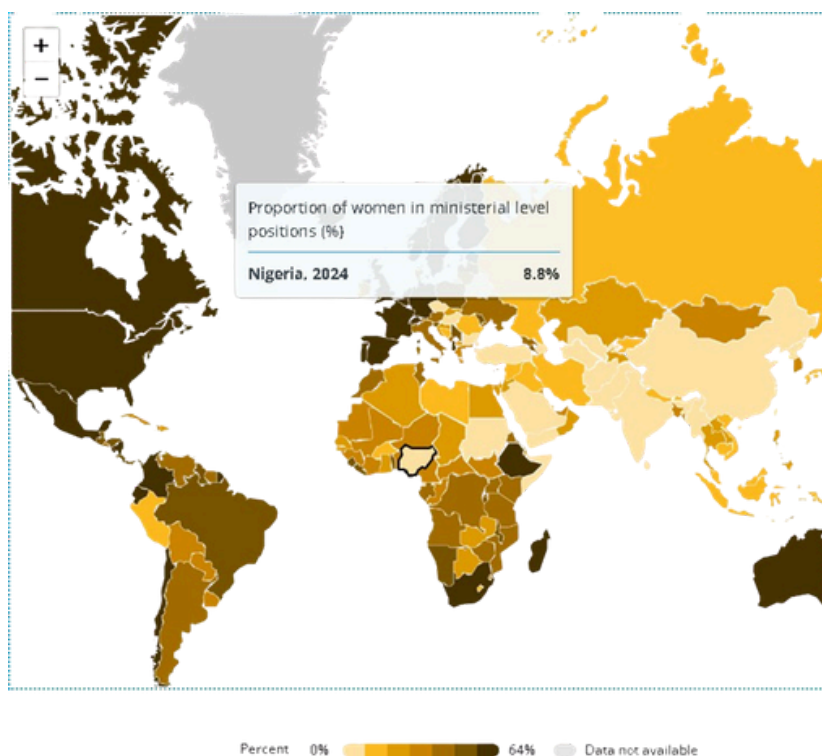
from 10.7% in 2023 to 17.6% in 2024.²⁴ Conversely, other reports from 2024/2025 stated the number of female ministers remained "stuck at eight,"²⁵ and Nigeria's global ranking for women in ministerial positions dropped significantly from 91st in 2024 to 131st in 2025.²⁶

Women are not well represented; men are higher than the women... we have not even reached that [35% affirmative action] .. my community, they are just men in that council.

- FGD Women Representatives Cross River State

The World Bank's 2024 data further reported a low 8.8% of women in ministerial-level positions.²⁷ This volatility in data indicates that appointed roles are more a reflection of political patronage and the whims of individual (male) leaders and fluctuating political negotiations, rather than institutionalised policy.

Proportion of women in ministerial-level positions(%)²⁸

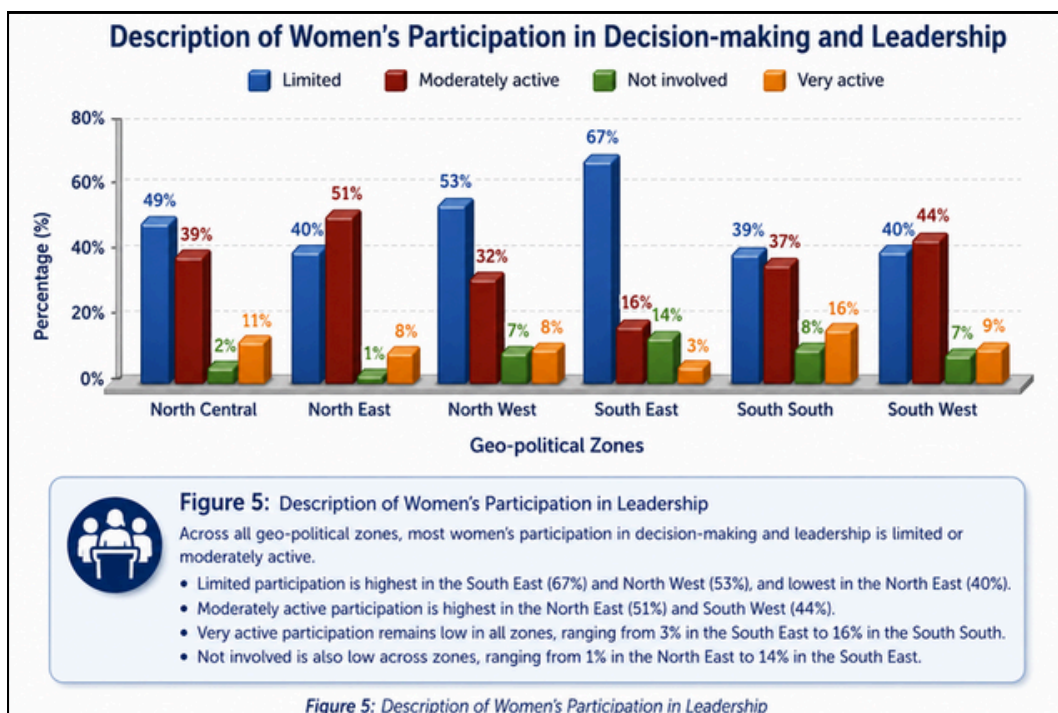


.Figure 4: Promotion of Nigerian women in ministerial-level positions

Across the surveyed states in the geopolitical zones, data on women's engagement in leadership and decision-making predominantly reveal a negative trend. A significant majority or plurality of respondents in four of Nigeria's six geopolitical zones characterised women's participation as "Limited." This pessimistic perspective was most prevalent in the North Central (49%), North West (53%), and South-South (39%), and exceptionally dominant in the South East (67%). This widespread consensus underscores a national perception that women are systematically excluded from leadership roles and key decision-making processes.

Women's participation in politics and leadership in Adamawa State remains extremely low... Very few women hold elective or appointive positions at the state and local government levels. Representation in the State House of Assembly, local councils, and senior government roles is minimal.

- FGD Women CSOs Adamawa State



The South East emerges as a particularly striking and concerning anomaly within this dataset. A substantial 67% of respondents in this zone a clear supermajority reported women's involvement as "Limited," marking the highest score for any category, whether positive or negative, across all six zones. Furthermore, the region recorded the nation's lowest "Very active" participation at a mere 3% and the highest "Not involved" score at 14%. This combination of data points to a profound and deeply ingrained regional perception of women's exclusion from leadership.

In contrast, the North East and South West are the only two regions that diverge from this negative pattern. In both zones, "Moderately active" was the most frequent response, at 51% and 44% respectively. The North East, uniquely, is the only zone where a clear majority of the populace perceives women as moderately active, also showing a low 1% for "Not involved." This suggests a considerably more positive regional environment where women's participation, though not dominant, is at least recognised and visible.

Finally, the data for "Very active" participation is remarkably weak nationwide, indicating a universal lack of perceived high-level influence. Even the South South, with the most optimistic score, only had 16% of respondents who felt women were "Very active." All other zones reported 11% or less in this category. This consistently low score confirms that, even in the most "moderate" regions, women are not widely perceived to occupy the highest echelons of power and decision-making in substantial numbers.

2.1.2 Women's Political Participation in Local Governments

The sub-national level is often theorized as the incubator for political leadership, yet in Nigeria, it mirrors the exclusion found at the federal level. In the 2023 elections, women secured approximately 4.7% of the total seats in State Houses of Assembly. Alarming, in 15 out of the 36 states, no woman was elected to the State Assembly, creating "gender deserts" in legislative governance across vast swathes of the country.²⁹

An analysis of the six focal states reveals distinct regional patterns and challenges:

- **Ekiti State:** This state represents a positive outlier in the South-West. In the 2023 elections, the state elected six women to the 26-member House of Assembly, the highest number in the region. This success is attributed to a combination of political will from the Executive, the advocacy of the former First Lady, Erelu Bisi Fayemi, and a vigilant civil society.³⁰
- **Cross River State:** Historically a state with better inclusion, Cross River witnessed a regression in 2023. The number of women in the State House of Assembly dropped, with only a few female candidates like Rita Agbo Ayim (Ogoja) and others navigating a highly competitive and monetized landscape.³¹

*There is no conscious plan for women to be considered in Elective and appointive positions in the state. What is happening is to give women traditional positions like women affairs and give them less lucrative positions.
- FGD Women Nasarawa State*

- **Ebonyi State:** The political space in Ebonyi has been volatile. While Mrs. Maria Ude Nwachi previously served as a notable minority leader, the 2023 cycle was marred by violence involving the Ebubeagu security outfit, which intimidated opposition candidates. Despite this, women like Hon. Nwogbaga Chinyere Juliet (Ebonyi North-East) managed to secure seats.³²
- **Adamawa State:** This state became the focal point of national attention due to the gubernatorial run of Senator Aishatu Dahiru (Binani). Although she did not win, her candidacy on the platform of a major party (APC) shattered the ceiling of what was considered possible for women in the conservative North-East. At the legislative level, Hon. Kate Raymond Mamuno was re-elected, serving as a beacon of resilience.³³
- **Kebbi State:** Located in the North-West, Kebbi faces deep-seated socio-cultural barriers. The 10th Assembly is male-dominated. However, the state government has implemented a policy ensuring at least one female councilor in every Local Government Area, an important affirmative action measure at the grassroots level.³⁴

- **Nasarawa State:** The state has struggled with female representation in the legislature. However, the 2023 election saw the emergence of Hon. Hajarat Ibrahim Danyaro in the House of Assembly. Furthermore, the executive arm has seen progress with the appointment of the first female Attorney General, Barr. Jugbo Hauwa Samuel.³⁵

Since the return to democracy, Kebbi State has not produced a female governor, deputy governor, senator, or member of the State House of Assembly, apart from one woman who served in the house of representative's member.
- FGD Women Representatives, Kebbi State

This benchmarking makes it clear that Nigeria's situation is not an unavoidable outcome of its developmental stage but a deliberate political choice by a male-dominated elite to resist continental and global norms of inclusive governance.

Table 2: Nigeria's Regression: Women in National Legislative & Global Context (1999-2025)

| Year | % Women in National Assembly (IPU Data) | % Women in Senate (109 Seats) | % Women in House of Reps (360 Seats) | Nigeria's Global Rank (Women in Parliament) | Sub-Saharan Africa Average % (WEF/IPU) |
|-------------|--|--------------------------------------|---|--|---|
| 1999 | 3.4% | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A |
| 2007 | 7.0% (Peak) | 7.3% (8 women) | 7.2% (26 women) | N/A | ~17% |
| 2015 | 5.6% | 6.4% (7 women) | 5.3% (19 women) | 155th | ~23% |
| 2019 | 4.5% | 7.3% (8 women) | 3.6% (13 women) | 184th | ~24.5% |
| 2023-2025 | 3.9% - 4.2% | 3.7% (4 women) | 4.2% - 4.7% (15-17 women) | 180th out of 185 | 27% |

Sources: Inter-Parliamentary Union (2024).³⁶

The political landscape presents a significant barrier to women's participation, making it a global anomaly. In the 2023 elections, women constituted merely 10% of all candidates. Furthermore, 92% of female gubernatorial candidates were associated with minor parties, offering no realistic path to victory. The legislature's failure in 2022 to enact the "Gender Bills" — Constitution Alteration bills designed to establish special seats for women — unmistakably signaled a lack of political will, which in turn foreshadowed the electoral setbacks experienced in 2023.

In the 2023 general elections, women held less than 8% of elective positions in the South-West and only 2 seats in the Ekiti State House of Assembly. - FGD Women CSOs - Ekiti State

Few women hold positions, often limited to women leader councilors in LGAs and few minor appointments. -FGD - Kebbi State

Women have access to leadership positions. Currently, the Deputy Governor is a woman, the first in the history of Ebonyi State.. The SSG is also a female. - FGD Ebonyi State

2.1.3 Barriers to Equal Access for Women

The barriers preventing equitable access to power are structural, economic, and cultural:

1. **Monetization of Politics:** The 2023 election cycle was defined by an exorbitant cost of entry. The ruling All Progressives Congress (APC) pegged presidential nomination forms at N100 million and governorship forms at N50 million. The People's Democratic Party (PDP) set presidential forms at N40 million.³⁹ While parties offered "concessions" or free forms to women, the ancillary costs of "consultations," logistics, and delegate inducement in the primaries were prohibitive. Research indicates that the "dollarization" of party primaries effectively priced women out of the market.⁴⁰

Males have more positions because politics is male-dominated, expensive, and sometimes violent.- FGD Women CSOs - Kebbi State

2. Patriarchal Party Structures: Political parties function as gatekeepers. The selection of candidates is often determined by "godfathers" and consensus arrangements that favor men. Women are frequently pressured to step down for "more viable" candidates, a euphemism for men with deeper pockets or violent leverage⁴¹

*Political parties fix meetings at very late hours; it's nothing but a calculated plot to exclude women.
FGD Women CSOs - Ebonyi State*

3. Indigeneity and Citizenship: Married women face a specific indigeneship dilemma. They are often rejected by their husband's state for being non-indigenes and by their father's state for being "married out." This leaves them politically stateless, a barrier the failed constitutional amendment bills sought to address.⁴²

4. Socio-Cultural Norms: In Northern states like Kebbi and Adamawa, cultural interpretations of religious texts regarding women's leadership (e.g., the concept of Purdah⁴³) restrict women's mobility and public interaction, which are essential for campaigning. The perception of politics as a "dirty game" incompatible with female virtue remains widespread.⁴⁴

Women in the rural areas are at a disadvantage compared to women in the urban areas because of awareness of the existing opportunities for women. FGD Women - Kebbi State.

2.1.4 Private Sector Progress

While the political landscape lags, the private sector is experiencing significant and rapid advancement in gender diversity. The 2023-2025 period marks a pivotal moment for women in corporate leadership. Historic milestones are evident in the 2025 PWRA NGX- 30 Board Gender Diversity Scorecard, which monitors Nigeria's top 30 listed companies. For the first time, women hold 31.1% of all board seats in these companies⁴⁵, the highest level ever recorded, showing a steady rise from 29.4% in 2023⁴⁶ and 21.82% in 2020.⁴⁷

Notably, all NGX-30 companies now have at least one woman on their board.⁴⁸ This progress extends to the highest leadership positions, with 5 of the top 30 firms led by female Chief Executive Officers and 3 companies having female board chairs, a significant increase from just one in 2024.⁴⁹

This positive trend is supported by strong management pipelines in crucial sectors. For instance, MTN Nigeria reported in 2024 that women constitute 46.7% of its executive management team and 41.4% of its overall leadership.⁵⁰ Similarly, 2025 data from McKinsey for Nigeria's legal sector indicates a robust pipeline, with women making up 55% of entry-level workers and 49% at the senior leadership level.⁵¹

2.1.5 The Causal Factor

The divergence is evident in the 2023-2025 data, which shows a systemic expulsion of women from public and political life (at 4.2% and decreasing) alongside their increasing integration into high-level private sector leadership (at 31.1% and rising). This divergence stems from the completely different incentive structures within the two sectors

1. **Private Sector Incentives:** Progress in corporate Nigeria is a result of regulatory pressure and global market forces. The Nigerian Code of Corporate Governance (NCCG) 2018 encourages gender diversity,⁵² and the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) has promoted female board representation.⁵³ For NGX-30 companies, attracting global capital necessitates compliance with international Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) standards. The "business case" for diversity is well-established and an integral part of corporate governance.⁵⁴

*The patriarchal nature of the society favours the men to be in leadership positions. Economic factor, political party structure and mode of operation favour the men.
- FGD Women Representatives - Ebonyi State*

2. **Public Sector Incentives:** In contrast, the political sector is characterised by hyper-localised, patriarchal incentive structures that are actively hostile to women. Analysis of the 2023 election reveals factors such as "godfatherism," extreme political monetisation, both online and offline political violence and intimidation⁵⁵, and deeply ingrained cultural and religious norms that exclusively position men as leaders.⁵⁶

There are groups of men.. that it's only men that should position themselves, it's only men that should have the money, it's only men that should do everything and women should not have a say. - FGD CSOs Women - Cross River State

Economic factor, political party structure and mode of operation favour the men.

- FGD Women Representatives - Ebonyi State

Table 3: Women's Leadership Representation: Public vs. Private Sector (2023-2025)

| Public Sector (Elective) | Total Seats | Women (Count) | Women (%) | Source |
|--|--------------------|----------------------|------------------|---|
| Senate (10th Assembly, 2023) | 109 | 3 | 2.70% | PLAC -Legist (2023) ⁵⁷ |
| House of Reps (10th Assembly, 2023) | 360 | 17 | 4.70% | PLAC -Legist (2023) |
| Total National Assembly | 469 | 20 | 4.20% | PLAC -Legist (2023) |
| State Houses of Assembly (Total, 2023) | 991 | 48 | 4.80% | National Assembly Library Trust Fund (2025) ⁵⁸ |
| States with 0 Women | 36 | 15 | 41.70% | PLAC -Legist (2023) |
| Public Sector (Appointive) | Total Posts | Women (Count) | Women (%) | Source |
| Federal Ministers (Jan 2023) | 28 | 3 | 10.70% | UN Women (2024) ⁵⁹ |
| Private Sector (NGX-30) | Total Seats | Women (Count) | Women (%) | Source |
| NGX-30 Board Seats (2020) | ~300 | 65 | 21.80% | UN Women (2023) ⁶⁰ |
| NGX-30 Board Seats (2025) | ~300 | 93 | 31.10% | PWR (2025) ⁶¹ |
| NGX-30 Companies w/ All-Male Boards | 30 | 0 | 0.00% | PWR (2025) |

2.2 Electoral Systems and Gender

2.2.1 Electoral Systems: The Role of Electoral Management Bodies

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) is the regulator of the electoral process, and its policies significantly impact gender inclusivity. INEC has institutionalized a Gender Policy to guide its internal and external operations.

- **Gender Desk Officers:** INEC has established Gender Desk Officers in all 36 states and the FCT. These officers are tasked with ensuring that gender perspectives are mainstreamed into electoral activities, from voter registration to the hiring of ad-hoc staff.⁶²
- **Data Collection:** INEC has made strides in providing gender-disaggregated data. For the 2023 election, data revealed that of the 93.4 million registered voters, 47.5% were women.⁶³ This highlights a critical disconnect: women are active participants as voters but are systematically excluded as candidates.
- **Limitations:** Despite these efforts, INEC lacks the legal power to reject party lists that do not comply with the National Gender Policy's 35% affirmative action. The commission is bound by the Electoral Act 2022, which does not explicitly mandate gender quotas for candidate lists, leaving INEC to rely on moral suasion which political parties largely ignore.

*A 2024 survey by INEC and UN Women found that women in Ekiti cited 'fear of political violence' and 'lack of party support' as their top deterrents.
- FGD CSOs - Ekiti State*

2.2.2 Gender Mainstreaming in Policies, Actions, and Institutions

The core of gender mainstreaming in Nigeria is the Revised National Gender Policy (2021-2026). This strategic document prescribes a 35% affirmative action for women in all appointive and elective positions.⁶⁴

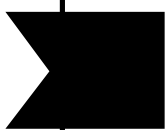
Specific Equality Mechanisms:

- Ministry of Women Affairs: acts as the primary machinery for gender mainstreaming. It coordinates with state-level ministries to implement empowerment programs and monitor compliance with the NGP.⁶⁵
- Federal Character Commission: While established to ensure ethnic balance, advocacy groups have pushed for the interpretation of "Federal Character" to include "Gender Character," arguing that the exclusion of women violates the constitutional principle of non-discrimination

2.2.3 Political Parties and Parity Democracy

Political parties in Nigeria have failed to uphold the principles of parity democracy. Analysis of the 2023 party primaries shows that internal party democracy is arguably the biggest hurdle for women.

- **Candidate Selection:** The number of female candidates declined from 2019 to 2023. In the 2023 elections, only 1,552 (10.1%) of the 15,307 candidates were women.⁶⁶
- **Tokenism:** While parties often create the position of "Woman Leader," this role is usually relegated to mobilizing women for rallies and catering, rather than being part of the strategic decision-making organ (NWC) of the party.
- **Trend:** The major parties (APC and PDP) fielded very few women for executive positions. The Labour Party (LP) and smaller parties like APM fielded more women relatively, but the dominant two-party system marginalized female candidates in "winnable" seats.⁶⁷



Political parties fix meetings at very late hours; it's nothing but a calculated plot to exclude women. FGD - Ebonyi State



Political parties have women's wings with women leaders at all levels for mobilizing women to participate in politics though mostly limited to voting. - FGD Kebbi State

Table 4: Women's Representation in the 2023 General Elections (National Overview)

| Position | Total Seats | Women Elected | Percentage (%) | Trend (vs 2019) |
|------------------|--------------|---------------|----------------|-------------------|
| President | 1 | 0 | 0% | Stagnant |
| Vice President | 1 | 0 | 0% | Stagnant |
| Governors | 28 (Elected) | 0 | 0% | Stagnant |
| Deputy Governors | 28 | 7 | 25% | Increase |
| Senate | 109 | 3 | 2.75% | Decrease |
| House of Reps | 360 | 17 | 4.7% | Stagnant |
| State Assemblies | 993 | ~72 | ~7.2% | Marginal Decrease |

Table 5: State-Level Disaggregation (Focal States - 2023 House of Assembly)

| State | Total Seats | Women Elected | Notable Female Members |
|-------------|-------------|---------------|---|
| Ekiti | 26 | 6 | Hon. Olowookere Bosede Yinka, Hon. Ogunlade Maryam Bimbola, Hon. Solanke Abimbola Christiana, Hon. Princess Okuyiga Teju, Hon. Fakunle-Okieimen Iyabo, Hon. Bolaji Olagbaju ⁶⁸ |
| Cross River | 25 | ~1 | Decline from previous assembly. Hon. Rita Agbo Ayim (former member) context implies reduction ⁶⁹ |
| Ebonyi | 24 | ~2 | Hon. Nwogbaga Chinyere Juliet, Hon. Esther Agwu ⁷⁰ |
| Nasarawa | 24 | 1 | Hon. Hajarat Ibrahim Danyaro ⁷¹ |
| Adamawa | 25 | 1 | Hon. Kate Raymond Mamuno ⁷² |
| Kebbi | 24 | 0 | No female member elected to the 10th Assembly ⁷³ |

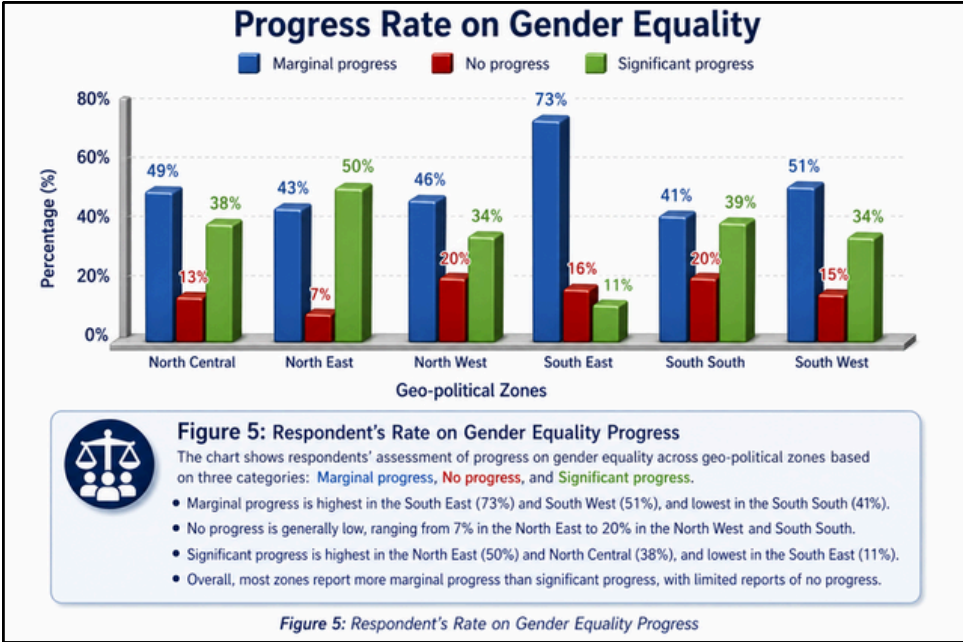
2.3 Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment

Nigeria confronts a profound obstacle in achieving gender equality, a reality consistently underscored by global data. The 2024 Global Gender Gap Report by the World Economic Forum positioned Nigeria at 125th out of 146 countries, highlighting significant disparities.⁷⁴ This disparity is not merely theoretical; it is most evident in political empowerment, where the report ranks Nigeria among the lowest globally (136th).

For instance, following the 2023 general elections, women's representation in the National Assembly drastically declined to 3.9%, with only 15 women in the 360-member House of Representatives and 3 in the 109-member Senate, according to the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU). This exclusion from political spheres is mirrored in the economic landscape. Despite high female labour force participation, often concentrated in vulnerable informal sectors, women face systematic impediments to accessing credit, owning land, and securing leadership positions.

Significant strides have been made despite systemic challenges, largely due to persistent civil society advocacy and crucial policy reforms. A major legal achievement is the 2015 Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) (VAPP) Act⁷⁵. This pivotal legislation establishes a comprehensive legal framework for prosecuting various forms of gender-based violence (GBV), such as domestic violence, rape, and harmful traditional practices. As of 2024, at least 35 states and the FCT have domesticated this law, providing a crucial tool for justice.

Perceptions of progress on gender equality vary across Nigeria's six geopolitical zones, with "Marginal progress" being the most common view nationally. This indicates a general sense of slow, incremental change rather than significant transformation. The South East exhibits the most distinct perspective, with 73% of respondents perceiving "Marginal progress"—the highest for any category in any zone. This is significantly higher than its 11% for "Significant progress," the lowest in the country, suggesting that while some limited progress is acknowledged, major advancements are seen as rare.



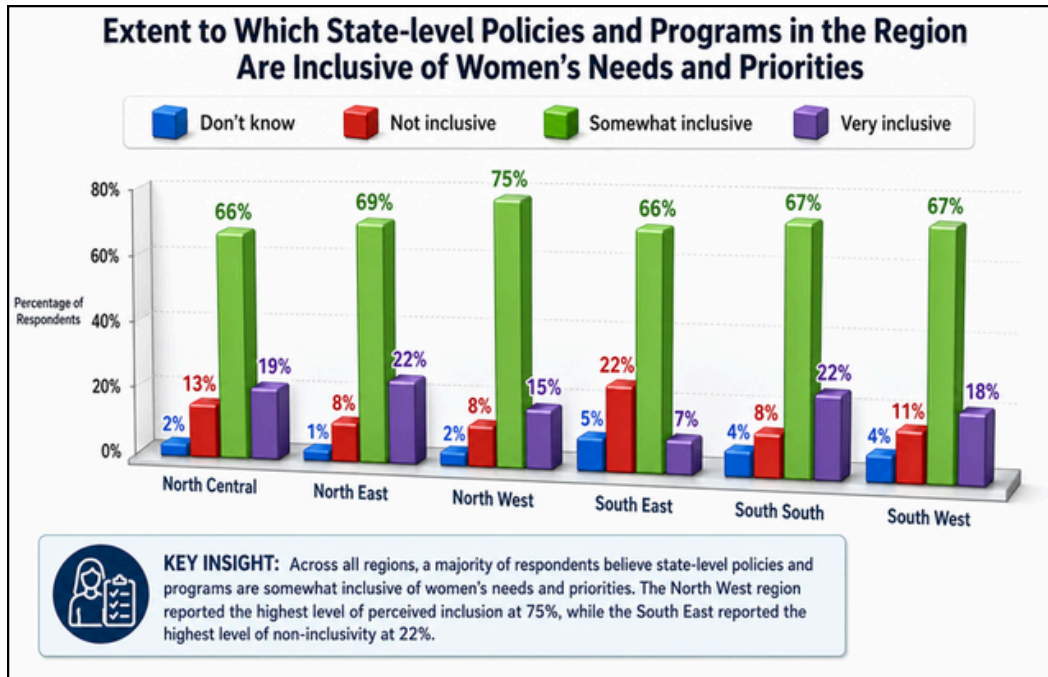
In contrast, the North East holds the most optimistic outlook, with "Significant progress" being the most frequent response at 50%. It also reports the lowest "No progress" at 7%, reinforcing this positive perception. The South-South and North Central zones show a more balanced view, with respondents nearly evenly split between "Marginal" and "Significant" progress (41%/39% and 49%/38%, respectively). Conversely, the North West and South-South express the highest pessimism, both recording 20% for "No progress."

Despite the existence of the VAPP Act, its implementation is inconsistent, and socio-cultural norms often deter survivors from seeking justice. Similarly, the Gender and Equal Opportunities (GEO) Bill, intended to domesticate CEDAW and safeguard women's rights in marriage, inheritance, and employment, has faced repeated rejections by the National Assembly⁷⁶. This ongoing resistance highlights a fundamental conflict: while empowerment initiatives foster individual successes, the systemic legal and political frameworks essential for true equality remain largely unchanged. Consequently, Nigeria's progress presents a paradox, showcasing significant empowerment in certain areas alongside deep-seated structural inequality in others.

Furthermore, progress is evident in education, with the gender gap in primary school enrollment having narrowed significantly. In the economic sphere, a new generation of female entrepreneurs is challenging the status quo, particularly in technology, creative industries, and SMEs, supported by initiatives like the National Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) Policy, which aims to improve women's access to finance and markets.

Respondents' State-Level Programs vs Women's Needs

Findings show a consistent national consensus among respondents, who believe that state-level policies and programs are only "Somewhat inclusive" of women's needs. This sentiment is strongest in the North West (75%) and remains dominant across all six geopolitical zones (66%-69%).



Even in regions demonstrating the most optimism, such as the North East and South-South, only 22% of respondents felt policies were "Very inclusive." This relatively low figure highlights that even in areas with a slightly more positive outlook, a substantial majority still harbors reservations about the complete effectiveness of these policies. The situation becomes more distinct in the North West, where only 15% of respondents perceive policies as "Very inclusive," further emphasising the widespread lack of confidence. The South East region exhibits the country's most significant concern regarding the perceived effectiveness of state-level gender policies. Only 7% of respondents in this region believe policies are "Very inclusive," a score that is the lowest by a considerable margin. This strongly suggests a widespread lack of confidence in the full efficacy of state policies within the South East.

This low perception may stem from several factors, including insufficient implementation, poor public awareness, or policies that fail to genuinely address the specific lived experiences and pressing needs of women in the area. The North Central (13%) and South West (11%) also show notable minorities with this negative view.

Overall, the data suggests widespread tokenism or partial implementation rather than outright policy failure. The dominance of the "Somewhat inclusive" category indicates a critical gap between policy design and its tangible impact, implying that current programs fail to fully address the core needs and priorities of women nationwide.

The widespread perception of "somewhat inclusive" suggests that existing programs are failing to fully address the fundamental needs and priorities of women across all regions of the country. This shortfall can be attributed to several factors:

- **Inadequate Funding and Resources:** Policies, regardless of their intent, cannot be effective without sufficient financial and human resources for their implementation.
- **Ineffective Implementation Mechanisms:** Even with sound policies and resources, poor execution, corruption, or a lack of accountability can undermine their intended impact.
- **Insufficient Understanding of Local Contexts:** Nationally designed policies may not adequately account for the diverse socio-cultural, economic, and political realities of different regions and communities, leading to a disconnect between policy goals and actual needs.
- **Limited Participation of Women in Policy Formulation:** If women are not sufficiently involved in the design of policies meant to benefit them, these policies may not accurately reflect their lived experiences and priorities.
- **Cultural and Social Barriers:** Deep-seated patriarchal norms and traditional practices can impede the effectiveness of even well-designed and implemented gender-inclusive policies.

Policy and Programmatic Responses: In response to these persistent challenges, a new policy architecture is emerging. The Government of Nigeria has launched the Women Economic Empowerment (WEE) Policy and Action Plan (2023)⁷⁷ and the Revised National Gender Policy (2021-2026)⁷⁸. These policies provide a formal framework for addressing socio-economic inequalities. Specific interventions complement these. The National Directorate of Employment (NDE), for example, has programs that show high female participation. In 2022, 55.0% of beneficiaries in the Enterprise Development Programme were female, as were 61.93% of beneficiaries in the National Open Apprenticeship Scheme.⁷⁹

International partners are also deploying large-scale programs. The World Bank's Nigeria for Women Program (NFWP) has reached over 1 million women by organising them into Women Affinity Groups (WAGs), which have collectively mobilised over N5 billion in savings.⁸⁰ Critically, the World Bank's Women Entrepreneurs Finance Initiative (We-Fi) is pioneering a solution to the collateral trap.⁸¹ In partnership with Nigerian banks, the We-Fi program is developing innovative credit solutions, such as cash-flow-based lending, that bypass the need for fixed collateral (like land) and instead use business bank account data to assess credit-worthiness.⁸² This represents a crucial, market-led attempt to break the structural financial barrier that traps women in informality.

2.3.1 Economic Empowerment: Women Entrepreneurs and Business Owners

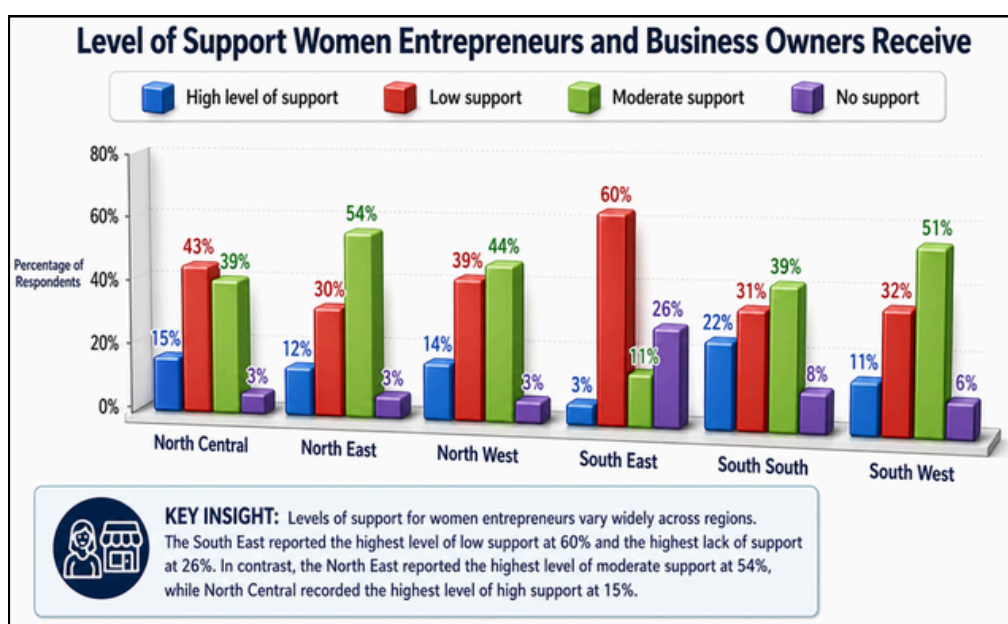
Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) are vital to Nigeria's economy. In 2020, Micro Enterprises constituted 96.9% and Small and Medium Enterprises 3.1% of all businesses. MSMEs collectively contributed 46.3% to the national GDP, 6.21% to gross exports, and employed over 84% of the total workforce. Regarding ownership, 96.2% of MSMEs are sole proprietorships, 3.3% are partnerships, 0.1% are faith-based organisations, and 0.4% fall into other categories. A gender breakdown shows that men own 67.1% of surveyed MSMEs, while women own 32.9%⁸³.

Despite this, women entrepreneurs are significant contributors to Nigeria's economy, owning 41% of all micro-businesses,⁸⁴ according to a verifiable PwC Nigeria report. However, a substantial gender finance gap hinders their growth. According to the survey, women entrepreneurs in Nigeria face significant challenges in securing adequate support, with "Low support" and "Moderate support" being the prevailing experiences across nearly all geopolitical zones. A consistent finding is the minimal perception of "High support," which never exceeds 22% and drops to a mere 3% in the South East, indicating a widespread lack of robust support systems for women business owners.

Research from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) reveals that about 80% of women-owned businesses depend on personal savings and informal funding⁸⁵. This reliance stems from the fact that formal lending institutions typically demand fixed assets, such as land, as collateral. Patrilineal inheritance customs and other socio-cultural norms often prevent women from owning such assets, thereby excluding them from formal credit markets.

Women in Adamawa State have limited access to formal financial institutions, making it difficult for them to secure loans or invest in their businesses.

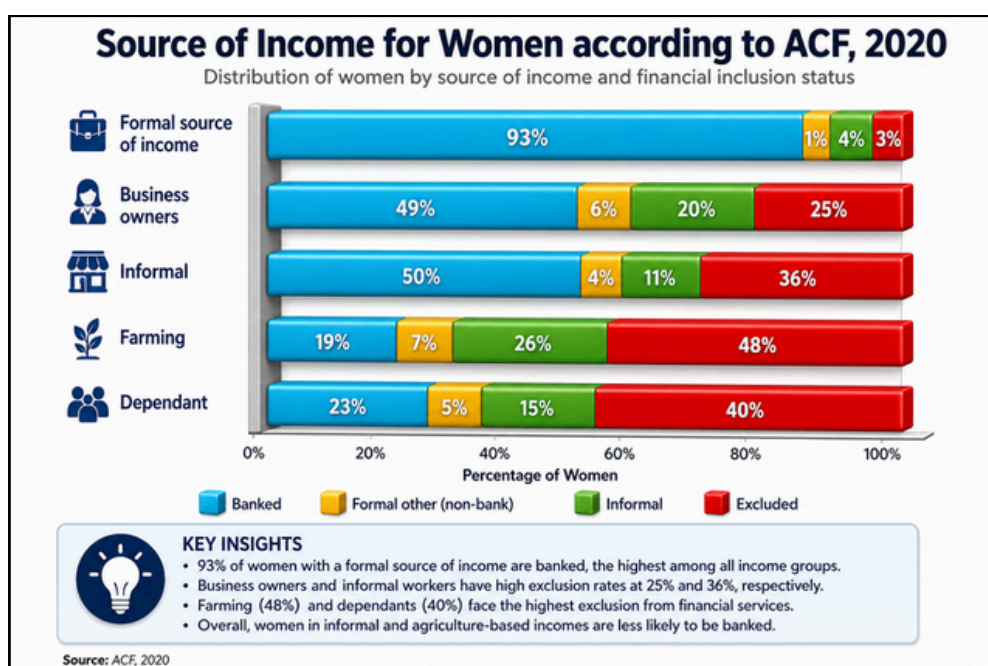
FGD Women Representatives - Adamawa State



The South East region stands out as a critical outlier, presenting the most concerning data. A striking 60% of respondents in this zone reported "Low support," the highest figure nationwide. Additionally, the South East recorded an alarming 26% for "No support," dramatically higher than any other zone (which all remained below 9%). This combined 86% of respondents reporting "Low" or "No" support highlights a severe support deficit in the region. According to Enhancing Financial Inclusion and Advancement (EFInA) (2024),⁸⁶ half of the women in business do not have access to formal financial services, which can provide opportunities to boost their business.

Women can also be given financial empowerment; that is, supporting them with money to start their own businesses.. to remove complete dependence on men for financial support. - FGD CSOs Rep - Ebonyi State

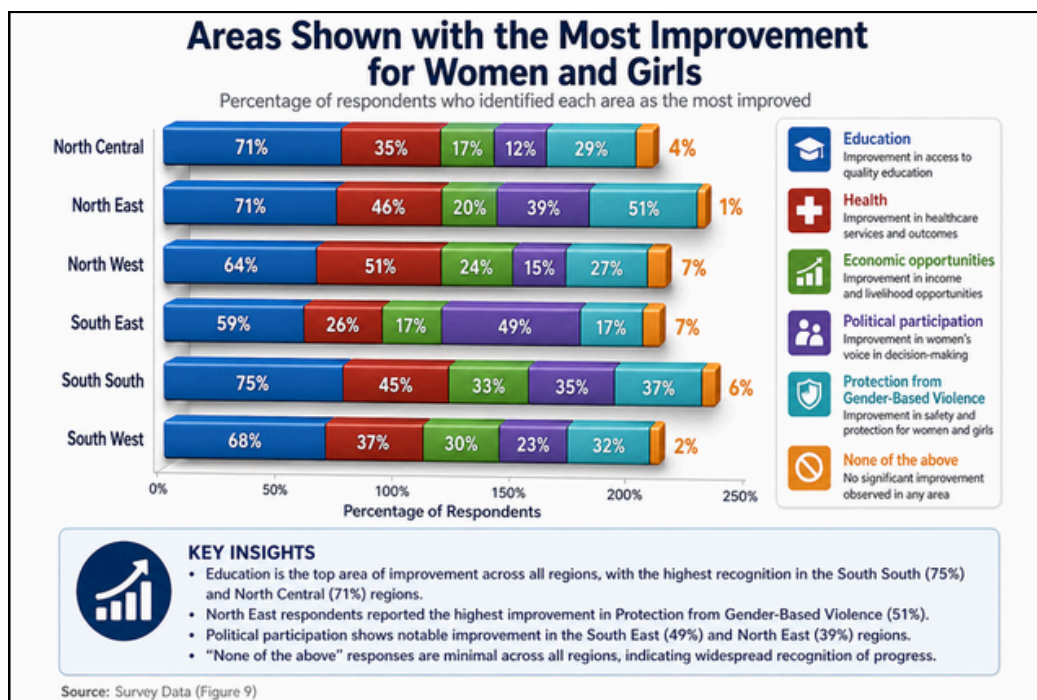
Conversely, the North East and South West exhibit the most favourable conditions. The North East leads the nation with the highest level of "Moderate support" at 54% and the lowest level of "Low support" (30%). The South West closely follows, showing the second-highest "Moderate support" at 51%. While the South South distinguishes itself with the highest level of "High support" at 22%, "Moderate" and "Low" support remain more common. The North Central and North West zones portray a mixed reality, with respondents almost equally divided between perceiving "Low" support (43%/39%) and "Moderate" support(39%/44%), suggesting an inconsistent support structure.



About 13 million women who own businesses could achieve economic empowerment through greater access to formal financial services. Studies demonstrate that women's economic empowerment improves household livelihood and food security, as evidenced by their allocation of limited income towards household expenditures. Key factors influencing women's contributions to household welfare in a 2020 study conducted⁸⁷ included age, education level, savings, remittances, entrepreneurship training, and access to credit. Furthermore, research in South-East Nigeria⁸⁸ indicates that an increased share of income for women leads to a higher budget allocation across various household expenditure categories. This supports the concept that intra-household resource allocation from women to men enhances household economic outcomes.

2.3.2 Bridging the Gap

In response, key institutions have launched targeted programs to bridge this divide. The Bank of Industry (BOI), a public-sector institution, established the "Guaranteed Loans for Women (GLOW)" program. This ₦10 billion fund (as of its launch) directly provides women with concessional loans at single-digit interest rates (7% p.a.) and offers capacity- building support⁸⁹. In the private sector, Access Bank's 'W' Initiative stands as a prominent example. Its flagship "Women-preneur Pitch-a-Ton" program does not just provide grants; it combines capital with a "mini-MBA" certification⁹⁰, offered in partnership with the International Finance Corporation (IFC), to equip women with the managerial and financial skills needed for sustainable growth.



However, respondents have a divergent view; economic opportunities are consistently perceived as one of the least-improved areas for women and girls across all six zones, indicating widespread stagnation. While the South-South (33%) and South West (30%) show the most positive outlook, even in these regions, only a minority of respondents perceive any improvement.

The perception of economic progress is weakest in the North Central and South East, both reporting a low score of 17%. The North East (20%) and North West (24%) also show very low figures, reinforcing this national trend. This highlights a significant disconnect: despite overwhelming perceived progress in "Education" (often above 70%), a corresponding improvement in economic opportunities is not observed. This suggests a considerable gap between women's educational attainment and their ability to participate and advance economically.

*There are a lot of policies put in place here in Cross River State.. they identify women, they train them every day.. after the training, they will empower them.- FGD
Women CSOs - Cross River State*

At a national level, the Federal Government adopted the National Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) Policy and Action Plan in May 2023. This policy, developed with support from partners like the World Bank, creates a formal framework to institutionalise gender-responsive budgeting, procurement, and policymaking. This high-level strategy acknowledges that capital alone is insufficient. It aims to tackle other systemic hurdles that initiatives like BOI's and Access Bank's also address, such as the disproportionate "double burden" of unpaid care work, exclusion from male-dominated business networks, and the digital literacy gap, all of which hinder women from transitioning their micro- businesses into larger, formal enterprises.

2.4 Women's Leadership: Health and Well-being

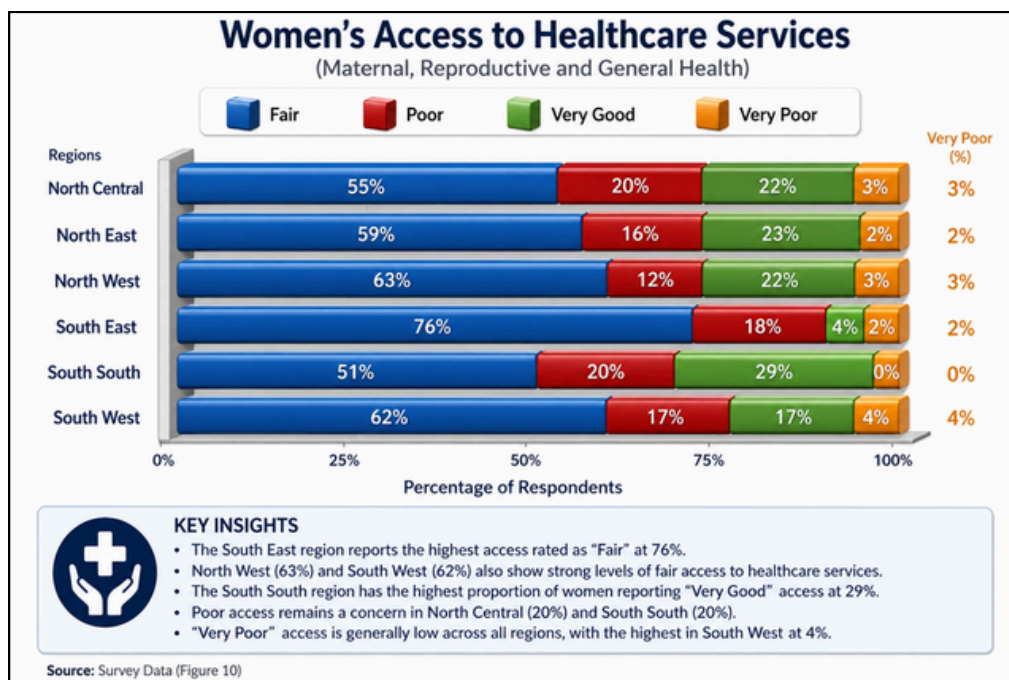
Nigeria continues to grapple with a significant challenge in women's health, particularly evident in its high maternal mortality rate. Despite some progress, the country's maternal mortality ratio remains among the highest globally, with the World Bank estimating 993 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2023.⁹¹ This tragic situation is primarily driven by limited access to quality healthcare. Data from the Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS) consistently reveal that a substantial proportion of births, especially in rural areas, occur without the presence of skilled health personnel. This deficiency is further exacerbated by a shortage of healthcare workers and inadequately equipped primary healthcare centres (PHCs).⁹²

The final foundational burden is the persistent crisis in women's health, which is a matter of life and death. The 2023–24 Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS) provides the new baseline data for monitoring this crisis, which is critical for tracking progress toward SDG 3.1.⁹³ High maternal mortality is linked to gaps in reproductive health services. The adolescent fertility rate in 2023 was 86 births per 1,000 girls aged 15-19.⁹⁴ This is a decrease from 2010 but remains higher than the average for Nigeria's income group⁹⁵. A key driver is the low uptake of modern contraception; 2018 data showed that only 35.6% of women who needed family planning had their need satisfied with modern methods.⁹⁶

These health crises are the physical manifestation of the low socio-economic status of women. They are interconnected: child marriage leads to adolescent pregnancy,⁹⁷ which carries a higher risk of maternal mortality, which in turn devastates the economic stability of the surviving household.

Finding reveals that women's access to maternal, reproductive, and general healthcare in Nigeria is predominantly perceived as "Fair." This sentiment is most pronounced in the South East (76%), followed by the North West (63%) and South West (62%). This indicates that while the healthcare system is functional, it often falls short of delivering high-quality outcomes for women.

Significant regional disparities exist in the perception of "Very good" access. The South-South leads with 29%, while the North East (23%), North Central (22%), and North West (22%) also report substantial positive experiences. In stark contrast, the South East reports an exceptionally low 4% for "Very good" access, highlighting a perceived lack of quality and high-level service delivery in the region.



The perception of "Very good" access highlights significant regional disparities. The South-South stands out as the most optimistic region, with 29% of its respondents reporting "Very good" access—the highest in the nation. The North East (23%), North Central (22%), and North West (22%) form a consistent bloc where more than one in five people perceive access as "Very good." This indicates that a substantial minority in these zones has a positive experience with the healthcare system.

However, the South East presents a stark and alarming contrast. The region reports an exceptionally low 4% for "Very good" access, a figure that is four to seven times lower than any other zone in the country. This near-total absence of perceived excellence, combined with the zone's 76% "Fair" rating, paints a picture of a healthcare system that residents view as profoundly lacking in quality and high-level service delivery for women.

Finally, a significant portion of the population reports actively negative experiences. The view that healthcare access is "Poor" (red bar) is strongest in the North Central and South-South, where 20% of respondents in both zones selected this option. When combining the "Poor" and "Very Poor" categories, the North West emerges as the most satisfied region, with the lowest combined negative rating (15%). Conversely, the North Central (23% combined) and South West (21% combined) report the highest levels of dissatisfaction, highlighting that in these regions, over one in five women's healthcare experiences are perceived as "Poor" or "Very Poor."

Table 6: Most pressing health challenges for women and girls in this region

| Health Challenges | North Central | North East | North West | South East | South South | South West |
|---|----------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|--------------------|-------------------|
| Maternal mortality | 43% | 53% | 63% | 51% | 51% | 46% |
| Limited access to reproductive health services | 48% | 63% | 49% | 60% | 51% | 52% |
| Gender-based violence and trauma | 42% | 57% | 31% | 84% | 53% | 46% |
| Mental health challenges | 28% | 41% | 31% | 57% | 39% | 41% |
| HIV/AIDS and other infectious diseases | 35% | 31% | 20% | 25% | 33% | 21% |
| Malnutrition | 21% | 37% | 47% | 50% | 35% | 21% |

The table identifies the most critical health challenges for women and girls, revealing that limited access to reproductive health services stands out as a critical health challenge for women and girls across Nigeria, identified as a top concern in all six zones. The North East (63%) and South East (60%) reported the most significant challenges in this area. Maternal mortality is another urgent national crisis, ranking among the top three concerns in every zone. This issue is particularly acute in the North West, where 63% of respondents—the highest in the nation for this specific concern—identified it as a pressing challenge.

The data from the South East presents the most alarming and distinct regional profile. An overwhelming 84% of respondents in this zone identified "Gender-based violence (GBV) and trauma" as a pressing challenge. This figure is not just the highest in the nation; it is a stunning 27 percentage points higher than the next closest zone (North East at 57%). This identifies GBV as the single most critical health issue perceived in the region. This crisis is compounded by the South East also posting the nation's highest scores for "Mental health challenges" (57%) and "Malnutrition" (50%), painting a picture of a region facing a severe, multi-faceted health crisis.

The northern zones highlight unique regional priorities. The North East faces a "triple crisis" where "Limited access to reproductive health" (63%), "GBV" (57%), and "Maternal mortality" (53%) all register as severe, high-priority issues, likely reflecting the region's security and humanitarian challenges. In the North West, "Maternal mortality" (63%) is the undisputed top challenge, followed by "Malnutrition" (47%). This combination highlights

The remaining issues show significant regional variance. "HIV/AIDS and other infectious diseases" is perceived as a primary challenge in the North Central (35%) and South-South (33%), but it is a much lower-priority concern in the North West (20%) and South West (21%). Similarly, "Malnutrition" is a major issue in the North West (47%) and South East (50%), but is reported as the least pressing challenge in the North Central and South West, with both zones posting an identical low score of 21%.

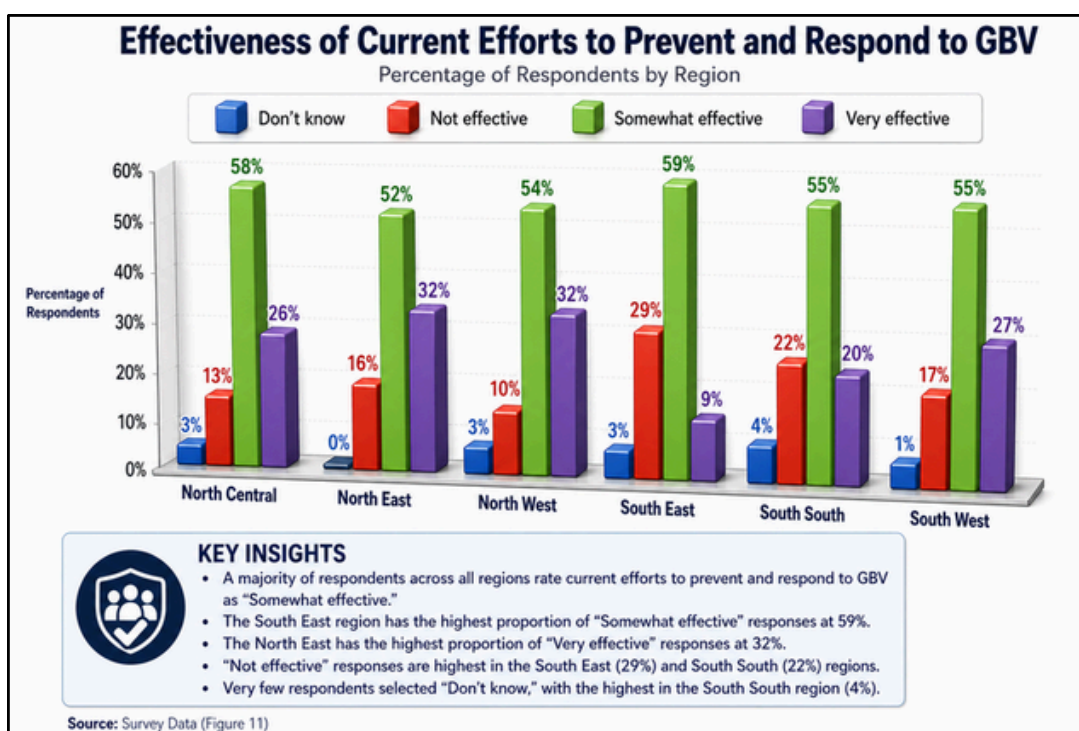
2.4.1 The Social Fabric: Norms, Traditions, and Structural Barriers

The economic, political, and health statistics detailed thus far are not standalone figures. They are the outcomes of a deeply entrenched social fabric woven from traditional practices, cultural norms, and systemic biases. This section analyses the foundational social structures that dictate women's agency, from gender-based violence (GBV) to harmful traditional practices. A key new occurrence identified in 2024 is the emergence of organised, ideological pushback against reforms.

2.4.2. Gender-Based Violence

Violence against women and girls (VAWG) remains a pervasive shadow pandemic in Nigeria. According to 2018 data (the most recent comprehensive survey), 13.2% of ever-partnered women and girls aged 15-49 reported experiencing physical and/or sexual violence from a current or former intimate partner in the previous 12 months.⁹⁸ The World Bank notes that Nigeria's lifetime prevalence of IPV is less than the global average of 27%,⁹⁹ though this 12-month figure still represents millions of women.

The data from the quantitative survey reveal a strong and consistent national consensus: the overwhelming majority of Nigerians in every geopolitical zone perceive current efforts to combat GBV as only "Somewhat effective." This single response (green bar) dominates the chart, with scores ranging from 52% in the North East to a high of 59% in the South East. This finding signals a widespread belief that current programs are mediocre—they are not seen as total failures, but they are clearly not viewed as highly successful or transformative.



The South East stands out as the most pessimistic and dissatisfied region in the country. It records by far the highest level of negative responses, with 29% of its population stating that efforts are "Not effective"—a figure significantly higher than any other zone.

Compounding this, the South East also reports the absolute lowest level of confidence, with a mere 9% perceiving efforts as "Very effective." This combination—the highest pessimism and the lowest optimism—paints a picture of a region with a profound lack of faith in the current systems for GBV response.

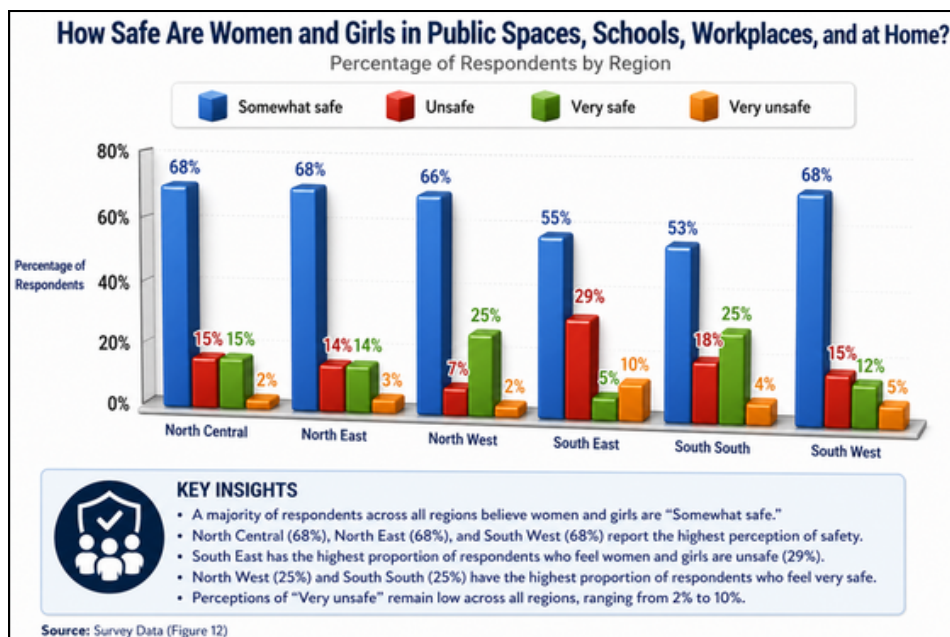
In sharp contrast, the North East and North West emerge as the most optimistic regions. Respondents in both zones report the highest levels of confidence, with 32% in each zone describing efforts as "Very effective." This is notably higher than all other regions. Furthermore, the North West also posts the lowest level of dissatisfaction, with only 10% of respondents seeing efforts as "Not effective." This suggests that residents in these two northern zones perceive the GBV interventions in their regions as being far more successful and impactful than their counterparts in the south.

The remaining zones reflect this same "somewhat effective" consensus but with varying degrees of dissatisfaction. The South-South follows the South East as the second most-pessimistic zone, with 22% of its respondents deeming efforts "Not effective." The South West (17%) and North Central (13%) also show significant minorities who are dissatisfied with the results of GBV programs. The "Don't know" responses are negligible in all zones, indicating that the public has a clear and well-formed opinion on this critical issue.

2.4.3. Legal Frameworks

Progress has been made in the legal architecture to combat this. The Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act (VAPP) of 2015 is a landmark piece of legislation,¹⁰⁰ and its adoption by numerous states is a key achievement.¹⁰¹ As of 2024, UN Women reports that 66.7% of legal frameworks that promote, enforce, and monitor gender equality (with a focus on VAW) are in place.¹⁰² Despite this legal progress, weak legal enforcement and social norms that prioritise silence over justice mean many cases go unpunished.¹⁰³

The quantitative survey data reveal a powerful national consensus: the overwhelming majority of respondents in every geopolitical zone perceive the safety of women and girls as merely "**Somewhat safe.**" This single category (blue bar) dominates the chart, with the **North Central** (68%), **North East** (68%), and **South West** (68%) all reporting identical, high majorities. While this is also the top response in the South East (55%) and South South (53%), the overall trend indicates a widespread national perception that safety for women is conditional and not guaranteed, falling well short of a high standard.



The **South East** stands as a stark and alarming outlier, registering the most negative perceptions of safety in the entire country. It reports by far the highest level of perceived danger, with **29%** of respondents selecting "**Unsafe**" and another **10%** selecting "**Very unsafe**." This combined **39%** who feel women are unsafe is dramatically higher than any other zone. Compounding this, the South East also posts the absolute lowest score for "**Very safe**" at just **5%**, painting a clear and disturbing picture of a region with a profound sense of insecurity for women and girls.

In contrast, the **North West** and **South-South** report the most optimistic (though still mixed) perceptions of safety. Both zones are tied for the highest level of "**Very safe**" responses at **25%**—a score five times higher than that of the South East. The **North West** is particularly notable, as it pairs this high optimism with the nation's lowest level of "**Unsafe**" responses at just **7%**. The North Central and North East reflect an identical, "middle-of-the-road" view, with **15%** "Unsafe" and **15%** "Very safe" in the North Central, and **14%** "Unsafe" and **14%** "Very safe" in the North East, showing a perfect tie between positive and negative sentiments in those regions.

Most times when these laws are being given.. There are no people out there to monitor and make sure these things.. are being carried out effectively. FGD Women Representative - Cross River State

2.4.4. Harmful Traditional Practices

Harmful traditional practices like child marriage and Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) represent the most devastating consequences of societal norms, reaching catastrophic levels in Nigeria. The country accounts for the third-highest number of child brides globally, exceeding 24 million.¹⁰⁴ As of February 2024, nearly half of all girls (44%) were married before age 18.¹⁰⁵ While national prevalence has seen a slight decline to 30.3%,¹⁰⁶ progress is slow,¹⁰⁷ and the practice remains widespread, particularly in the North West (52% prevalence) and North East (51.1%). It disproportionately affects the poorest, rural households¹⁰⁸

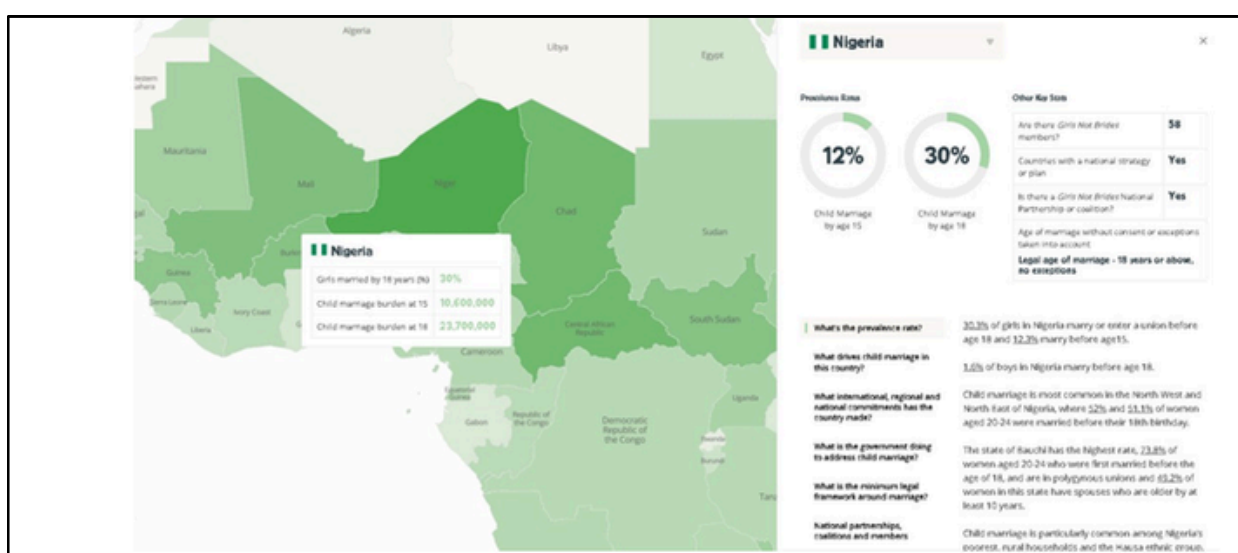


Figure 13: Sources: Girls Not Bride¹⁰⁹

From the quantitative data across the survey, "Domestic violence/intimate partner violence" and "Sexual harassment/assault/digital facilitated violence" are consistently identified as the most prevalent forms of gender-based violence (GBV). These two categories are the primary concerns in every geopolitical zone. Domestic violence is most frequently reported in the North East (82%) and North West (68%).

Sexual violence ranks highest in the South West (73%) and is equally prominent in the South East (79%) and South-South (65%). This indicates a widespread agreement that violence within the home and sexual violence in public and digital realms represent the most pervasive GBV issues facing the nation.

Table 7: What are the main reasons girls drop out of school in this region/geopolitical zone?

| Reasons/Issues | North Central | North East | North West | South East | South South | South West |
|---|---------------|------------|------------|------------|-------------|------------|
| Early/child marriage | 52% | 76% | 39% | 46% | 33% | 37% |
| Teenage pregnancy | 42% | 60% | 12% | 81% | 59% | 61% |
| Poverty and inability to afford school fees | 65% | 78% | 93% | 93% | 84% | 79% |
| Cultural/traditional restrictions | 26% | 39% | 36% | 53% | 22% | 22% |
| Poor school infrastructure or safety concerns | 15% | 20% | 31% | 28% | 20% | 20% |
| Preference for boys' education | 20% | 26% | 14% | 21% | 16% | 20% |

The South East presents by far the most alarming and severe regional profile. It reports the highest or tied-for-highest levels of violence in five of the six categories. An exceptional 79% of respondents in the zone identified both "Domestic violence" and "Sexual violence" as the most common forms. More alarmingly, the South East reports a massive 77% for "Harmful traditional practices," a figure that is 34 percentage points higher than the next closest zone and indicates a crisis-level challenge with practices like harmful widowhood rites. The zone also posts the nation's highest figures for "Political violence" (63%) and "Human trafficking" (43%), painting a picture of a multi-faceted GBV crisis that is more intense and varied than any other region.

The North East also displays extremely high vulnerability. It records the highest score in the entire table for "Domestic violence" at 82%, suggesting this is an overwhelming challenge. This is followed closely by "Sexual harassment/assault" at 70%. The region also posts high scores for "Harmful traditional practices" (43%) and "Political violence" (42%), likely reflecting the region's long-term instability and humanitarian challenges, which notoriously exacerbate all forms of GBV.

Significant regional contrasts exist in other categories. "Harmful traditional practices" provides the sharpest divide: while it is a dominant issue in the South East (77%), it is perceived as the least common form of GBV in the South West (18%) and a relatively low concern in the North West (24%).

Similarly, "Workplace discrimination" is a notable issue in the South West (40%) and North East (39%) but is the lowest-ranked concern in the North West (17%). "Human trafficking" is consistently ranked as one of the least common issues in most zones, except for the South East (43%), where it is seen as a significant threat.

A critical "new occurrence" identified in 2024 UNFPA and UNICEF reports is that the fight against FGM is facing a "growing, systematic and persistent pushback".¹¹⁰ This is not merely the slow decay of an old tradition. It is an active, organised resistance linked to a "broader backlash against gender equality and women's rights".¹¹¹ This pushback frames FGM as a right to cultural or religious adherence, seeking to justify its continuation.¹¹²

This "new trend" is an alarming development. It transforms the fight against FGM and other harmful practices from a health and education issue into a political and ideological one. It means that policy can no longer rely on passive sensitization campaigns; it must now actively counter a politicized, organized movement that seeks to roll back progress.

2.4.5 Equal Rights to Land Ownership and Inheritance

Social norms are not soft cultural preferences. They function as a concrete, parallel legal and economic system that dictates resource allocation and curtails agency, often overriding the formal laws of the state.

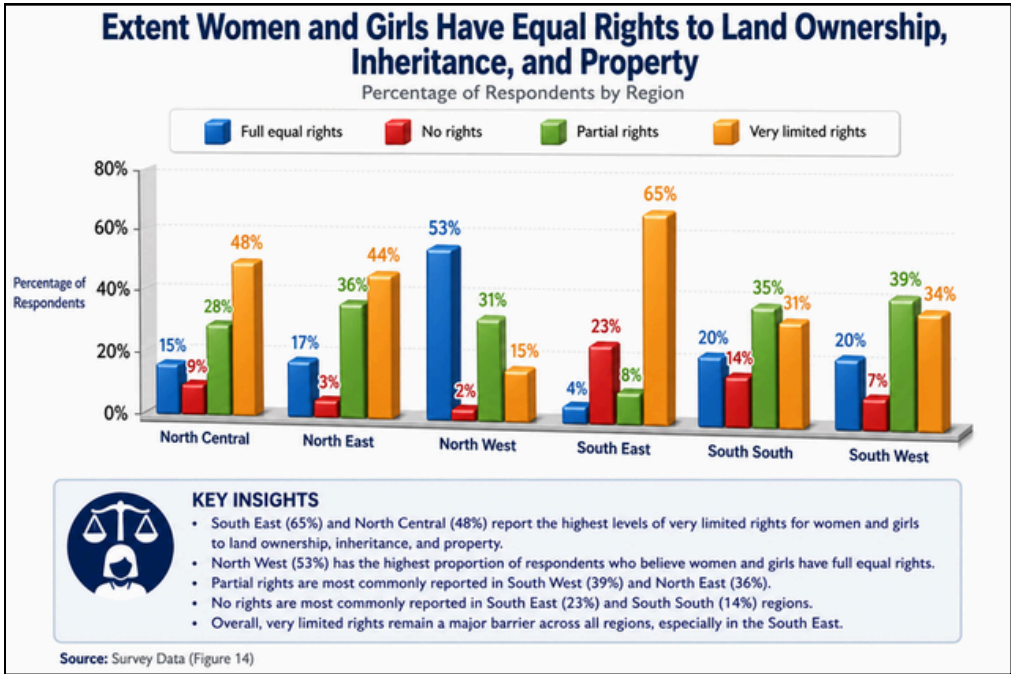
Nigeria's 1999 Constitution guarantees equal rights,¹¹³ and the country has ratified international conventions like CEDAW.¹¹⁴ However, in practice, this formal legal system is superseded by a social legal system of norms. These norms are identified as a primary constraint to Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE).¹¹⁵

Several key controls of this parallel system include, women domesticity, which expects women to handle all domestic and care-related chores.¹¹⁶ Also, husbands and fathers are foreseen to control women's mobility, their access to financial services, and their very engagement in income-generating activities.¹¹⁷ Another is income control, where women's wages are explicitly considered "pocket money" rather than essential household income.¹¹⁸ The final control is women are not expected to control their own assets and property,¹¹⁹ which is the root of the land ownership crisis.¹²⁰

This system of norms directly neutralizes any formal rights women may have to work, own property, or participate in public life. Research from Stanford University, presented in 2025, provides empirical evidence for this.¹²¹ The study, conducted in rural Nigeria, separated barriers to women's political participation into three categories: resource-based (time, skills), norms-based (social expectations), and psychological (feelings of disempowerment). It found that the norms-based and psychological barriers were the most significant constraints.

According to data from the quantitative survey, perceptions of women's rights in Nigeria vary drastically across the country, particularly regarding property and inheritance. A quantitative survey reveals a striking dichotomy between the North West and South East zones.

The North West stands out as the sole zone with a positive outlook, where a majority (53%) of respondents believe women have "Full equal rights." This contrasts sharply with the South East, which reports the most significant denial of rights. An overwhelming 65% in the South East state women have "Very limited rights," the highest negative score nationally. Furthermore, the South East also records the highest level of "No rights" at 23%, meaning a combined 88% perceive rights as "Very limited" or non-existent. This region also has the lowest percentage (4%) for "Full equal rights," indicating a deeply entrenched systemic and cultural denial of property rights for women.



Other zones also show negative perceptions. The North Central and North East exhibit similar views, with 48% and 44% respectively reporting "Very limited rights." In both these northern zones, the perception of "Full equal rights" is minimal (15% and 17%). The South- South and South West form another consistent group with a more moderate, yet still negative, perspective. In both these southern zones, "Partial rights" is the most common response (35% and 39%). Both zones also show a low 20% score for "Full equal rights," reinforcing the national trend (outside the North West) that full, equal inheritance and property rights are not the perceived reality for women. This national polarity highlights the absence of a unified consensus on this critical economic issue.

My mother used to benefit from the proceeds of the plantation until when her father died. Her younger brothers denied her access to the palm plantation.
FGD Women Representative Ebonyi State.

2.4.6 Women Traditional and Community Roles

Women are largely excluded from the formal structures of traditional leadership, yet they are simultaneously recognized as the central pillar of community development. This duality has given rise to a pragmatic new occurrence in development policy engaging the very patriarchal structures that enforce exclusion as the primary agents for enabling change.

Nigeria's diverse cultural history includes instances of influential female traditional leaders. In pre-colonial Yoruba society, for example, titles like the Iyalode (leader of the women) and Iyaloja (leader of the market) conferred significant socio-political power.¹²² However, this system was progressively eroded. The British colonial administration reinforced patriarchy by collaborating almost exclusively with male chiefs, sidelining these female roles and diminishing their influence.¹²³

This marginalization persists in the modern era. Deep-seated traditional and cultural beliefs, which posit leadership as an exclusively male domain, remain a primary barrier to women's participation in both formal politics and traditional governance.¹²⁴ While modern female leaders in business and civil society are celebrated, the formal traditional leadership structures remain almost entirely male. There is no current data to suggest any significant presence of female traditional rulers.¹²⁵

A 2023 UN Women Nigeria assessment noted that only 8–10% of rural women in South-West Nigeria owned titled land, and many widows were dispossessed after their husband's deaths.

FGD Women Representative - Ekiti State

Traditional leadership institutions thus present a fundamental duality. They are, on one hand, the primary enforcers of the patriarchal social norms that restrict women's agency and block their access to leadership.¹²⁶ On the other hand, their very authority and social legitimacy make them the most critical vector for dismantling those same norms. A key new occurrence in development and policy practice is the high-level, strategic engagement of these male traditional and religious leaders as agents of change. This "Patriarchal Pivot" is a pragmatic strategy being deployed by agencies like UN Women and the government.

2.5 Women and Emerging Issues

2.5.1 Promoting Media Sensitiveness to Gender Equality

The media plays a dual role: it can either amplify women's voices or reinforce patriarchal stereotypes. A review of media coverage during the 2023 elections indicates a bias in reportage.

- **Coverage Disparity:** Research monitoring Nigerian newspapers found that female candidates received significantly less coverage than men. When covered, the focus was often on their domestic roles, appearance, or marital status rather than their competency or policy platforms.¹²⁷
- **Stereotyping:** Female politicians are often framed as "aggressive" if they are assertive, or "weak" if they are conciliatory. The media often failed to highlight the specific challenges women faced, such as the high cost of nomination forms, instead framing their losses as a lack of "viability"¹²⁸
- **Recommendation:** There is an urgent need for the Nigerian Press Council and media owners to enforce the Nigerian Media Code of Election Coverage, which mandates equitable and fair coverage for all candidates regardless of gender.¹²⁹

2.5.2 Promoting Gender Sensitive Social Media Space

Social media has emerged as a double-edged sword.

- **Advocacy:** Platforms like Twitter(X) were utilized effectively by the Obidient movement and gender advocates to raise awareness about female candidates like Aishatu Binani and Irete Kingibe (FCT Senator-elect).
- **Technology-Facilitated GBV (TF-GBV):** Conversely, women in politics faced severe cyberbullying, doxing, and the weaponization of their private lives. In Nasarawa State, the Women Affairs reported a rise in "technology-facilitated GBV," including the non-consensual sharing of intimate images to blackmail active women.¹³⁰ The digital space has become a new frontline where patriarchal violence is enacted without physical contact but with devastating reputational damage.¹³¹

*A 2023 UN Women Nigeria assessment noted that only 8–10% of rural women in South-West Nigeria owned titled land, and many widows were dispossessed after their husband's deaths.
FGD Women Representative - Ekiti State*

2.5.3 Advancing Women's Leadership During A Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic(2020-2022) had a lingering impact on the 2023 elections. The economic contraction caused by the pandemic disproportionately affected women, who dominate the informal sector. This depletion of economic reserves meant that many potential female aspirants could not afford the high cost of the 2023 party primaries. However, the crisis also highlighted the effectiveness of women's leadership in community response and humanitarian aid, particularly in states like Adamawa and Borno, where women-led NGOs were pivotal in post-conflict and post-pandemic recovery.¹³²

Additionally, the intersection of youth and gender is critical. The "Not Too Young To Run" Act reduced age limits, but young women face a "double jeopardy" of ageism and sexism. Despite this, the 2023 elections saw younger women stepping forward, particularly in the State Houses of Assembly. Mentorship programs, such as those run by ElectHER and Yiaga Africa, are crucial in bridging the intergenerational gap and equipping young women with the technical skills to navigate party politics.¹³³

2.5.4 Human Capital: Women Education and Digital Skills

The foundation of women's economic and political participation rests on their human capital. The 2023-2024 data reveals a complex and bifurcated reality. While Nigeria continues to grapple with a foundational crisis of mass illiteracy and millions of girls being denied basic education, a new trend has emerged: girls who do gain access to the school system are now demonstrating higher completion rates than boys. This progress, however, is being immediately undermined by a new, severe gender gap in the STEM and digital skills that define the 21st-century economy.

At the most basic level, Nigeria is failing to provide foundational literacy and numeracy to a significant portion of its female population. A profound gender gap persists in literacy, only 52.7% of females are literate, compared to 71.3% of males.¹³⁴ For Youth Literacy (15-24), the gap narrows but remains stark, with a female literacy rate of 57.5% versus 75.0% for males.¹³⁵

*There are certain initiatives pushing women and girls into STEM.. like the American Girls Innovative and Girls in Tech.. they even give free scholarships to girls in Calabar.
FGD CSOs Representative - Cross River State*

2.5.5. The Female Secondary School Completion Advantage

The dominant narrative of girls being left behind by the education system is challenged by critical new 2023 data from UNICEF's analysis of MICS data. This data reveals a nuanced "Access vs. Resilience" model. While girls face a monumental barrier to entry, those who overcome this barrier and remain in the school system now demonstrate higher resilience and retention than their male peers.

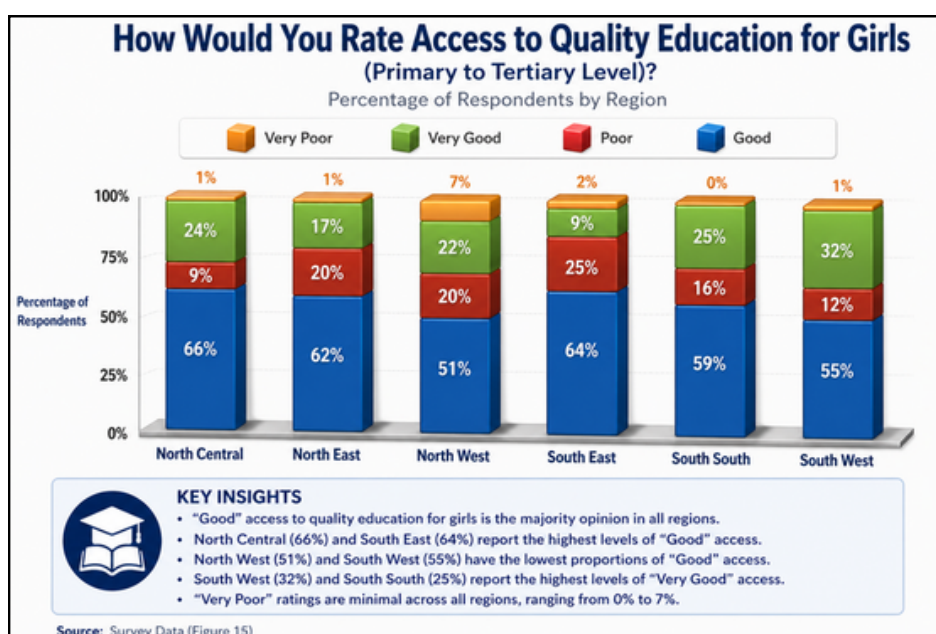
In 2023, data on completion rates reveals that girls and boys achieved parity in Primary Completion, both at 73%.¹³⁶ However, a female advantage emerges at the Junior Secondary School (JSS) Completion level, with girls at 69% compared to boys at 67%.¹³⁷ This advantage becomes even more pronounced in Senior Secondary School (SSS) Completion, where 57% of girls complete their education, significantly higher than the 51% of boys.¹³⁸

This is a critical finding. It suggests that the bottleneck for female education is not a lack of aptitude or desire, but the initial socio-economic and cultural barriers that prevent their entry and retention in the crucial early years.¹³⁹ The data shows that girls who are supported to stay in school are a high-success cohort. This evidence provides a powerful justification for policy interventions focused on eliminating the initial barriers to access (such as child marriage and school fees), as the investment is highly likely to yield returns in the form of higher completion rates.

The quantitative data reveals a broadly positive national perception of girls' access to education, as "Good" (blue bar) is the single most common response in all six geopolitical zones. This positive majority is strongest in the North Central (66%) and South East (64%) and remains the dominant view even in the North West (51%), its lowest point. When combining "Good" and "Very good" responses, the North Central emerges as the most optimistic region, with a total of 90% of respondents viewing access positively.

One in five girls aged 14–17 in rural Ekiti had dropped out of school primarily due to financial constraints and domestic burden. FGD CSOs Representative - Ekiti State

Adolescent girls, on the other hand, placed high importance on education, vocational training, and computer literacy, believing these will help broaden their horizons. - FGD CSOs Representative Adamawa State



However, beneath this "Good" rating, the data shows sharp regional divides in the quality and failure of that access. The South West is the most optimistic about quality, posting the highest national score for "Very good" access at 32%. In contrast, the South East is the most pessimistic about quality, with only 9% of respondents selecting "Very good" and a significant 25%—the highest in the nation—choosing "Poor."

The North West and South East are tied for the most negative overall perception, with a combined 27% of respondents in both zones rating access as "Poor" or "Very Poor." This negativity manifests differently: the South East's dissatisfaction is concentrated in the "Poor" category (25%), while the North West's is split between "Poor" (20%) and a "Very Poor" rating of 7%, which is notably higher than any other zone. This indicates that while most Nigerians feel access to education for girls is "Good," a significant minority in the South East and North West perceives this access as failing.

Even as women show greater resilience in secondary school completion, a new structural barrier has emerged that threatens to segregate them in the new economy: the STEM and digital deficit. This gap is the 21st-century equivalent of the 20th-century literacy gap, and it is poised to lock in gender-based income disparity for generations.

The exclusion of women from Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) fields is stark. According to the National Bureau of Statistics, women make up on average just 22% of the total number of Engineering and Technology university graduates each year. This translates directly into the labour market. Women make up only about a fifth (~20%) of the total workforce in the information and communication technology (ICT) sector. This disparity is also seen in research, where women represent only 17- 20% of science researchers in Nigeria, far below the global share (though globally, women are still underrepresented at less than 30%).¹⁴²

This combination of an educational gap in STEM and an access gap in digital tools is creating a "new structural segregation."¹⁴³ As the Nigerian economy digitizes, women are being systemically funneled away from high-growth, high-wage digital and technical fields and toward the same analogue, informal, and low-wage sectors they have always occupied.¹⁴⁴ This creates a bifurcated economy: a "male economy" that is increasingly digital, formal, and high-wage, running parallel to a "female economy" that remains analogue, informal, and low-wage.

The quantitative data presents an unambiguous and universal primary barrier to girls' education across all six geopolitical zones: "Poverty and inability to afford school fees." This economic factor is the single most dominant reason in every region, with overwhelming majorities identifying it as a key cause. The perception is most acute in the North West and South East, which are tied with a staggering 93%. The South-South (84%), South West (79%), North East (78%), and North Central (65%) follow, confirming that economic hardship is the foundational challenge that underpins all other barriers to keeping girls in school nationwide.

Table 8: What are the main reasons girls drop out of school in this region/geopolitical zone?

| Reasons | North Centra l | North East | North West | South East | South South | South West |
|---|----------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|----------------|---------------|
| Early/child marriage | 52% | 76% | 39% | 46% | 33% | 37% |
| Teenage pregnancy | 42% | 60% | 12% | 81% | 59% | 61% |
| Poverty and inability to afford school fees | 65% | 78% | 93% | 93% | 84% | 79% |
| Cultural/traditional restrictions | 26% | 39% | 36% | 53% | 22% | 22% |
| Poor school infrastructure or safety concerns | 15% | 20% | 31% | 28% | 20% | 20% |
| Preference for boys' education | 20% | 26% | 14% | 21% | 16% | 20% |

Beyond the universal issue of poverty, the data highlights two critical, region-specific social challenges: "Teenage pregnancy" and "Early/child marriage." "Teenage pregnancy" is identified as a crisis-level driver in the **South East**, where a massive **81%** of respondents selected it. It is also a dominant factor in the South West (61%), South-South (59%), and North East (60%). In contrast, "Early/child marriage" is the most significant social driver in the **North East** (76%) and **North Central** (52%). This creates a clear regional divide: southern zones and the North East identify pregnancy as a primary social cause, while the North East and North Central see early marriage as the more pressing issue.

The **South East** once again presents a unique and multi-faceted set of challenges. It is the only region in the country where "Cultural/traditional restrictions" (53%) ranks as a top-three driver, significantly higher than any other zone. This suggests that in the South East, girls' education is uniquely challenged by a "triple threat" of poverty(93%), teenage pregnancy (81%), and restrictive cultural norms (53%). The **North West** is also an outlier, but in the opposite direction: it reports by far the lowest incidence of "Teenage pregnancy" (12%) as a cause, indicating that its dropout problem is seen as almost exclusively economic (93%) and related to early marriage (39%).

The remaining factors are perceived as secondary concerns in most of the country. "**Poor school infrastructure**" is a mid-level concern, peaking at 31% in the North West and **28%** in the South East, but it is not a primary driver elsewhere. Finally, "**Preference for boys' education**" is consistently ranked as one of the least significant factors in all six zones (all 26% or lower). This suggests a positive shift in attitudes, where the public perceives the barrier to girls' education as being less about a cultural preference for boys and almost entirely about economic hardship, early marriage, and teenage pregnancy.

Table 9: Nigeria - Gender-Disaggregated Education & Skills Indicators (2023-2024)

| Indicator | Female (%) | Male (%) | Sources |
|--|-------------------|-----------------|---|
| Adult Literacy (15+) | 52.7 | 71.3 | UNESCO (2022) ¹⁴⁵ |
| Youth Literacy (15-24) | 57.5 | 75 | UNESCO (2022) ¹⁴⁶ |
| Out-of-School Children (% of 10.5M) | >60.0 | <40.0 | UNICEF (2023) ¹⁴⁷ |
| Primary School Completion | 73 | 73 | UNICEF (2023) |
| Junior Secondary Completion | 69 | 67 | UNICEF (2023) |
| Senior Secondary Completion | 57 | 51 | UNICEF (2023) |
| Engineering/Technology Graduates | 22 | 78 | WTEC - Women's Technology Empowerment (2019) ¹⁴⁸ |
| ICT Sector Workforce | ~20.0 | ~80.0 | WTEC - Women's Technology Empowerment (2019) |
| Adolescent Girls (North) Phone Ownership | 18 | N/A | World Bank ¹⁴⁹ |



CHAPTER THREE

Trend Analysis

3.1 Trend Analysis: Nigeria Gender Report 2023 vs 2025

Table 10: Comparison of Nigeria Gender Report (2023 vs 2025)

| S/N | Thematic Area | 2023 Status (Baseline) | 2025 Revalidation (Current Status) | Trend / Verdict |
|-----|--|--|---|--|
| 1 | Women's Political Participation (Elective) | Low Representation: Following the 2023 elections, women held 4.2% of seats in the National Assembly (NASS). There were 3 female Senators (2.7%) and 17 House of Reps members (4.7%). | Stagnation & Regression: Representation remains stuck at 4.2% for national level. A new low was identified: 15 out of 36 State Assemblies have zero women. Nigeria now ranks 178th out of 182 globally for parliamentary representation. The recent off-cycle Anambra election did not shift women representation in politics | 🔴 Critical Regression (The "IronGate" has solidified) |
| 2 | Women's Political Participation (Appointive) | Inconsistent Progress: In Jan 2023, women held 10.7% of Federal Ministerial positions. | Volatile / Unreliable: While some reports claim a rise to 17.6%, conflicting data shows numbers "stuck at eight" ministers (approx. 8.8%), causing a drop in global ranking from 91 st to 31 st . | 🟡 Volatile / Unstable (Dependent on patronage, not policy) |

| | | | | |
|---|-------------------------------------|--|--|--|
| 3 | Private Sector Leadership | Growing: In 2020/2023, women held approximately 21.8% - 29.4% of board seats in NGX-30 companies. | Historic Milestone: Women now occupy 31.1% of NGX-30 board seats. 0% of NGX-30 companies have all-male boards. 5 companies have female CEOs. | ● Significant Progress (Driven by ESG/Regulatory pressure) |
| 4 | Economic Empowerment (Labour Force) | High Volume, Low Value: High participation rates (~80%) but heavily concentrated in the informal sector. | "High-Participation, High-Vulnerability"- Participation remains high (80.7%), but 96.4% of women are in the informal sector. A 36% financial exclusion rate persists (double that of men). | ● Stagnant Quality (More work, but less security) |
| 5 | Education (Access) | Crisis: Nigeria had a massive out-of-school children (OOSC) crisis, with girls disproportionately affected | Persistent Crisis: 10.5 million children remain out of school, >60% are girls. Foundational literacy for adult females is 52.7% (vs 71.3% for males). | ● Negative (Access barrier remains unbroken) |
| 6 | Education (Completion) | Gap Observed: Boys historically perceived to have higher retention. | "Resilience Advantage"- New trend shows girls who enter school now finish at higher rates than boys. Junior Secondary: Girls 69% vs Boys 67%. | ● Positive Reversal (Girls outperform boys in retention) |
| 7 | STEM & Digital Skills | Emerging Gap: Digital divide was noted as a concern. | "New Segregation": A severe structural gap has calcified. Women make up only 22% of Engineering/Tech graduates and ~20% of the ICT workforce, locking them out of the future economy. | ● Critical Emerging Threat |

| | | | | |
|----|-----------------------------|--|--|---|
| 8 | Health (Maternal Mortality) | Critical: Maternal mortality ratio was extremely high (est. 512-993 per 100k). | Persistent Crisis: Ratio remains critically high at 993 per 100,000 live births. 88.6% of respondents in the North West identify it as the most pressing challenge. | ● No Significant Improvement |
| 9 | Gender-Based Violence (GBV) | Legislative Wins: Passage of VAPP Act in several states. | Implementation Failure: While 35 states have domesticated VAPP, enforcement is weak. 84% of South East respondents list GBV as a top health challenge. "Technology-Facilitated GBV" is a new, rising threat. | ⊙ Mixed (Laws exist, enforcement fails) |
| 10 | Land & Inheritance Rights | Customary Barriers: Women largely denied land ownership by tradition. | Systemic Denial: In the South East, 88% of respondents say women have "Very limited" or "No rights" to land. This "parallel social legal system" overrides constitutional rights. | ● Critical Blockage (Root cause of economic disempowerment) |



CHAPTER FOUR

Conclusion

4.1 Conclusion

Nigeria stands at a pivotal moment marked by a widening divergence in gender equity. The 2023 - 2025 period reveals a structural imbalance: women are advancing within corporate leadership and private-sector governance, yet political representation has declined to historic lows. While women now occupy 31.1% of board seats in top-tier companies, representation in the National Assembly remains at 4.2%, placing Nigeria among the lowest globally in women's political inclusion.

Economically, women operate within a “High Participation, High Vulnerability” framework deeply engaged in the labor force yet concentrated in informal, under-protected sectors and burdened by unpaid care responsibilities and systemic financial exclusion. Regional disparities further intensify these challenges, with varying patterns of maternal health risks, land rights limitations, insecurity, and political marginalization across geopolitical zones.

Despite these constraints, resilience is evident. Educational completion rates for girls now surpass those of boys at the secondary level, and isolated examples of political will demonstrate that representation can improve when structural barriers are addressed. However, without decisive and coordinated reforms, Nigeria risks entrenching a dual-track future: an increasingly inclusive corporate economy operating alongside a politically exclusionary governance system.

4.2 Recommendations

To bridge the gap between policy commitment and lived reality, coordinated action is required across government institutions, political parties, civil society, the private sector, and development partners.

A. Political Governance & Representation: Dismantling Structural Barriers

1. Institutionalize Affirmative Action

- Transition the 35% affirmative action target from policy aspiration to enforceable legislation.
- Amend the Electoral Act to empower INEC to reject party candidate lists that fail to meet minimum gender thresholds.
- Introduce reserved or special legislative seats to prevent “gender deserts” in state assemblies.

2. Reform Political Party Structures

- Cap nomination fees and regulate monetized primaries.
- Prohibit exclusionary practices such as late-night meetings and opaque waiver processes.
- Elevate the role of party “Women Leaders” to decision-making status within National Working Committees.

3. Regulate Campaign Financing

- Introduce gender-responsive campaign finance regulations, including spending caps or matching funds for female candidates.

4. Strengthen Electoral Security

- Criminalize Violence Against Women in Politics (VAWIP) as a distinct electoral offense.
- Establish election-period security protocols prioritizing female candidates and voters.
- Develop early warning systems to track threats and hate speech targeting women.

B. Media & Digital Governance

1. Enforce Equitable Election Coverage

- Implement the Nigerian Media Code of Election Coverage to guarantee fair airtime and representation for female candidates.
- Monitor and sanction gender-biased political reporting.

2. Combat Technology-Facilitated GBV

- Amend the Cybercrimes Act to explicitly criminalize doxxing, cyberstalking, and non-consensual image distribution.
- Require social media platforms to establish rapid-response reporting channels for female political actors.

3. Institutionalize Gender-Sensitive Reporting

- Mandate training for political editors and journalists to eliminate stereotypical framing.
- Promote sustained “Her-Story” narratives highlighting women’s leadership across sectors.

C. Legal & Policy Reform

1. Strengthen Enforcement of the VAPP Act

- Ensure full domestication across all states.
- Fund and operationalize Sexual Assault Referral Centres (SARCs) in every senatorial district.
- Establish specialized GBV courts or fast-track mechanisms.

2. Pass the Gender and Equal Opportunities (GEO) Bill

- Codify protections related to inheritance, land ownership, and non-discrimination.
- Align domestic law with international commitments such as CEDAW.

3. Implement UNSCR 1325 State Action Plans

- Ensure women's leadership in peacebuilding and security governance structures.

D. Economic Empowerment: From Informality to Asset Ownership

1. Close the Collateral Gap

- Scale cash-flow-based lending models and enforce gender-disaggregated lending data transparency.
- Expand programs that reduce dependency on land collateral.

2. Enforce Land and Inheritance Rights

- Support enforcement of Supreme Court rulings protecting women's inheritance rights.
- Establish legal aid mechanisms for land disputes.

3. Institutionalize Gender-Responsive Budgeting

- Embed gender budgeting across federal and state Ministries of Finance to ensure resource allocation aligns with women's socio-economic priorities.

E. Human Capital & Digital Inclusion

1. Close the STEM Gap

- Launch coordinated national scholarship and mentorship initiatives targeting girls in engineering, technology, and digital innovation.
- Partner with the private sector to create structured internship pipelines.

2. Scale Proven Education Interventions

- Expand programs such as AGILE to address the out-of-school crisis, particularly in northern states.

F. Health & Social Protection

1. Revitalize Primary Healthcare

- Invest in rural PHCs, skilled birth attendants, and maternal health infrastructure.

2. Operationalize GBV Protections

- Fund survivor-centered services and hold institutions accountable for non-enforcement.

3. Counter Harmful Social Norms

- Engage traditional and religious leaders as strategic allies in eliminating child marriage and FGM.

G. Institutional Accountability & Data Systems

1. Standardize Gender-Disaggregated Data

- Mandate comprehensive gender data collection across sectors to improve policy targeting.

2. Strengthen the Ministry of Women Affairs

- Elevate its role from welfare-focused programming to cross-sector policy coordination and compliance monitoring.

3. Promote Inclusive Institutional Culture

- Introduce gender-sensitive work-life policies within political institutions.
- Establish cross-party women's caucuses to foster collaboration.
- Ensure disability-inclusive implementation of Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) policies.

4.3 Final Policy Imperative

Nigeria does not face a deficit of gender frameworks; it faces a deficit of enforcement, financing, and institutional accountability. The evidence demonstrates that where systems are structured, regulated, and monitored, women thrive. The decisive question for the 2025–2030 period is whether similar structural commitment will be applied to political governance, legal enforcement, and social protection.

Without this shift, Nigeria risks institutionalizing a bifurcated trajectory: economic modernization alongside political exclusion. With it, the nation can align growth, governance, and gender equity within a unified development framework.



CHAPTER FIVE

ANNEXES

REPORTS FROM STATES

5.1 Annex 1 - The North-West Report (Kebbi State)

Executive Summary

This report presents the findings from the revalidation of the Gender in Nigeria Report for the North-West geopolitical zone, with Kebbi State serving as the representative case study. The assessment synthesizes evidence from a desk review of relevant policies and literature, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), and a field-based questionnaire survey. Collectively, these data sources provide a comprehensive analysis of progress made, persistent gaps, and emerging challenges in advancing gender equality and women's empowerment in the region.

The findings indicate that while awareness of gender equality has improved, structural barriers continue to impede meaningful progress. Deeply rooted cultural and religious norms, economic limitations, restricted political participation, and weak institutional enforcement mechanisms remain significant constraints. Critical areas of concern include limited access to quality education and healthcare services, high prevalence of Gender-Based Violence (GBV), low representation of women in leadership and decision-making roles, and restricted access to productive resources such as land, finance, and property.

Notwithstanding these challenges, there is increasing recognition of the importance of women's participation in governance and community development. Government institutions particularly the Ministry of Women Affairs alongside development initiatives such as the Adolescent Girls Initiative for Learning and Empowerment (AGILE), the Nigeria for Women Project, civil society organizations, and other donor-funded programs, are contributing to incremental gains in women's socio-economic empowerment across the state.

The report concludes with actionable recommendations focused on strengthening legal enforcement, expanding economic opportunities, improving educational access, enhancing political inclusion, and promoting positive cultural transformation. Sustained coordination among government, civil society, traditional institutions, and development partners will be essential to translating policy commitments into measurable improvements in the lives of women and girls in Kebbi State and the broader North-West region.

1. Introduction

The study was conducted in Kebbi State, serving as the representative state for Nigeria’s North-West geopolitical zone, one of the country’s six major regions. The North-West comprises Kebbi, Sokoto, Zamfara, Katsina, Kano, Jigawa, and Kaduna States. The region is predominantly Hausa–Fulani, with Islam as the major religion, while notable Christian minority communities exist in parts of Kaduna and Kebbi States. The population is largely rural and agrarian, with livelihoods centred on crop cultivation, livestock rearing, petty trading, and traditional crafts.

Women play a critical role in the agricultural and rural economy, actively contributing to food production, processing, and market distribution. However, these contributions are often undervalued and insufficiently captured in formal economic statistics. Structural inequalities continue to limit women’s access to education, healthcare, financial services, and formal employment opportunities. These constraints are further reinforced by deeply embedded patriarchal norms and the strong influence of traditional and religious institutions in shaping gender roles and social expectations.

Across the North-West, women face significant barriers to economic independence and political participation. While many operate small-scale enterprises; such as food processing, petty trade, and artisanal production - their access to credit, skills development, land ownership, and other productive resources remains limited. In the political sphere, female representation is notably low. Women rarely occupy elective or high-level appointive positions, and participation is often confined to designated “Women Leader” roles within political parties or councillor positions at the local government level.

These patterns mirror broader national gender disparities but are particularly pronounced in the North-West, where socio-cultural norms, economic vulnerability, and limited institutional support intersect to constrain women’s leadership and empowerment opportunities.

2. Methodology

The revalidation exercise adopted a mixed qualitative approach, integrating multiple data sources to ensure a comprehensive and contextualized assessment of gender issues in Kebbi State.

Desk Review:

A review of relevant policy documents, gender indices, government reports, and previous Gender in Nigeria studies was conducted to identify prevailing trends, existing interventions, and policy gaps related to gender equality and women's empowerment in the North-West geopolitical zone.

Focus Group Discussion (FGD):

An in-person Focus Group Discussion was held in Birnin Kebbi on 8th October 2025. The session convened 12 participants comprising 4 adult females, 3 young females, 3 adult males, and 2 young males. Participants represented diverse stakeholder groups, including academia, civil society organizations, political actors, traditional institutions, and youth groups. The FGD provided in-depth insights into lived experiences, socio-cultural dynamics, and perceptions of gender equality within the state.

Field Questionnaire Survey:

A structured questionnaire was administered across selected communities in Kebbi State to capture public perceptions on gender equality, barriers to women's empowerment, access to essential services, economic opportunities, and political participation.

Data from all sources were analyzed thematically, enabling the identification of recurring patterns and key issues related to access to resources, institutional effectiveness, political inclusion, and the influence of socio-cultural norms on gender relations.

3.0 Key Findings

3.1 Opportunities and Barriers for Women and Girls' Advancement

The findings indicate a growing awareness of gender equality across the North-West geopolitical zone, largely driven by increased access to education, media advocacy, and donor-supported interventions. Public discourse on women's rights and empowerment has expanded in recent years, contributing to gradual shifts in perception, particularly among younger populations.

Despite this progress, women and girls continue to face systemic and deeply rooted barriers. Early marriage, poverty, limited educational attainment, and restrictive socio-cultural and religious norms significantly constrain their opportunities for advancement. Gender-based violence (GBV) remains prevalent, and weak enforcement of existing legal frameworks further undermines women's protection and empowerment.

While initiatives such as the Adolescent Girls Initiative for Learning and Empowerment (AGILE) and programs led by the Ministry of Women Affairs have improved access to education and entrepreneurship opportunities, the benefits are unevenly distributed. Urban women are more likely to access these interventions, whereas rural women remain disproportionately excluded due to low literacy levels, limited access to information, and mobility restrictions.

3.2 Women's Participation in Decision-Making, Leadership, and Governance

Women's representation in politics and governance in Kebbi State remains extremely low. To date, no woman has served as governor, deputy governor, senator, member of the State House of Assembly, or elected local government chairperson in the state. The only recorded instance of female representation at the national level occurred between 2007 and 2011, when one woman served in the National Assembly.

Across formal and informal decision-making platforms; including local councils, political party structures, and traditional institutions; men overwhelmingly dominate leadership positions. Barriers to women's political participation include:

- High financial cost of political engagement
- Entrenched gender stereotypes and cultural taboos
- Religious interpretations discouraging women's leadership
- Political violence and intimidation
- Limited awareness and implementation of gender policies, including the 35% Affirmative Action target

Notwithstanding these challenges, advocacy by civil society organizations, women's associations, and development partners is gradually fostering greater acceptance of women's political participation. Emerging mentorship and capacity-building initiatives are supporting a new generation of young women leaders, although structural and institutional barriers remain significant.

3.3 Access to Education and Health Services

Access to quality education for girls has improved modestly; however, substantial disparities persist. School dropout rates among girls remain high, driven by early marriage, household poverty, cultural preferences for boys' education, and inadequate school infrastructure. These challenges are more pronounced in rural communities.

Programs promoting girls' education, including AGILE, are contributing positively to enrollment and retention. However, concerns remain regarding sustainability, scale, and long-term impact, particularly in underserved communities.

In the health sector, maternal and reproductive health services are available but often insufficient in quality, accessibility, and coverage. Women in rural areas frequently depend on under-resourced public health facilities or informal providers. High maternal mortality rates, limited access to comprehensive reproductive health services, and emerging mental health concerns were identified as critical issues.

Although awareness of reproductive health is gradually improving, stigma, cultural sensitivities, and gender norms continue to hinder women's timely access to professional healthcare services.

3.4 Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and Women's Safety

Gender-based violence remains pervasive across the North-West. Common forms include domestic violence, sexual harassment, harmful traditional practices such as female genital mutilation (FGM) and widowhood rites, and political intimidation.

Underreporting is widespread, as many survivors fear stigma, retaliation, social exclusion, or lack confidence in law enforcement mechanisms. Public spaces - including schools, markets, workplaces, and transportation systems are often perceived as only "somewhat safe" for women and girls.

Although legal frameworks addressing GBV exist, enforcement remains weak, and prevailing social attitudes frequently normalize or justify violence. Participants emphasized the need for sustained community sensitization, survivor-centred support services, stronger accountability systems, and improved coordination among law enforcement and judicial actors.

3.5 Socio-Economic Empowerment and Access to Resources

Women's economic participation is constrained by limited access to productive assets, including land, credit, and inheritance rights. While statutory laws may recognize gender equality, customary practices and patriarchal inheritance systems often marginalize women in practice.

Most women operate within the informal economy, engaging in petty trading, food processing, and small-scale agriculture without access to formal credit, agricultural extension services, technology, or structured market linkages. Survey data indicate that a majority of respondents perceive government and institutional support for women entrepreneurs as inadequate.

Limited awareness of financial inclusion programs, bureaucratic bottlenecks, and weak outreach mechanisms further reduce women's access to economic opportunities. Expanding microcredit schemes, vocational and technical training, digital literacy initiatives, and market integration programs would significantly enhance women's economic resilience and independence.

3.6 Social Norms and Culture

Deeply entrenched social and cultural norms continue to reinforce gender hierarchies across the North-West. Patriarchal systems position men as primary authority figures in public and political spaces while confining women's roles largely to domestic spheres.

Religion is frequently invoked to justify women's exclusion from leadership and public decision-making. However, progressive and context-sensitive interpretations within Islam increasingly support women's education, economic participation, and community leadership.

Focus Group Discussion participants emphasized that transforming harmful norms requires culturally sensitive, faith-informed, and community-led advocacy. The engagement of traditional rulers, religious leaders, and respected community influencers is critical to shifting attitudes and promoting sustainable behavioural change.

4. Recommendations

i. Strengthen Legal and Institutional Frameworks:

- Enforce laws protecting women from GBV and discrimination.
- Domesticated and implement the 35% Affirmative Action policy at state and local levels.
- Establish gender desks across ministries and local councils.

ii. Promote Girls' Education and Retention:

- Expand girl-child education programs and scholarships.
- Introduce flexible learning for married or adolescent mothers.
- Integrate gender education into school curricula.

iii. Enhance Women's Political Participation:

- Introduce quotas for women in elective and appointive offices.
- Provide campaign financing and mentorship for aspiring female politicians.
- Engage men as allies in gender advocacy.

iv. Economic Empowerment and Access to Resources:

- Create inclusive access to credit and agricultural inputs for women.
- Reform land and inheritance laws to protect women's property rights.
- Support vocational and digital skills training.

v. Strengthen GBV Prevention and Response:

- Establish functional GBV response centers in all LGAs.
- Train law enforcement personnel on gender sensitivity.
- Provide psychosocial and legal support for survivors.

vi. Cultural and Religious Engagement:

- Partner with faith leaders to promote women's rights within acceptable cultural frameworks.
- Conduct community dialogues to challenge gender stereotypes.

5. Conclusion

The revalidation of the Gender in Nigeria Report for the North-West, represented by Kebbi State, highlights that gender inequality remains both structural and cultural. Progress has been made in awareness and policy development, but practical implementation lags behind. Women's access to education, healthcare, economic opportunities, and leadership positions continues to be shaped by poverty, tradition, and weak institutional capacity.

To accelerate gender equality and women's empowerment, deliberate and sustained action is required. Strengthening institutions, promoting inclusive policies, and fostering cultural transformation are essential for ensuring that women and girls in the North-West fully realize their rights and potential. With coordinated support from government, civil society, and international partners, the region can achieve meaningful gender parity and contribute to Nigeria's broader development goals.

Focus Group Discussion (FGD)

Introduction

The Focus Group Discussion (FGD) was conducted in Birnin Kebbi, Kebbi State for the north western geo-political zone on 8th October 2025. The FGD was organized as part of the revalidation of the Gender in Nigeria Report. The session brought together participants from diverse backgrounds, including, lecturers, politicians, women leaders, youths, civil society actors, and traditional representatives. A total of 12 participants attended the FGD that includes 4 adult females, 3 youth females, 3 adult males and 2 youth males. Discussions centered around gender equality and women empowerment, identifying barriers to women's empowerment, and exploring strategies for achieving inclusive participation in social, economic, and political spheres.

Summary of Findings by Themes

Opportunities and Barriers for Women and Girls' Advancement in Nigeria

The Focus Group Discussion revealed a growing awareness of gender equality and women's empowerment across Kebbi State. Participants understood gender equality as providing both men and women with equal rights, opportunities, and access to education, health care, and economic resources. Women's empowerment was generally perceived as enabling women to make independent decisions and providing them with the necessary education, skills, and support to actively participate in social, economic, and political life.

Despite positive changes, significant barriers persist. Cultural and religious norms continue to shape attitudes toward women's roles, often discouraging their full participation in public life. Early marriage, domestic responsibilities, and gender-based violence (GBV) were identified as major impediments to girls' education and women's confidence. Participants noted that women in rural areas are particularly disadvantaged due to limited access to information and fewer opportunities for education and economic empowerment.

While there are enabling initiatives—such as the Ministry of Women Affairs, AGILE (Adolescent Girls Initiative for Learning and Empowerment), and donor-funded projects that promote female education and entrepreneurship—weak enforcement of gender-related laws and poor access to healthcare remain key challenges. Many women, especially in rural areas, still rely on poorly equipped public health centers or unqualified patent medicine stores.

Furthermore, gender-based violence—ranging from physical and emotional abuse to economic deprivation and forced marriages—remains widespread, with social stigma and cultural norms discouraging victims from seeking justice.

Overall, the discussions underscored that although policy frameworks exist to promote gender equality, their impact is constrained by deep-rooted socio-cultural practices, weak institutional responses, and limited awareness among women about their rights and available support services.

Women’s Participation in Decision-Making, Leadership, and Governance

Participants agreed that men overwhelmingly dominate leadership and decision-making spaces in Kebbi State. Women’s representation in politics and governance is minimal, with few occupying elective or appointive positions beyond “women leader” roles in political parties. Since the return to democracy, Kebbi State has not produced a female governor, deputy governor, senator, or member of the State House of Assembly, apart from one woman who served in the house of representative’s member.

The reasons for this imbalance are multi-dimensional. Politics in the region is seen as expensive, competitive, and often violent—factors that discourage women’s participation. Cultural and religious expectations that confine women to domestic roles further limit their involvement in governance. Financial constraints and political godfatherism were identified as additional barriers that favor men over women. Many women lack the resources to contest elections, while societal perceptions often label women in politics as morally loose or irresponsible.

Participants also observed that awareness of the 35% Affirmative Action policy is low, and where known, it is rarely implemented. Some community members even perceive gender equality policies as contradictory to cultural and religious values. Stakeholders such as political parties, government institutions, the office of the First Lady, civil society organizations, and traditional and religious leaders play critical roles in determining women’s representation. While CSOs and NGOs continue to advocate for women’s inclusion, their efforts are often constrained by limited funding and resistance from entrenched political structures.

Despite these challenges, participants acknowledged that the establishment of women’s wings in political parties, mentorship initiatives, and awareness campaigns by NGOs are beginning to create modest spaces for women’s participation.

However, there remains an urgent need to strengthen political inclusion mechanisms and ensure the enforcement of gender quotas across all levels of governance.

Recommendations for Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment, particularly for Women’s Political Participation and Leadership

Participants proposed practical strategies to enhance gender equality and empower women politically and economically. They emphasized the importance of engaging men as allies in promoting women’s rights—encouraging fathers, husbands, and brothers to support women’s education, leadership aspirations, and economic independence. Education and awareness campaigns from early childhood were considered essential to dismantle gender stereotypes and foster a culture of equality.

It was recommended that national gender policies and international commitments, such as the 35% Affirmative Action and the Beijing Declaration, be translated into state and local frameworks to ensure meaningful implementation. Participants called for stronger enforcement of laws protecting women from gender-based violence and for holding perpetrators accountable. They also highlighted the need to involve religious and traditional leaders in gender advocacy and in creating enabling environments for women’s political participation.

Economic empowerment emerged as a critical pathway for achieving gender equality. Participants suggested that government and donor agencies should increase funding for women entrepreneurs, create access to credit, and provide vocational and leadership training. They also advocated for mentorship programs to build young women’s confidence and political capacity. The office of the First Lady and relevant institutions were encouraged to sustain engagement with women’s groups to enhance political mobilization and awareness.

Finally, participants urged the Nigerian Women Trust Fund (NWTF) to establish a permanent presence in the state to strengthen advocacy, monitor the implementation of gender-related laws, and provide financial and technical support to aspiring women politicians. Continuous dialogue, public sensitization, and inclusive community engagement were seen as the most effective approaches to achieving sustainable gender equality and empowering women across all sectors.

ANALYSIS OF THE QUESTIONNAIRES

Introduction

The field survey questionnaire was analysed using descriptive statistical methods, with findings presented through clear visual charts to enhance interpretation and clarity. Responses from seventy (70) participants in Kebbi State, representing the North-West geopolitical zone, provided insights into key thematic areas including education, healthcare access, leadership and political participation, and women’s socio-economic empowerment.

The quantitative analysis complements the desk review and Focus Group Discussion findings, enabling triangulation of data sources and providing a balanced assessment of both the progress made and the persistent structural and socio-cultural barriers that continue to shape gender equality outcomes in the region.

Socio- Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

This section shows basic information about the respondents, such as their age, gender, education, marital status, and occupation. These details help to understand their background and how social and economic factors may influence men’s and women’s experiences and opinions.

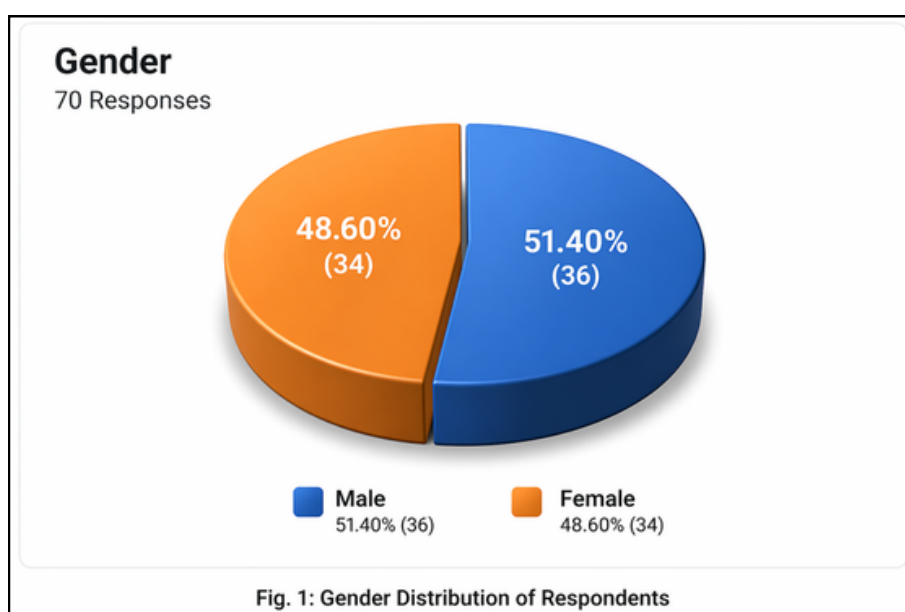


Figure 1 indicates an almost equal gender distribution among respondents, with males making up 51% and females 49%. This near balance adds credibility to the gender-related insights obtained from the survey

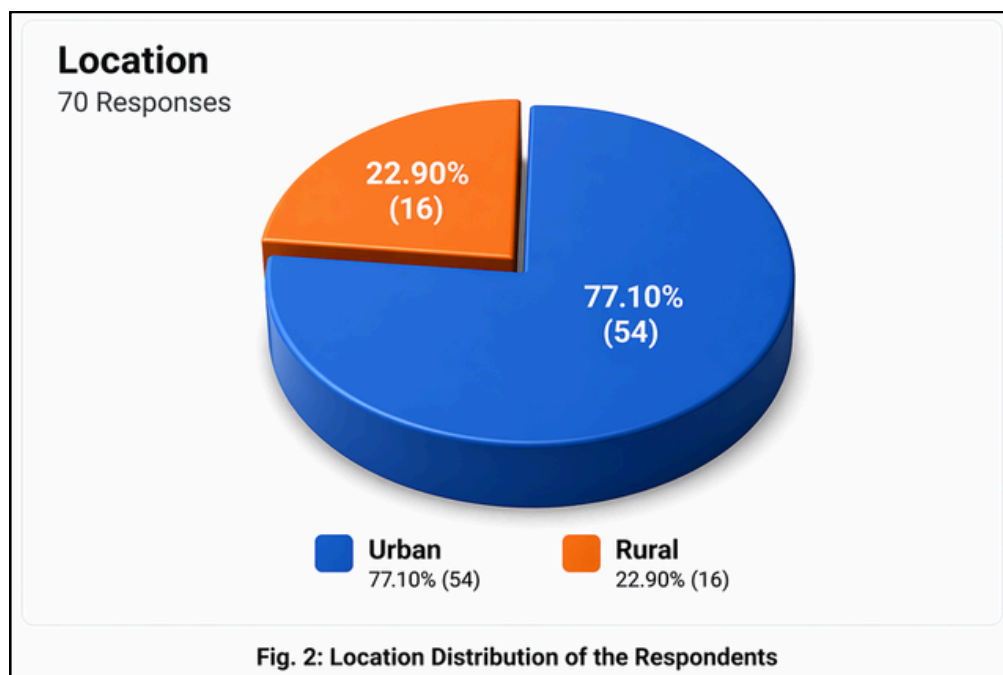


Figure 2 shows that urban respondents make up 77.10 %, showing higher participation from cities and towns. Rural voices remain limited, suggesting the concentration of the survey in urban areas.

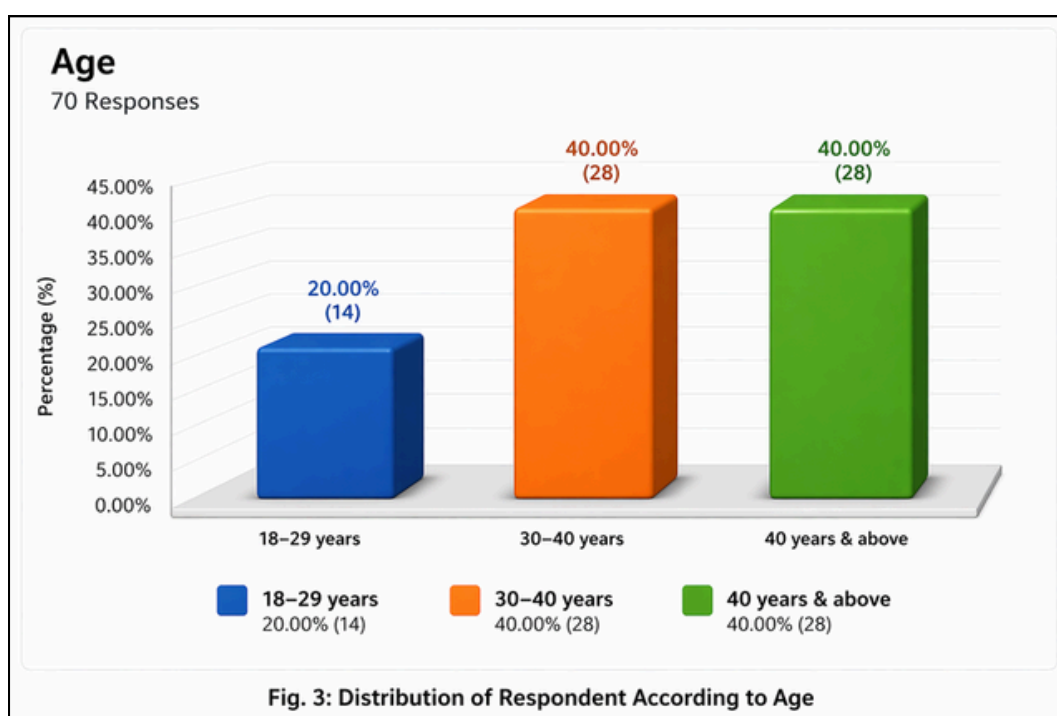


Figure 3 depicts that a significant majority (80%) of respondents are above 30 years of age. The predominance of mature adults implies that responses were shaped by lived experiences, family responsibilities, and exposure to community realities.

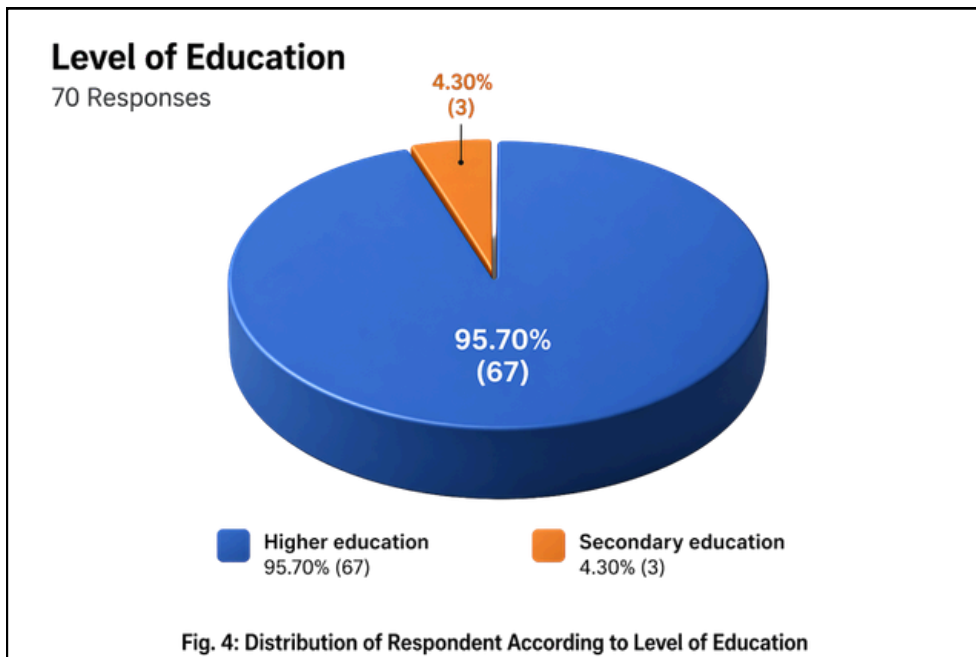


Figure 4 shows that an overwhelming 95.70% of respondents reported having attained higher education. This highly literate sample indicates that the insights captured are well-informed, analytical, and reflective of educated perspectives in the region

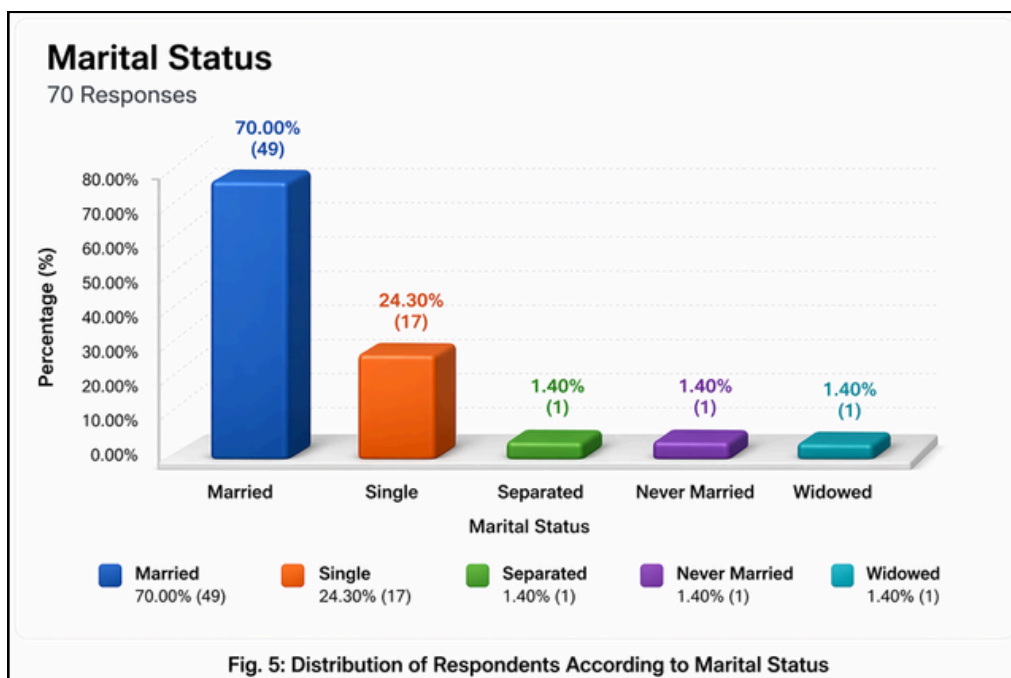


Figure 5 shows that 70 % of the respondents are married, while 24 % are single. This pattern reflects the prevailing cultural structure of the North-West, where marriage is widely regarded as a mark of responsibility and social maturity.

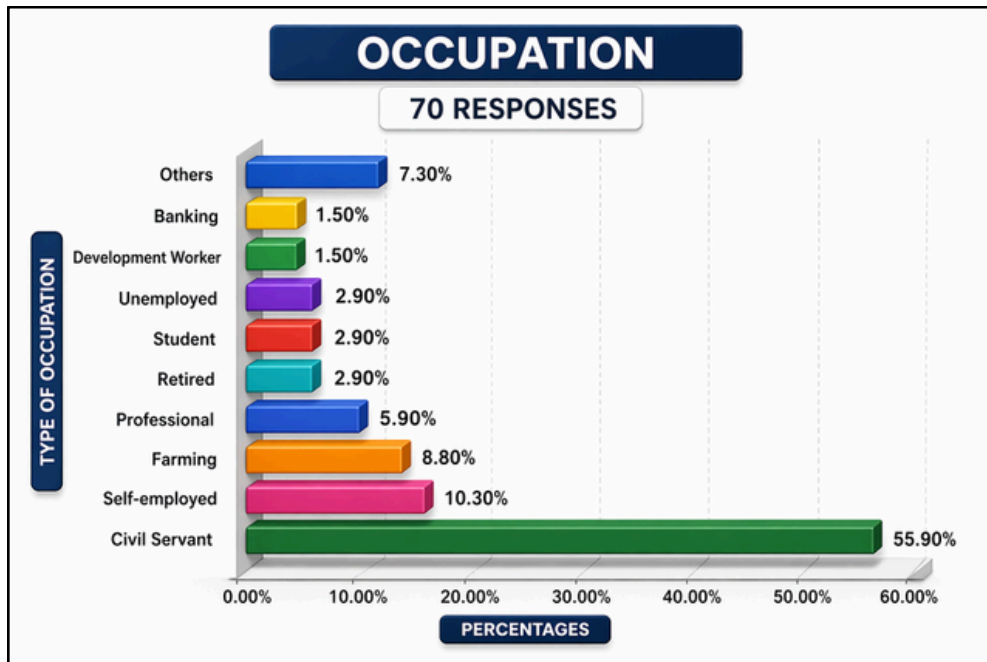


Figure 6 shows that majority of the respondents (55.90%) were civil servants, followed by self-employed and farmers. This mix reflects an economy anchored in public service with growing small-business participation.

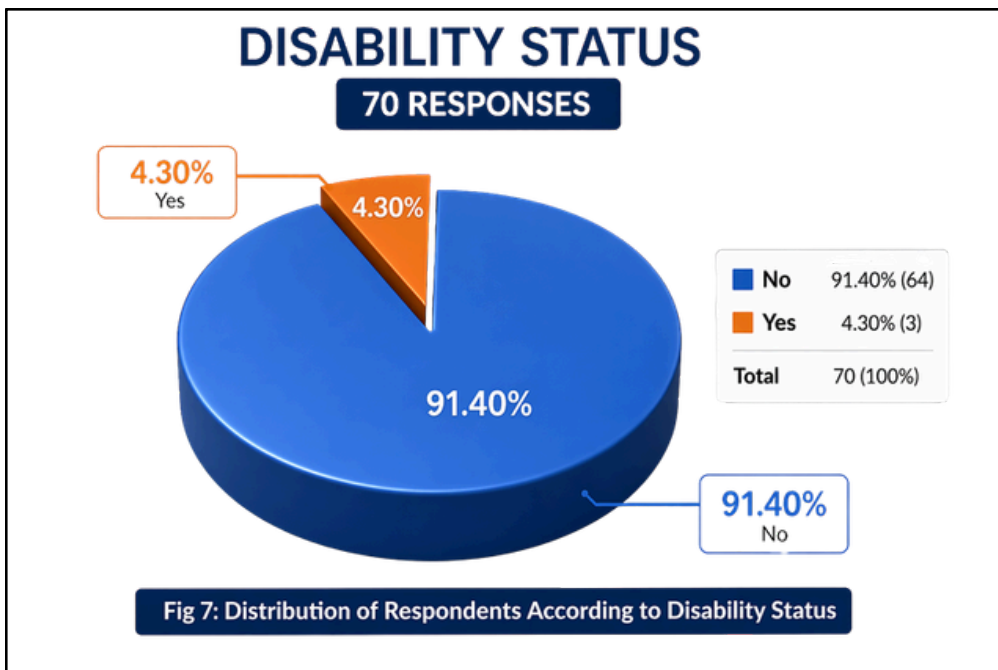


Figure 7 shows that only 4% of respondents identified as living with a disability, indicating less participation of persons with disabilities

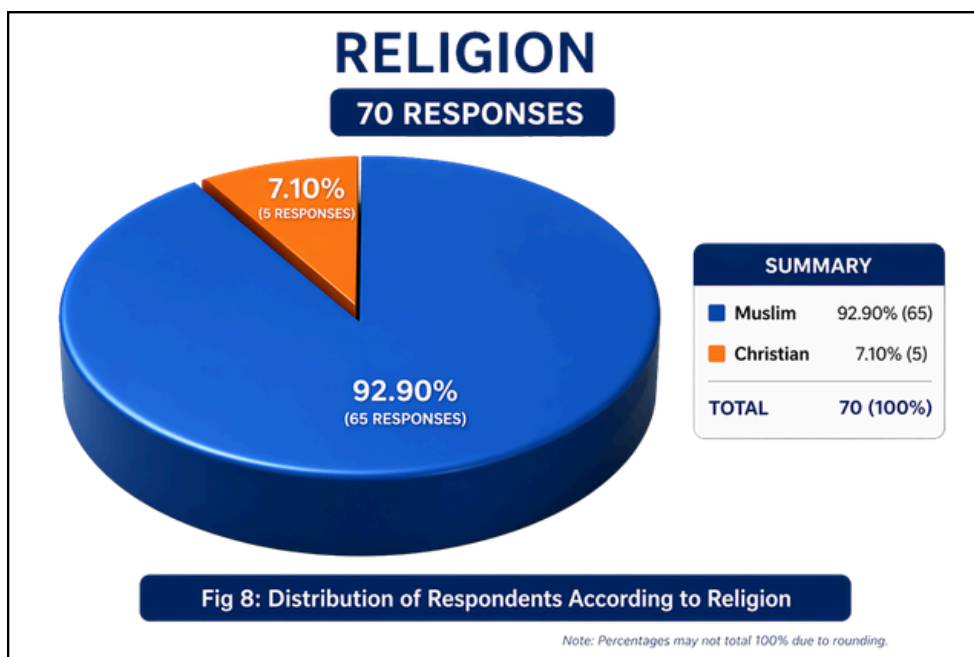


Figure 8 shows that Muslims constitute 92.90% % of respondents, reflecting the region’s dominant faith profile, while Christians make up 7 %. Religious balance is consistent with the area’s demography.

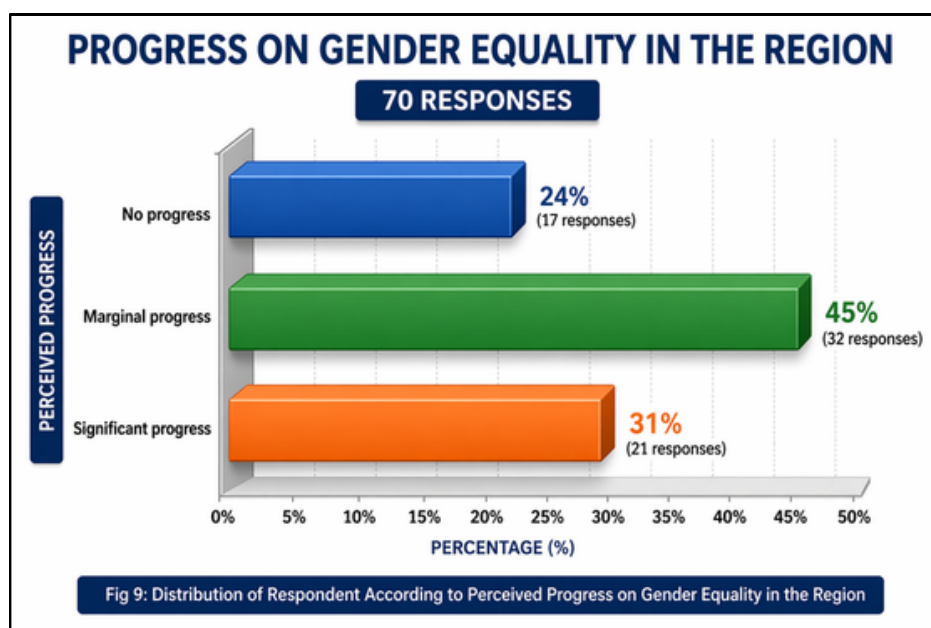


Figure 9 shows that about half (45 %) of the respondents perceived only marginal progress toward gender equality, and 24 % see none. This indicates slow regional advancement despite existing frameworks

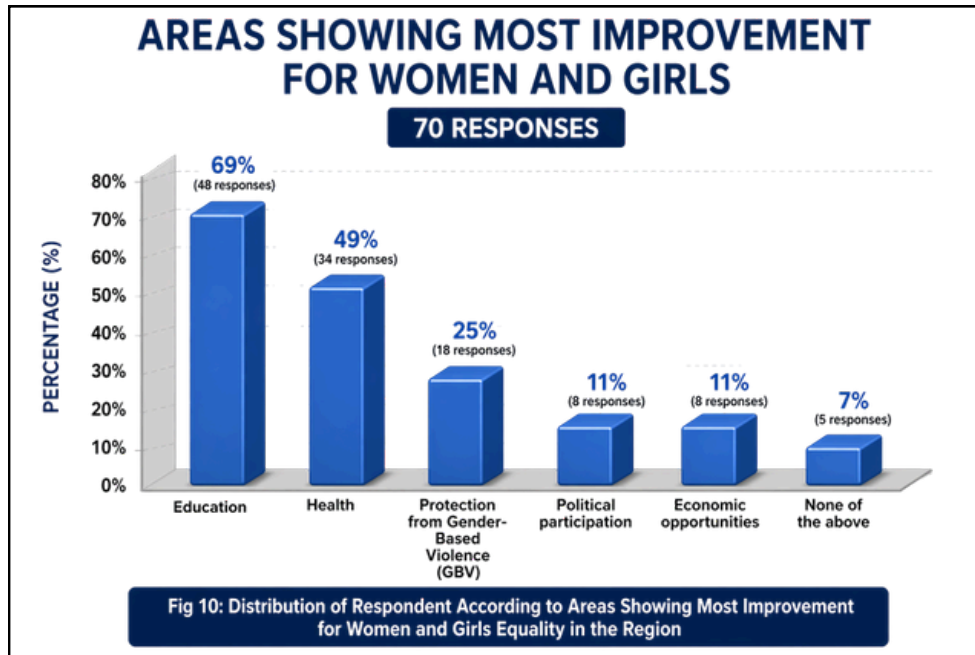


Figure 10 depicts that, Education (69 %) and health (49 %) show the strongest improvements, highlighting the positive impact of ongoing education and health-sector reforms.

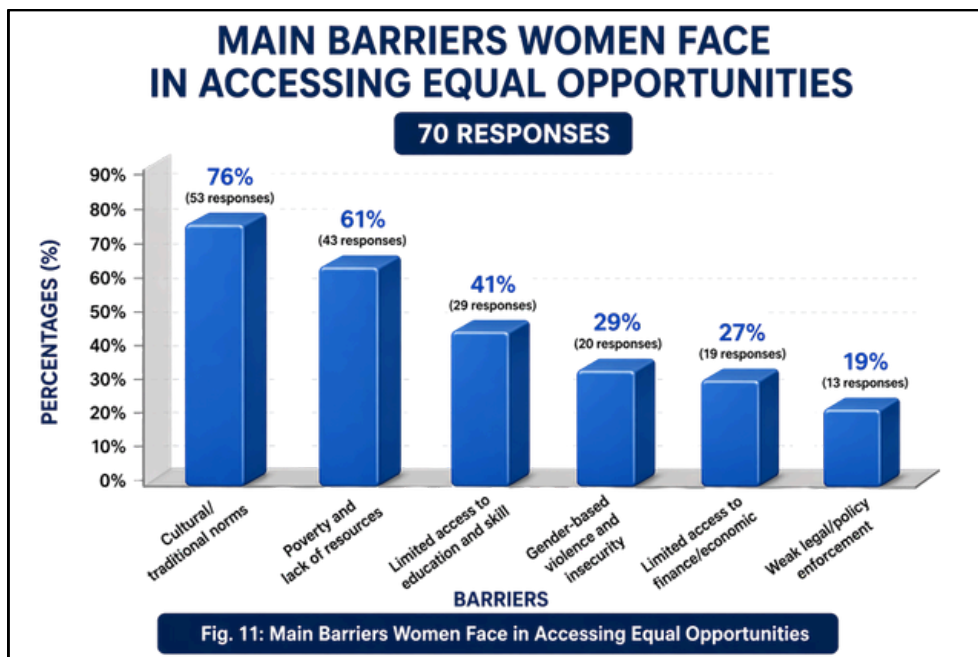


Figure 11 shows that cultural norms (77%) and poverty (63%) emerged as the leading barriers. These deep-rooted challenges require coordinated social, cultural, and economic actions to promote inclusive development



The figure above shows that women's involvement in leadership remains limited, with 43% of respondents noting minimal participation and only 11% describing it as active. Expanding women's leadership opportunities remains vital to strengthening governance inclusivity.

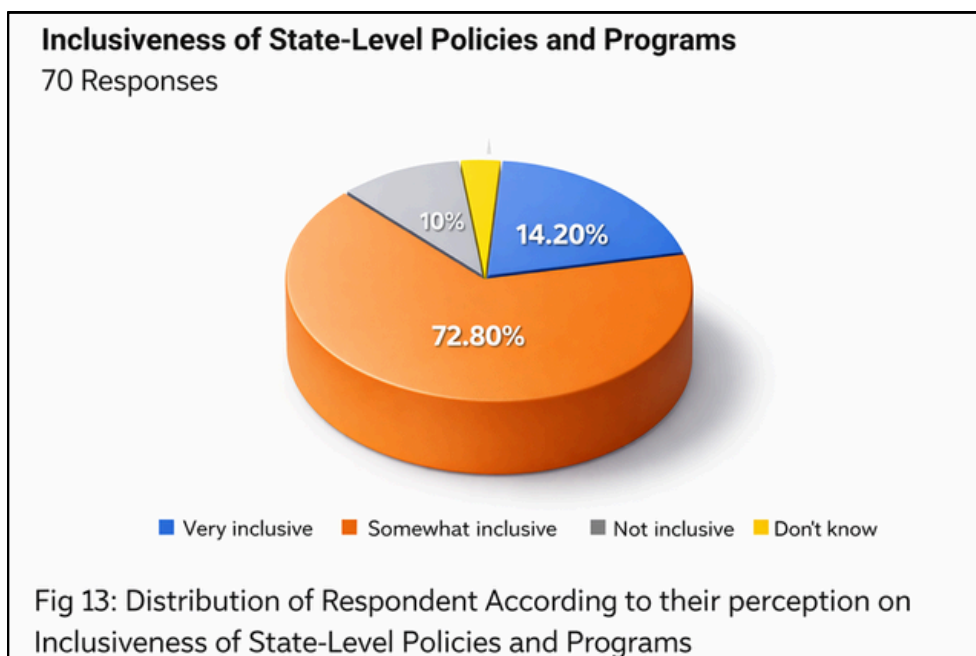
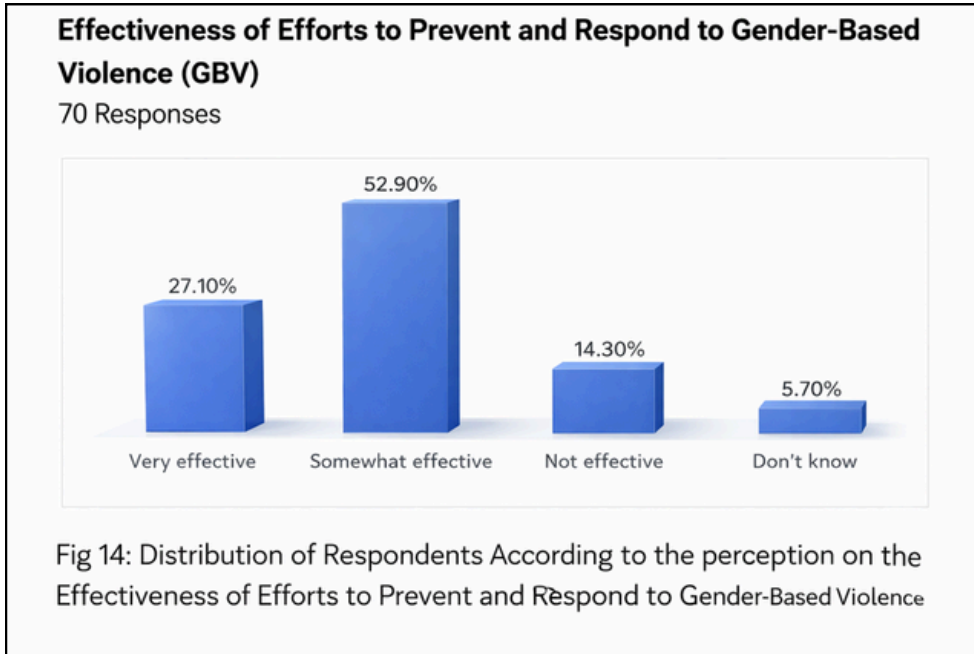


Figure 13 reveals that majority (73%) of respondents found state-level policies to be only somewhat inclusive. This indicates partial mainstreaming of gender concerns and highlights the need for stronger institutional commitment to full inclusiveness.



Slightly over half (52.9%) of respondents rated gender-based violence (GBV) interventions as somewhat effective. While progress is evident, the findings emphasize the need to reinforce response systems and survivor support mechanisms.

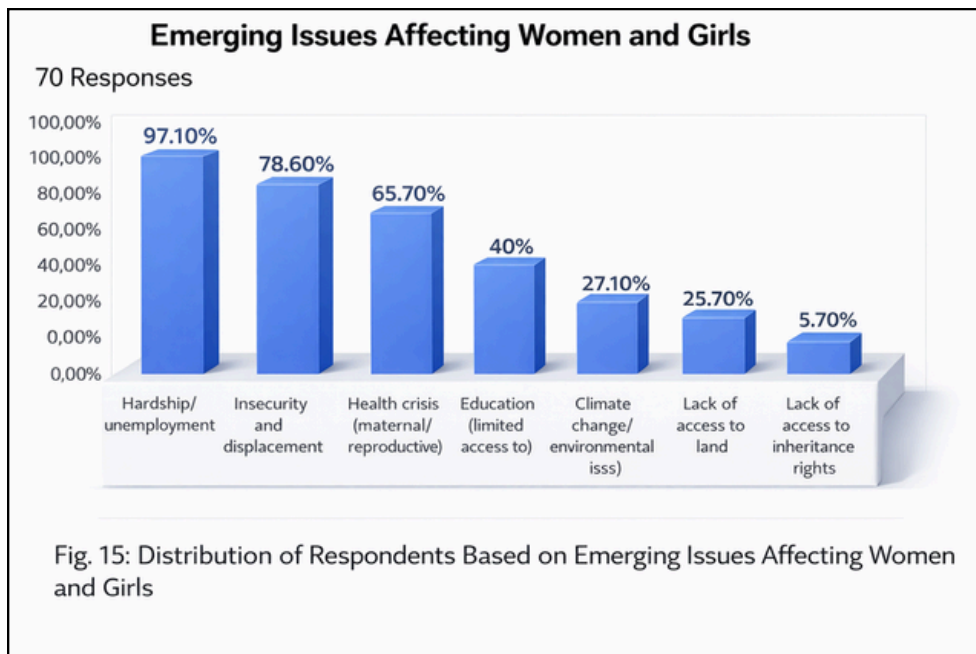
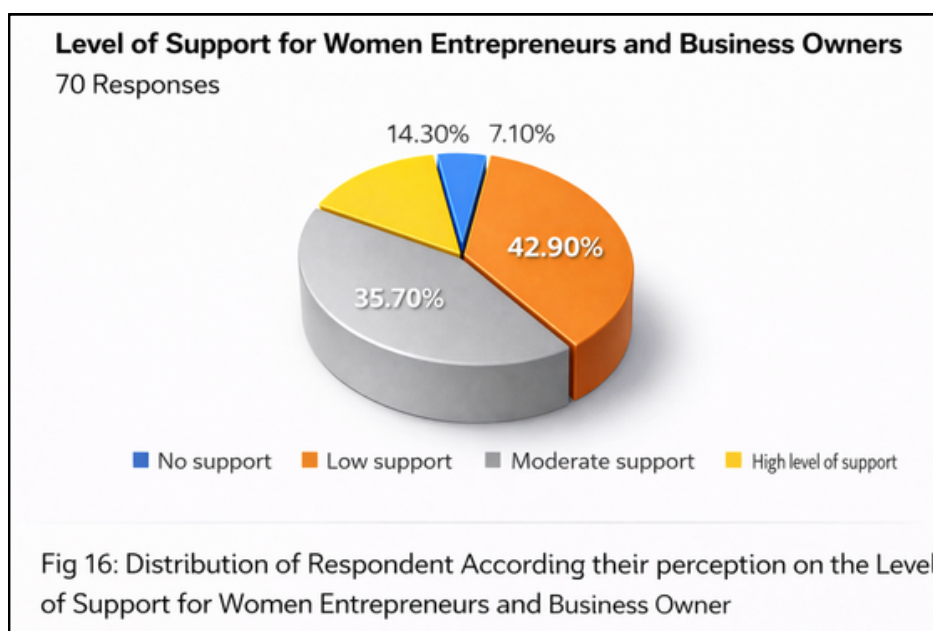


Figure 15 shows that economic hardship (97 %) and insecurity (79 %) are top emerging issues. These intersecting crises exacerbate women’s vulnerability and limit empowerment prospects



According to figure 16, most respondents cited low (43 %) or moderate (36 %) support for women and business owners in the state. Therefore, more financial access and tailored business services are needed to support and empower women entrepreneurs

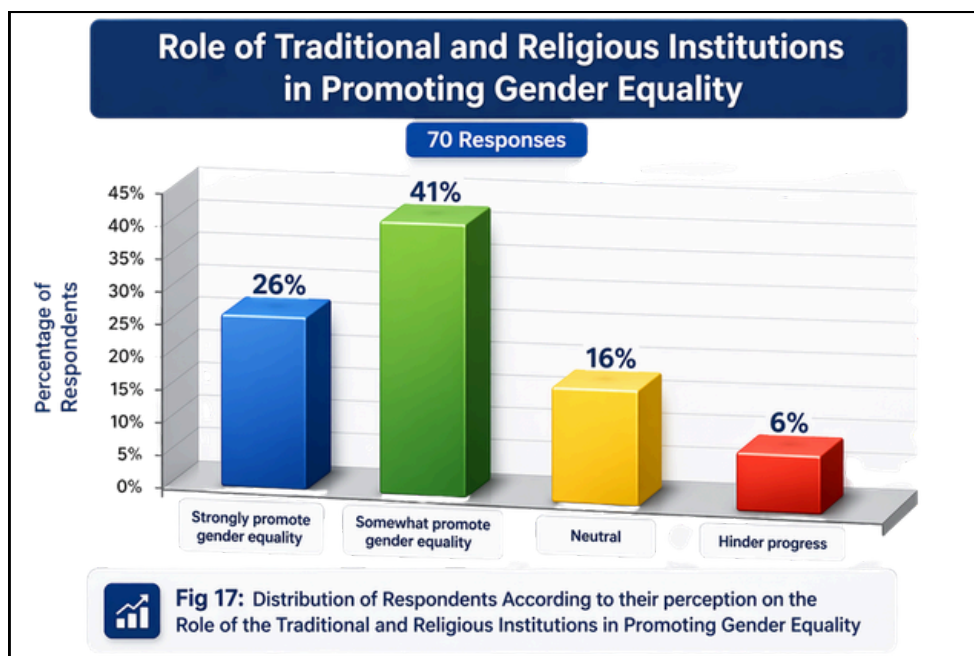


Figure 17 shows that About 41% of the respondents believe traditional and religious institutions somewhat promote gender equality, while others perceived them as neutral or restrictive. Constructive engagement with these institutions is therefore critical to fostering positive change.

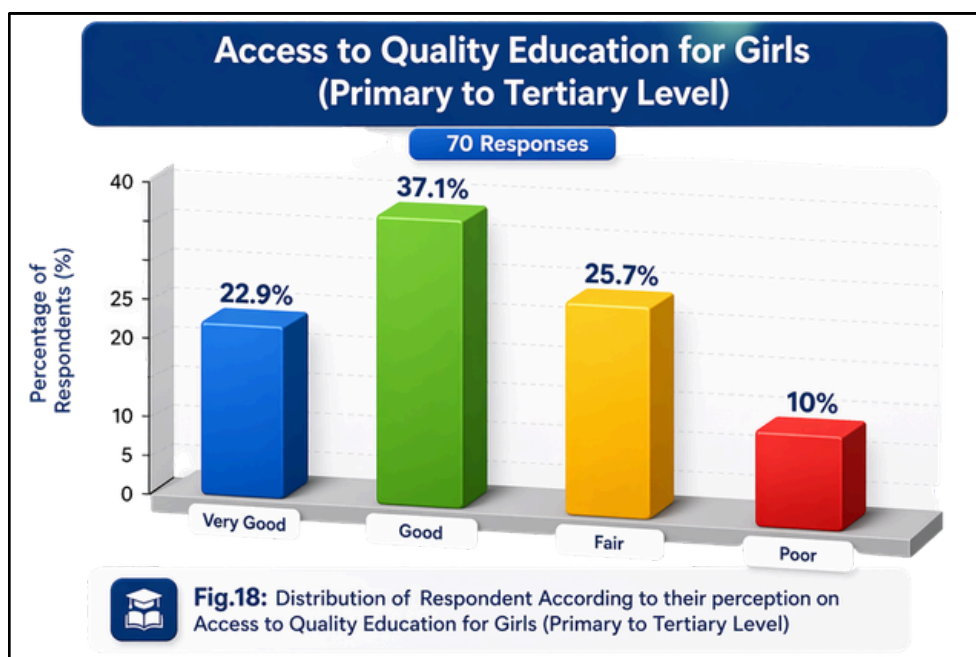


Figure 18 depicts that 37.1% of the respondents rated girls' access to education as good, 40% considered it fair or poor. The results suggest persistent resource and infrastructure gaps, particularly in rural and underserved areas.

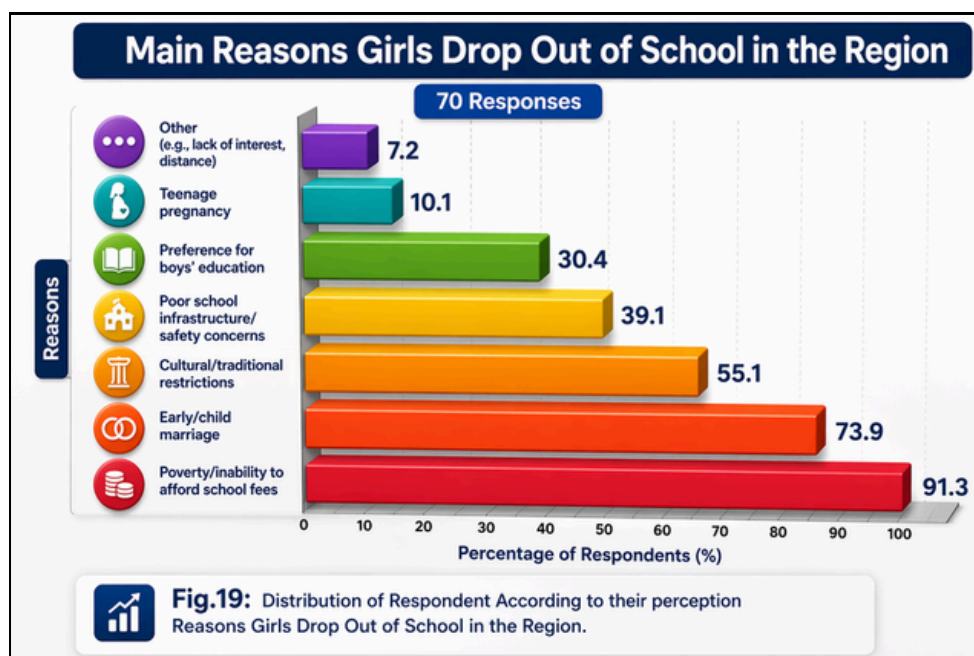


Figure 19 shows that Poverty (91 %) and early marriage (74 %) dominate as causes of dropout. Tackling these socioeconomic and cultural pressures is vital to sustaining girls' education.

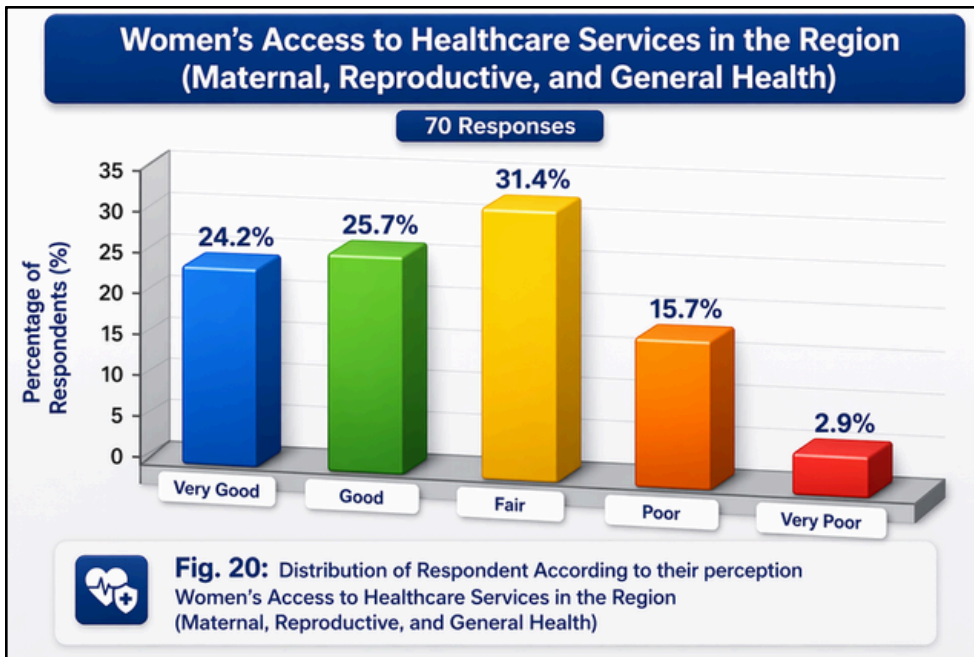


Figure 20 shows that most respondents rated healthcare access for women as fair (31.4%) or good (25.7%). This suggests moderate satisfaction with service availability but highlights ongoing challenges in affordability, quality, and reach, particularly in rural communities.

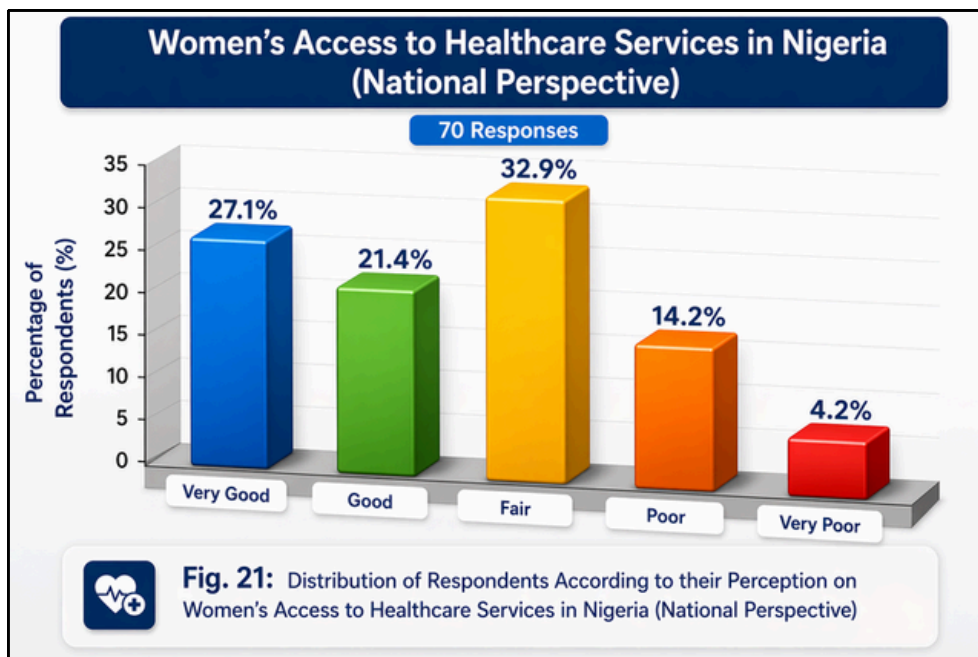


Figure 21 shows slightly better access to national women national health services with higher proportions rating services as very good (27.1%) compared to the regional figure. This indicates some progress in national health policy delivery, though inequalities remain.

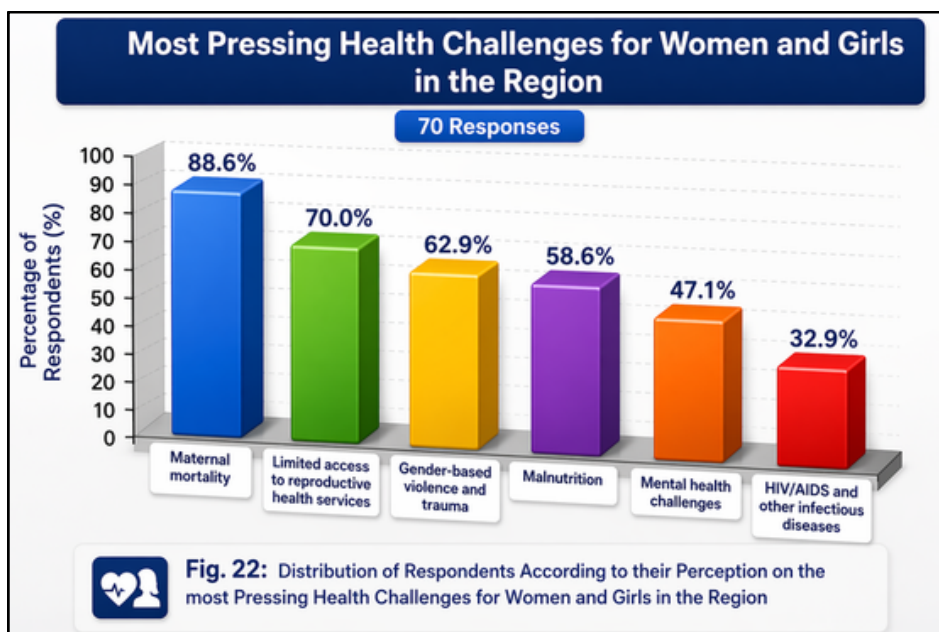


Figure 22 show that maternal mortality (88.6%) and limited reproductive health services (70%) were identified as the most critical challenges. Gender-based violence, malnutrition, and mental health concerns follow closely, reflecting deep-seated health inequities

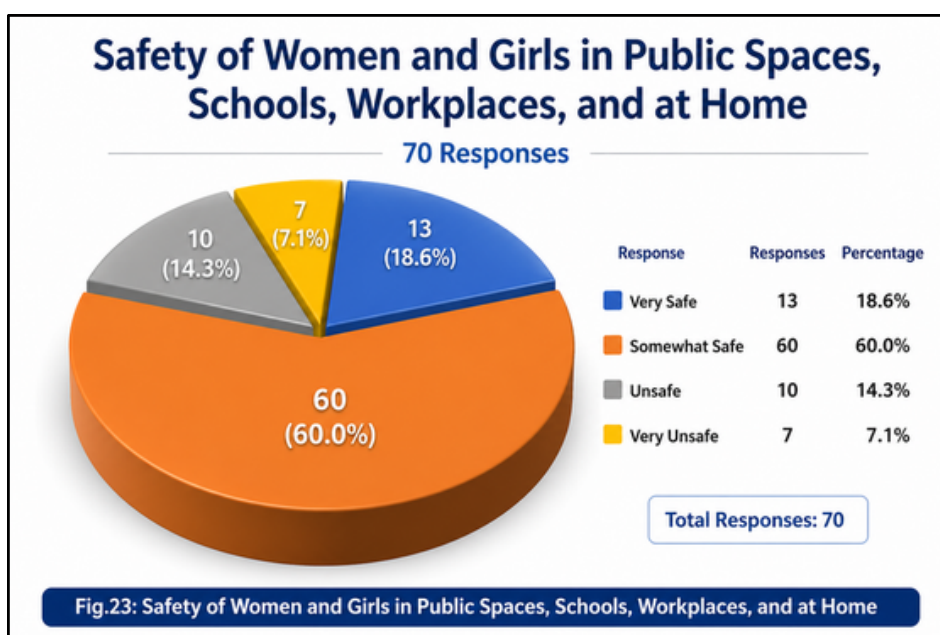
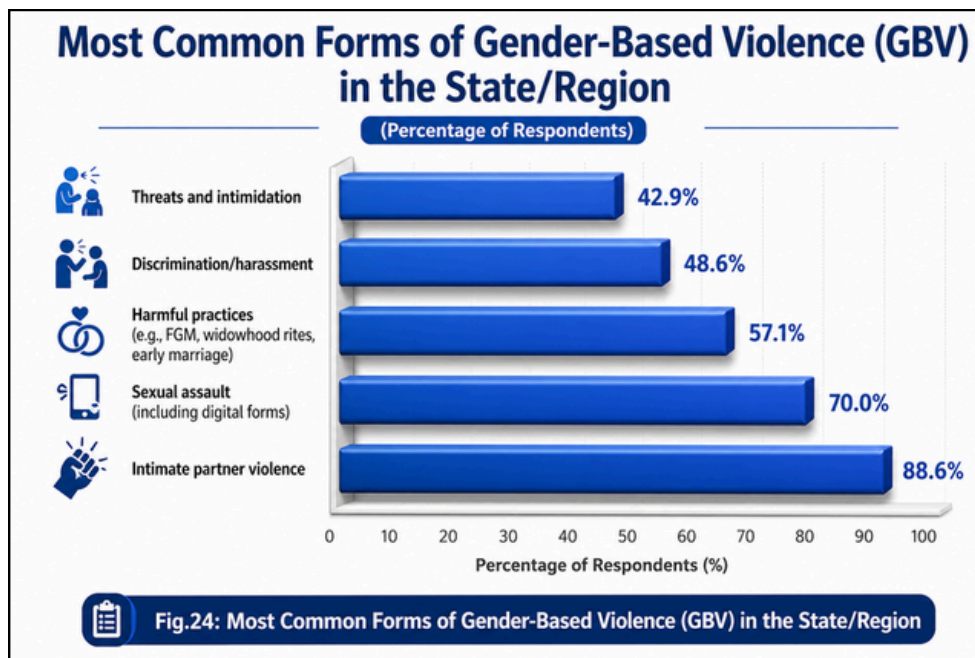


Figure 23 shows that 60% of respondents believe women are somewhat safe, 21% view conditions as unsafe. This points to persistent threats to women’s security in both public and domestic environments.



The figure above shows that domestic violence (89%) and sexual harassment (70%) were reported as the most prevalent forms of GBV. The findings emphasize the need for stronger protection systems, community awareness, and legal enforcement

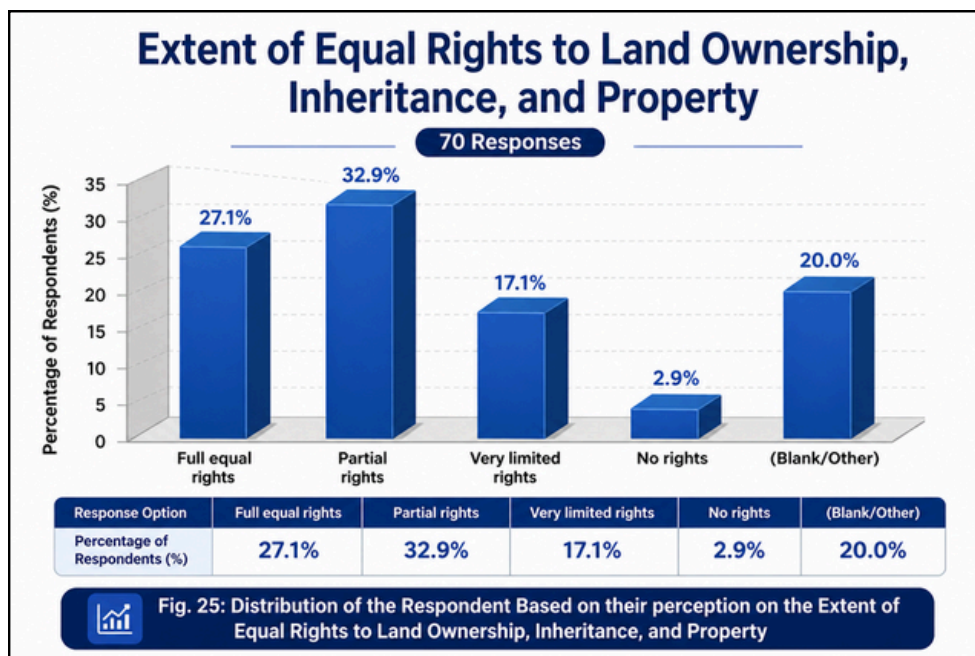


Figure 25 shows that only 27% of respondents reported full equality in land and property rights. Structural inequalities in asset ownership continue to limit women’s economic independence and empowerment.

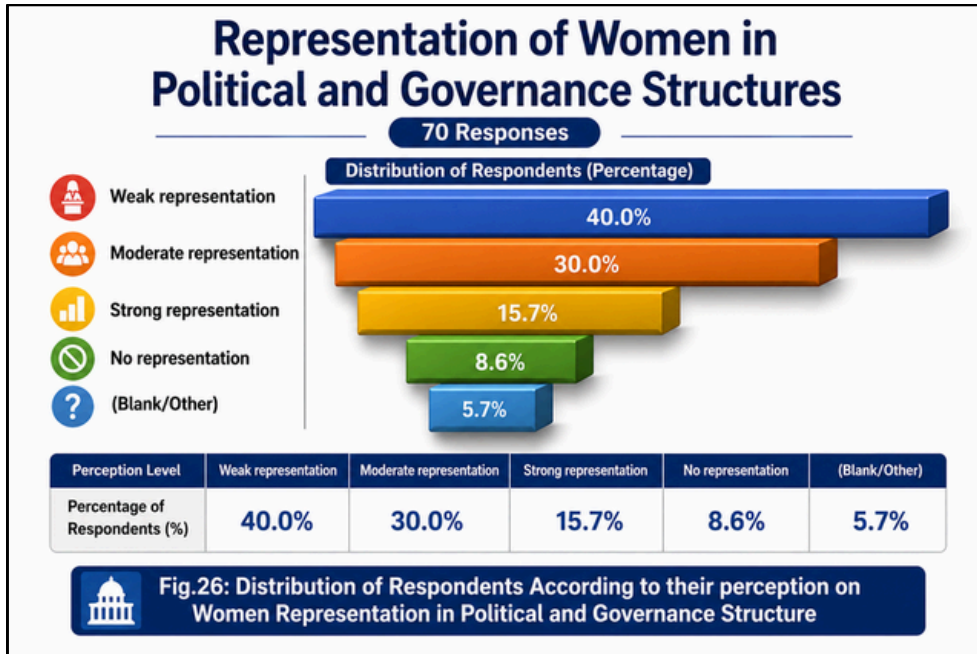
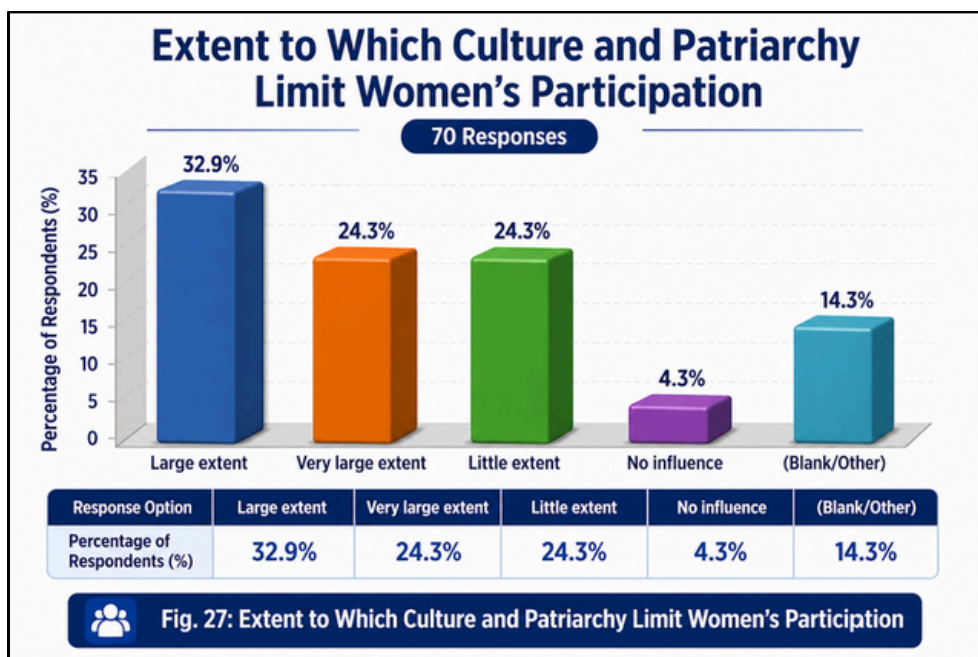


Figure 26 shows that 40% of respondents described women’s representation in politics and governance as weak. This highlights the need for stronger implementation of gender inclusion policies and leadership development initiatives.



The Figure above shows that more than half (57.2%) of respondents agreed that cultural and patriarchal norms significantly constrain women’s involvement in leadership. These findings underscore the continued influence of traditional systems in shaping gender relations.

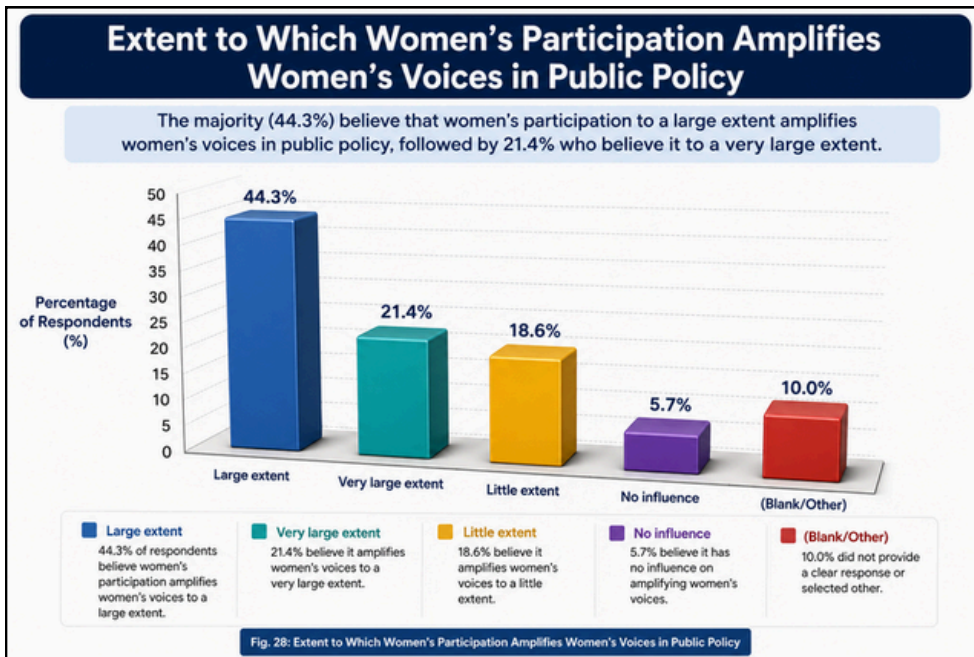


Figure 28 depicts that majority of the respondents (65%) believe that women's participation in governance amplifies women's voices in policy decisions. This underscores the value of inclusive governance for balanced social development

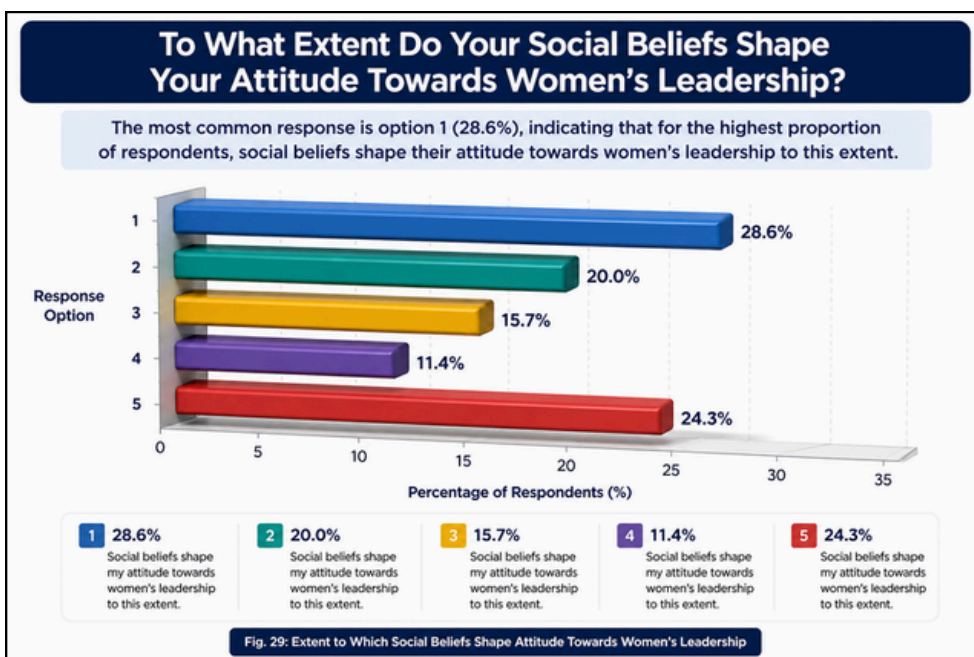


Figure 29 shows polarized responses with 28.6% of respondents reporting strong influence of social beliefs, on women leadership while 24% indicated no- influence. This mix shows a gradual cultural shift toward greater acceptance of women in leadership roles.

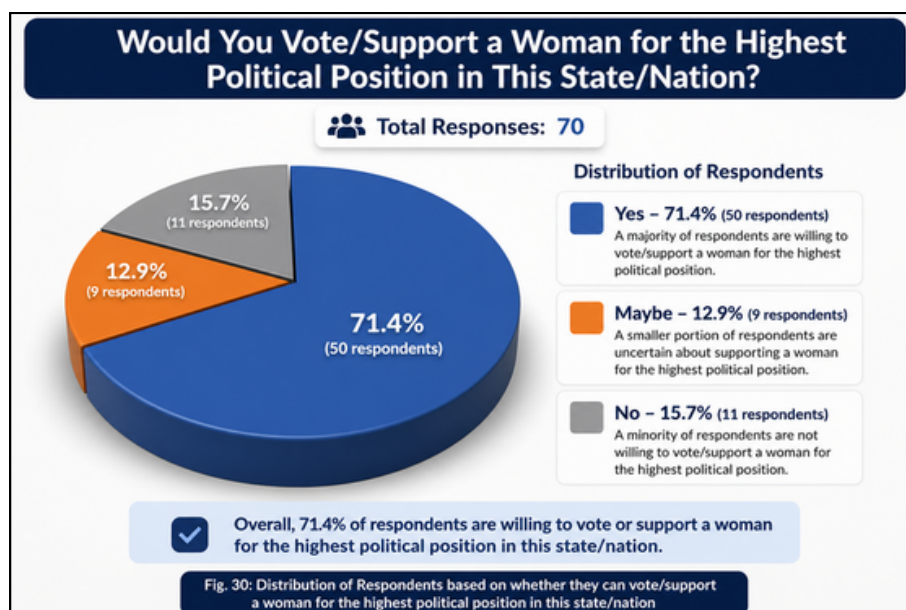


Figure 30 shows that a large majority (71.4%) of the respondents expressed willingness to support a woman for the highest political office. This suggests a growing openness to women’s leadership and evolving gender perceptions in political participation

Recommendations to advance gender equality and women’s empowerment form questionnaires

Based on responses from the field questionnaires in Kebbi State, the following priority actions were identified to advance gender equality and strengthen women’s empowerment across the North-West region:

Education and Awareness

- Expand scholarship schemes for girls, particularly in rural and low-income communities.
- Strengthen school feeding programs to improve enrollment, retention, and completion rates among girls.
- Promote adult literacy initiatives targeting women who missed formal education opportunities.
- Increase investment in STEM education, vocational training, and technical skills development to enhance women’s employability and competitiveness in emerging sectors.
- Improve community-level awareness campaigns on the importance of girls’ education and women’s rights.

Legal Enforcement and Policy Implementation

- Strengthen enforcement of existing gender-related laws and policies, including protections against child marriage and gender-based violence.
- Operationalize and monitor the 35% Affirmative Action policy to ensure meaningful representation of women in public institutions.
- Enforce statutory rights relating to inheritance and land ownership, particularly in communities where customary practices limit women's access to productive assets.
- Improve institutional accountability mechanisms to ensure gender policies translate into tangible outcomes.

Political Inclusion and Leadership Development

- Introduce reserved seats or legislated quotas to increase women's representation in elective and appointive positions.
- Encourage political parties to adopt internal guidelines that promote gender inclusion in candidate selection and leadership structures.
- Establish mentorship, leadership training, and capacity-building programs to support aspiring female leaders.
- Reduce structural barriers such as high nomination fees and political intimidation that disproportionately affect women.

Economic Empowerment and Financial Inclusion

- Expand access to grants, low-interest loans, and targeted financial products for women entrepreneurs.
- Strengthen women's access to formal credit through financial literacy programs and simplified loan procedures.
- Provide business development services, including market linkages, digital skills training, and cooperative formation support.
- Support women's participation in value chains beyond subsistence-level activities.

Gender-Based Violence (GBV) Prevention and Response

- Strengthen protection mechanisms for survivors of GBV through improved law enforcement response and judicial processes.
- Expand access to survivor-centered services, including shelters, psychosocial support, legal aid, and medical care.

- Increase public awareness campaigns to reduce stigma and encourage reporting of abuse.
- Enhance coordination between government agencies, civil society organizations, and traditional institutions to address GBV comprehensively.

Cultural and Community Engagement

- Engage traditional and religious leaders as champions of gender equality and women's rights.
- Promote culturally sensitive and faith-informed advocacy strategies to challenge harmful norms.
- Facilitate sustained community dialogues to address patriarchal attitudes and discriminatory practices.
- Encourage male engagement programs that promote shared responsibility in advancing gender equality.

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PHOTO GALLERY



Photo speaks: Representative of the Ministry for Women Affairs Contributing during the FGD



Photo speaks: A Lecturer from Waziru Umaru Federal Polytechnic Birnin Kebbi, contributing during the FGD



Photo speaks: Group Photograph of the Participants during the FGD

FGD SCRIPT

Revalidation of The National Gender in Nigeria Report by NWTF - FGD Guide

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THE FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION (INTERVIEW) FOR THE REVALIDATION OF THE NATIONAL GENDER IN NIGERIA REPORT

My name is Balkisu Saidu, I am a researcher for the Nigerian Women Trust Fund (NWTF). The Nigerian Women Trust Fund (NWTF) is a civil society organisation focused on closing the gender gaps at all levels of governance. Ultimately, NWTF seeks to institutionalize access to resources for women in governance in Nigeria and increase the quantity and quality of women in public offices in Nigeria.

As part of its mandate, NWTF is conducting national research to revalidate its National Gender in Nigeria Report. The current study is aimed at capturing gender-disaggregated multi-sector indices and statistics that speak to women's leadership and political participation against the background of the socio-economic state of women in Nigeria, while highlighting new trends and occurrences shaping the subject matter.

This effort is also expected to provide relevant findings and information that will spur conversation and policy action towards improving women's representation in decision-making process as well as the general standard of living for women and girls in Nigeria.

How much time will this interview take?

This interview will take between 45 minutes to 1 hour of your time.

What will I be asked to do if I agree to participate in the interview?

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to respond to questions on issues that speaks to women's leadership and political participation against the background of the socio-economic state of women in Nigeria, while highlighting new trends and occurrences shaping the subject matter,

What are the risks involved in participating in this study?

There are no risks, but you will be spending some of your time to respond to questions voluntarily. Your anonymity is assured.

What are the benefits of my participation in this study?

Your participation in this study will contribute to deepening knowledge on issues that speaks to women’s leadership and political participation against the background of the socio-economic state of women in Nigeria.

Can I decide not to participate? If so, are there other options?

Yes, participation is voluntary. So, you can choose not to participate. Even if you agree to be in the study now, you can change your mind later and leave the study without any negative consequences.

How will the confidentiality of the research records be protected?

In line with ethical standards guiding such study, the records of this interview will be kept confidential. In any report published, information about your identity will not be disclosed. Research records will be stored securely and only the researchers will have access to the records that identify you by name. Staff of the Nigeria Women Trust Fund (NWTF) may review the records to make sure we are doing the right thing, but they will keep your information confidential.

Who can I contact for more information?

If you have questions about this study, please contact the lead research consultant (Dr Bridget – 08034362396) and or (Yahuza Garba Illo, 08035493494)

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information. I have all my questions answered. (check one:)

I consent to participate in this interview voluntarily I DO NOT consent to participate

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Theme 1: Questions to determine opportunities and barriers for women and girls' advancement in Nigeria

1. What does gender equality and women's empowerment mean to you?

Meaning of Gender Equity:

- P8. Both male and female to have equal rights and opportunities to make decision
- P10. Equal right for all (men and women) in all aspect of life (education, economics, Health etc).
- P5. Women to have the same rights as men

Meaning of Gender Empowerment

- P2. Given access to equality education, health, economic opportunities etc to both men and women to equip them for sound decision making
- P8. Give support to women in order to be able to make independent decision in all aspect of their life
- P4. Build the capacity of women and support them to stand on their feet and decide their future by themselves

1. What are the opportunities and challenges women and girls face in this region?

Opportunities women and girls face in this region

- P1. There is a government ministry (ministry for women affairs) that only focused on supporting women through skills acquisition and continue education for school drop -outs.
- P7. Political appointments (e.g., some commissioners are women and there are women leaders in all the political parties)
- P3. Many Donors funded projects and NGOs ensures minimum of 30% women participation through targeted inclusion
- P10. Incentives are provided for women to participate in anti -natal clinic and free drugs are also provided
- P5. Women are supported in Education through the AGILE (Adolescent Girls Initiative for Learning and Empowerment) by provision of incentives such as cash transfer, free uniforms and books

2. Challenges women and girls face in this region

- P8. Increased Gender Based Violence (GBV) effect girl child enrollment to boarding schools
- P.3 Cultural and Religion placed constrains on women full participation in politics and leadership in the state
- P9. Early marriage encourages girls to drop out of school and therefore limit their confidence and opportunities
- P4. Women in the rural areas are at the disadvantage compared to women in the urban areas because of awareness of the existing opportunities for women

3. How do people in this state/community access healthcare?

P10. Many women in the state depends on public health centers, though not easily accessible to rural women and are far and poorly equipped.

P8. Many women in both rural and urban areas heavily depend on Patent Medicine Stores (Chemist) who are mostly quakes without requisite qualifications and experience to perform most of the diagnostic and treatment they give to them

P6. Though there exist the state Health Insurance Scheme for all the citizens, it is far from reaching majority of the citizens

P5. Many NGOs support the government health programs in the state by providing outreach medical services

P6. Women still need permission from her husband to attend health related issues

P7. Many women don't want to be attended to by a male health worker and there are limited number of female health workers especially doctors

4. What forms of violence do women and girls face in this community?

P4. Emotional violence is very common especially in the polygamous family

P8. Physical violence is also common (husband beating wives)

P9. Economic violence especially deprivation of basic needs as a punishment to children and even wives

P6. There are still cases of forced marriages

P2. Street harassment and intimidation especially during political campaigns

5. How does violence impact women and girls' agencies, voices and leadership?

(probe for the nexus/connection between violence and women's participation in politics and leadership).

P4. GBV traumatizes women throughout her life

P7. Few that overcome the GBV, it lowers their confidence and effect their roles in the society

P10. Many women fear public speaking or political participation due to cultural and religion constrains

P8. GBV is used by politicians and local leaders to silences women in community meetings and discourages them from leadership or political participation.

6. Are there actions either at community or state levels that enables violence against women and girls especially in relation to their political participation and leadership in this region

P1. Weak enforcement of laws against gender-based violence encourages others to commit it

P2. Many elected women or those in the leadership positions don't care to fight for women rights

P8. Cultural acceptance of wife-beating as a private right of the husband

P9. Parents and society mostly cover up rape cases to avoid societal stigma

7. Are there actions either at community or state levels that discourages violence against women and girls especially in relation to their political participation and leadership?

P7. The state's Ministry of Women Affairs and some CSOs promote awareness and legal reporting.

P4. Interventions of traditional and religious leaders reduces the levels of violence

P3. Programs that focus on girl's child education empowered the women to stand on her feet

8. Can you identify key areas where women are still disadvantaged? If not mentioned, probe for how access to education i.e. STEM courses etc. empower women and girls? probe for gender stereotypes that negates women's voices and leadership.

P1. In education due to hawking and early marriage

P3. Access to productive capital like land for farming and capital for business

P8. Representation in politics and leadership because women are seen as homemakers not leaders

P6. In professional careers like Doctors, Lawyers, Bankers etc. There are few women due to less opportunities in education and cultural and religion stereotype that limit their participation.

9. To what extent does economic background influence someone's socio-economic status?

P8. Very high influence wealthy families can afford to educate and protect their daughters by not allowing them to hawk on the streets or marrying them early

P1. Poor women remain dependent on men economically and that limit their ability to make economic decisions

P2. Economic hardship pushes families to send daughter to street hawking and early marriages

10. What have been stakeholders' efforts to promote gender equality and women economic empowerment? Probe for successes of these initiatives and or failures.

P10. NGOs (like Nigerian for women project, ATASP-1, State first lady projects) train women on entrepreneurship.

P7. Government empowerment programs, such as constituency projects provide support for women

P5. Religious and community leaders promote participation into women targeted programs of government and NGOs

P4. There is dedicated ministry for woman affairs saddled with the responsibility of promoting gender equity and empowerment in the state

Theme 2: Women’s Participation in Decision making, Leadership and Governance

1. Do you think women and men have been well represented in political and appointive positions in this geo-political zone?

P8. No, men dominant politics in this zone

P2. Few women hold positions, often limited to “women leader”, councilors in LGAs and few minor appointments

P1. There was never a woman Governor, Deputy Governor, House of Assembly member or senator from the state, except one house of representative member since the inception of democracy in Nigeria

2. Which gender (females or males) have more leadership position and why?

- a. Probe to know why the difference in access to leadership positions at all levels,
- b. What are the enabling factors for the difference?
- c. Are the factors still relevant in the current context?

P1. Males have more positions because politics is male-dominated, expensive, and sometimes violent.

P4. Women are discouraged by family or community; cultural and religious beliefs also reinforce male dominance.

P6. Financial constraints and political godfatherism favor men.

P7. The society look at women in politics irresponsible people

3. In your opinion, what is your understanding of women political participation and representation in elected positions?

- a. (probe to ascertain the understanding and appreciation of the 35% affirmative action and representation of women in elective and appointive positions in Nigeria)

P10. Women participation and representation in elected position is to allow women to present themselves for election and to be elected into various political positions

P1. Many women, even the educated once are not aware of the 35% affirmative action policy

P8. It is not even possible to implement it the state

P9. Affirmative action and Beijing declaration are seen as attempt to pollute our culture and religion

4. What are the formal and informal channels for engagement in which women can participate meaningfully in politics across all levels?

- a. (Probe to find out available spaces for women in political parties, community spaces and structures, etc.)

Formal

- P1. Political parties
 - P6. Office of the first lady of the state
 - P4. NGOs support groups
- Informal
- P8. Community associations

5. Who are the major stakeholders involved in determining representation of women in government at the state and national levels?

(Probe to find out the dominant state/formal and non-state actors/informal actors political parties as well as their interests)

- P5. Government in power
- P10. Political party leaders
- P7. Traditional rulers
- P1. Office of the first lady of the state (Wife of the Governor)
- P6. Godfathers (wealthy politicians)
- P3. Religious leaders.
- P5. CSOs and women groups

6. How do these stakeholders exercise their power and influence in determining men and women's representation in leadership and governance?

- P3. They can endorse a candidate and that can give him popularity
- P5. They can give financial support to the candidate
- P10. They control the party structures which is needed to emerge as a candidate
- P4. They can help to campaign for the candidate

7. What are the constraints faced by women in participating in politics?

(Probe to find out how political alliance/loyalism/favoritism affect women's political participation)

- P1. Intimidation, lack of funds, and social stigma.
- P9. Family disapproval and support
- P6. Fear of harassment.
- P3. Political violence
- P5. Party challenges (women don't have access to party structures)

8. What has been stakeholder's role in engendering women's political participation and representation e.g. CSOs, Political parties, INGOs, Private sector etc.

P3. Political parties have women's wings with women leaders at all levels for mobilizing women to participate in politics though mostly limited to voting

P5. CSOs and NGOs sensitize and promote women inclusion in politics especially as aspirants

P7. The office of the first lady support and promote women participation in politics by sensitizing and providing financial support to women candidates

9. What do you recommend should be done to increase participation of women in politics as appointees and elected public officers in government?

P1. Enforce the 35% affirmative action quota.

P3. Provide funding support for female aspirants.

P.6 Sensitize communities to accept women in politics.

P9. Engage men and religious leaders as partners and collaborators

P1. Offer mentorship and leadership training for young women to understand the roles and responsibilities is beyond homemaking

Theme 3: Recommendations for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment, particularly for Women's Political Participation and Leadership.

11. How can men actively participate in achieving gender equality and support women's political empowerment?

P8. By supporting their wives, daughters, and sisters to pursue education and leadership.

P10. Advocating and fighting against gender-based violence in our societies

P4. Ensure women are included in any decision to be taken in our communities

P6. Empower and support women to become economically independent

12. What strategies do you think will work in removing barriers women face in your community/state to ensure they achieve their full potential?

P1. Awareness and education from early age.

P3. Formulation of laws, removal of cultural barriers and promotion of religious perspectives that support women's rights.

P7. Provision of program that can economically empowerment and enable them to access capital

P5. Enforcing laws that protect women's rights and safety.

P6. Engaging the office of the first ladies and other relevant institutions to sensitize women on the power of their votes and their collective bargaining power

13. What will you recommend to improving the implementation of national, regional and international laws that promote gender equality and women's economic empowerment?

P10. Strengthen legal enforcement and accountability (ensure law brakers are punish especially GBV)

P8. Translate national laws such as 35 affirmative actions into practice in states and LGAs

P7. Engage religious and traditional leaders in the formulation and implementations of these laws

P2. Extensive sensitization of the general public to be aware of such laws

Closing

i. Do you have any comments for the Nigeria Women Trust Fund?

P1. NWTF need to come up with programs that will ensure women equality in the state

P4. They should establish state offices for engagement and enforcement of relevant laws that promote gender equality

P10. They should be organizing seminars and workshop to create awareness about existing laws on gender equality

P5. Since financial constrains have been identified as one of the major obstacles for women participation in politics, NWTF should be supporting women candidates financially

P2. There should be regular programs with state first ladies since they can play a fundamental role in ensuring the emergence of women candidates in political parties

II. Are there any other comments you would like to make at this time?

P1. I wish to expressed our appreciation to NWTF for given us this opportunity to say our mind on various gender issues in the state. Also, to the consultants that invited us to this FGD and hope this discussion will help to bridge the existing gaps on gender equality in Kebbi State and Nigeria at large.

5.2 Annex 2 - The North Central Report

Nasarawa State

REPORT GENDER REPORT IN NORTH CENTRAL REGION (NASARAWA - FOCAL STATE)

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, increased attention has been given globally to the role of women in governance and leadership. This heightened focus reflects growing recognition that women have historically been significantly underrepresented in decision-making positions, despite constituting a substantial proportion of the population. Their marginalization from political and leadership structures has limited inclusive development and equitable representation.

Nigeria reflects this global pattern. Women have traditionally occupied secondary roles in governance and leadership, with limited access to elective and appointive positions. Although various policies, advocacy efforts, and empowerment initiatives have emerged in recent years to promote women's political participation, representation remains disproportionately low.

This review research examines the factors influencing women's participation in governance and leadership, the structural and socio-cultural barriers they face, and the extent to which advocacy efforts and policy interventions have contributed to measurable progress.

Scope of the Study

The study focuses on Nasarawa State, located in Nigeria's North Central geopolitical zone. As of 2025, the projected population of Nasarawa State is approximately 3.9 million people, according to figures referenced in the State Government's 2025 budget projections. It is the 15th largest state in Nigeria by land area and is endowed with rich solid mineral resources and a strong agricultural base.

Although precise 2025 disaggregated gender data are unavailable, estimates suggest that women constitute approximately 1.4 to 1.5 million of the state's population.

Despite its economic potential, Nasarawa State faces developmental challenges shaped by poverty, socio-cultural constraints, and educational disparities. Since Nigeria's return to democratic governance in 1999, women's political participation in the state has remained notably low. Socio-cultural norms, economic hardship, limited educational attainment, and gender stereotypes have contributed to their persistent underrepresentation in governance and leadership structures.

Nevertheless, women's empowerment efforts continue through the work of development organizations, civil society groups, and community-based initiatives. These efforts focus on skills development, awareness campaigns, advocacy for gender inclusion, and leadership capacity building.

Purpose of the Study

This review seeks to:

1. Identify and analyze existing literature and evidence on women's participation in governance and leadership in Nasarawa State, with particular attention to patterns of exclusion, structural barriers, and potential solutions.
2. Examine what has been done to improve both the quantity and quality of women's participation in elective, appointive, and decision-making positions.
3. Assess the role and impact of women's rights advocacy groups and gender-focused initiatives in increasing female representation in governance and leadership structures.

Methodology

Data for this review were collected from three Local Government Areas (LGAs), representing the three senatorial zones of Nasarawa State.

The instruments used included:

- **Focused Group Discussions (FGDs):**

FGDs were conducted with diverse stakeholders, including youth (both male and female), middle-aged men and women, community leaders, women leaders, and gender advocacy activists. This approach provided qualitative insights into perceptions, lived experiences, and socio-cultural dynamics affecting women's political participation.

- **Questionnaires (Online Media):**

Structured questionnaires were administered via online platforms to capture broader perspectives on governance, gender equality, and women's leadership participation.

1) ANALYSIS OF THE FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION

Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment

Participants generally defined gender equality and women's empowerment as ensuring that all genders have equal opportunities to participate in governance and leadership without discrimination or structural hindrance. Respondents emphasized that women should have equal representation and an equitable stake in decision-making processes at all levels.

However, the majority of participants agreed that this ideal has not been realized in Nasarawa State. Many attributed women's limited participation to entrenched patriarchal norms, with governance often perceived as a "man's domain."

Notably, 57% of respondents stated that governance for women entails ensuring equal access to decision-making processes, active participation in public life, and the integration of women's rights, needs, and priorities into policies, institutions, and legal frameworks at all levels of government.

Participants further emphasized that achieving genuine gender equality requires transforming governance structures to become gender-responsive and inclusive. This includes moving beyond assumptions of gender neutrality in public policies and service delivery, recognizing that policies often affect men and women differently.

Current Status Of Women In Governance: Opportunities And Challenges

Political Representation

Findings from the Focus Group Discussions indicate that 80% of respondents believe there is no deliberate or strategic framework to promote women's inclusion in elective and appointive positions in Nasarawa State. Participants noted that women are often assigned traditional or gender-stereotyped roles such as positions within Ministries of Women Affairs while being excluded from more influential and strategic offices.

As of early 2025, women's representation in governance remains significantly low:

- **Governor:** Male
- **Deputy Governor:** Male
- **Senate (3 seats):** No female senator
- **House of Representatives (5 seats):** No female representative
- **State House of Assembly (23 seats):** One female member
- **Local Government Chairpersons (13 LGAs):** No female chairperson

In appointive positions, women constitute less than 7% of leadership roles. Notable appointments include:

- One Commissioner for Women Affairs
- Eleven female Permanent Secretaries appointed in February 2025

At the local government level, none of the 13 LGAs has an elected or appointed female chairman.

Despite this low representation, participants acknowledged a modest increase in women's appointments over the past three years. Examples cited include the appointment of a female Vice Chancellor at Nasarawa State University and a female Head of the State Civil Service. These developments signal incremental progress, though they remain insufficient to bridge the gender gap in governance.

Women in Community-Level Decision-Making and Land Inheritance

Respondents reported that women's participation in community-level decision-making processes remains minimal. Traditional and discriminatory practices, poverty, limited education, and a lack of female role models were identified as key barriers.

Participants emphasized that women are often denied inheritance rights and land ownership in their names due to entrenched customary norms. This economic exclusion further limits their political and social influence.

Socio-cultural expectations continue to restrict women's access to leadership positions, both elective and appointive. Although women contribute significantly at the grassroots level, their roles are often informal and unrecognized.

However, efforts such as the Nasarawa State Action Plan on Security and Peacebuilding (2020–2024) were acknowledged as progressive frameworks aimed at promoting inclusive governance. The Action Plan aligns with UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and seeks to ensure women's active participation in peacebuilding and security processes.

Gender-Based Violence (GBV)

Participants affirmed that gender-based violence remains prevalent across the state, manifesting in both political and domestic contexts. Women are frequently subjected to domestic abuse, political intimidation, and reproductive control, including resistance to family planning decisions.

Some respondents described deeply entrenched patriarchal attitudes that perceive women as subordinate or as property. In political spaces, women are often discouraged from aspiring to leadership positions, and non-indigenous women married into the state reportedly face additional discrimination.

While policies addressing GBV exist, participants argued that implementation remains weak. Many interventions are perceived as theoretical rather than practical, with limited enforcement and inadequate support systems for survivors.

Constraints Hindering Women's Active Participation in Politics

Approximately 90% of participants identified structural and socio-cultural barriers that limit women's political engagement, including:

- Late-night political meetings that pose safety risks and conflict with domestic expectations
- High costs of nomination forms and campaign financing
- Limited access to economic resources
- A political culture heavily driven by financial influence
- Societal stigma portraying politically active women as morally questionable
- Fear of violence and instability associated with Nigerian politics

Economic disadvantage was repeatedly highlighted as a critical constraint, as women generally have less access to financial capital needed to compete in a monetized political system.

Existing Interventions and Emerging Initiatives (2020–2025)

Participants acknowledged that although patriarchal norms and underrepresentation persist, recent years have witnessed emerging positive developments. Key interventions include:

1. Women’s Economic Empowerment

- The Human Capital Development Agency’s “Empower Her” Project, providing training and health insurance to thousands of women.
- Cash grant programs for small-scale traders under the Federal Government’s Renewed Hope Initiative.

2. Girls’ Education

- The Adolescent Girls Initiative for Learning and Empowerment (AGILE), supporting secondary school enrollment and retention through scholarships and financial assistance.

3. Inclusion in Peacebuilding

- The Nasarawa State Action Plan on Security and Peacebuilding (2020–2024), promoting women’s participation in conflict resolution and governance processes in line with UNSCR 1325.

4. Healthcare and Disability Inclusion

- Adoption of a Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights (SRHR) policy specifically targeting women and girls with disabilities, ensuring inclusive healthcare access and free medical support for vulnerable populations.

5. Advocacy and Civil Society Engagement

- Participants highlighted the role of the Nigerian Women’s Trust Fund (NWTF) in amplifying women’s voices, conducting research, and advocating for gender-responsive policies.
- The influence of NGOs, media advocacy, and awareness campaigns was acknowledged as gradually increasing societal acceptance of women in leadership roles. Respondents noted that such programs have contributed to improved understanding and a modest shift toward inclusiveness.

Government Policies and Action Plans Promoting Women’s Participation

The Nasarawa State Action Plan on Security and Peacebuilding remains one of the key policy frameworks promoting inclusive governance. It recognizes women and girls as central actors in peace processes and leadership structures.

However, participants emphasized the need for stronger legislation specifically designed to enhance women’s political participation. Recommendations included:

- Enacting enforceable gender quotas or affirmative action policies
- Involving women-led organizations, including the Nigerian Women Trust Fund and other advocacy groups, in policy formulation and decision-making processes
- Prioritizing women’s development as a core government agenda

Overall, The Focus Group Discussions revealed that while incremental progress has been made, women in Nasarawa State remain significantly underrepresented in governance and leadership. Structural barriers, economic constraints, socio-cultural norms, and weak policy implementation continue to limit meaningful inclusion.

The identified gaps, alongside participants’ recommendations, provide a strategic roadmap for strengthening women’s political participation. Greater commitment from the state government, traditional institutions, religious leaders, and civil society actors is essential to achieving inclusive governance and sustainable gender equality in Nasarawa State.

(2). ANALYSIS OF QUESTIONNAIRES

Table 1: Demographics |

| Indices (N=64) | | % |
|--|---|-------|
| 1. Sex | Female | 39% |
| | Male | 61% |
| | Prefer not to say | 0 |
| 2. Age | 18 - 29 | 58% |
| | 30 - 40 | 9% |
| | 40 Years & above | 33% |
| 3. Level of Education | Higher education (NCE, OND, HND, BSc, MSc, PhD) | 97% |
| | No formal education | 0 |
| | Primary education | 0 |
| | Secondary education | 3% |
| 4. Marital Status [Please choose one] | Divorced | |
| | Married | 33% |
| | Never Married | 0 |
| | Separated | 0 |
| | Single | 67% |
| | Widow | 0 |
| 6. Disability status | No | 100% |
| | Prefer not to answer | 0 |
| | Yes | 0 |
| 7. Religion | African Traditional Religion | 0 |
| | Christian | 87.5% |

Gender of Respondents: No. 1 shows the gender distribution of the respondents, which is in line with the sampling design adopted for this study. It shows that more Males responded, which represents 67% of the responses, while the Female respondents were 33%.

AGE: They also show the age distribution of the respondents. 58% of respondents fall within 18 – 29 years, 33% 40% of the respondents in the age range of 40 and above, while 9% fall within 30 to 40 years. This indicates that most of the respondents fall within the youthful working population and have a clear understanding of the issues raised in the questionnaire.

No. 3 on the Demography Table shows the literacy level of the respondents. 97% of the respondents are tertiary graduates. This shows clearly that the respondents are knowledgeable about the issues raised in the questionnaire, and their responses were very informed and educational.

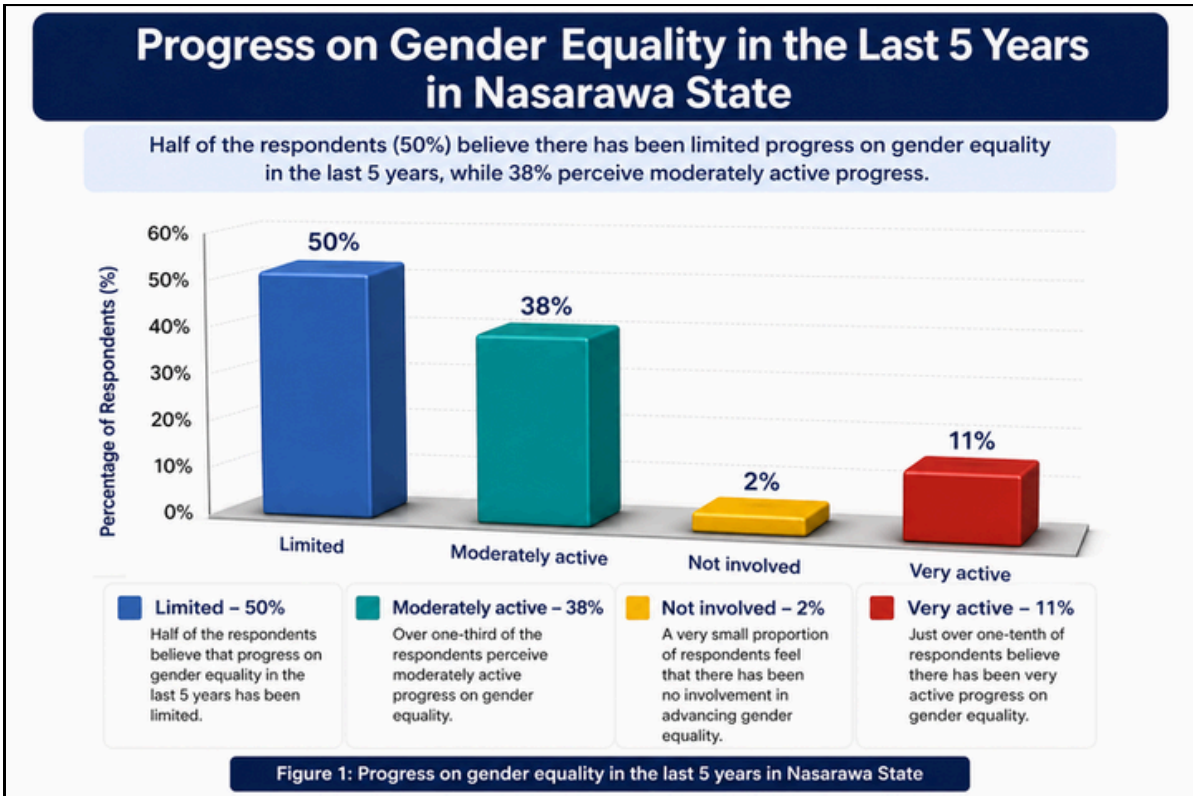


FIGURE 1. 50% of the respondents agree that some progress, though limited, has been made on gender equality in Nasarawa State in the last five years. 38% said moderately active progress has been made on this issue, while 11% of the respondents said active progress has been made on this matter. This shows that some progress has actually been made on gender equality in Nasarawa State in the last 5 years, as opposed to what it used to be.

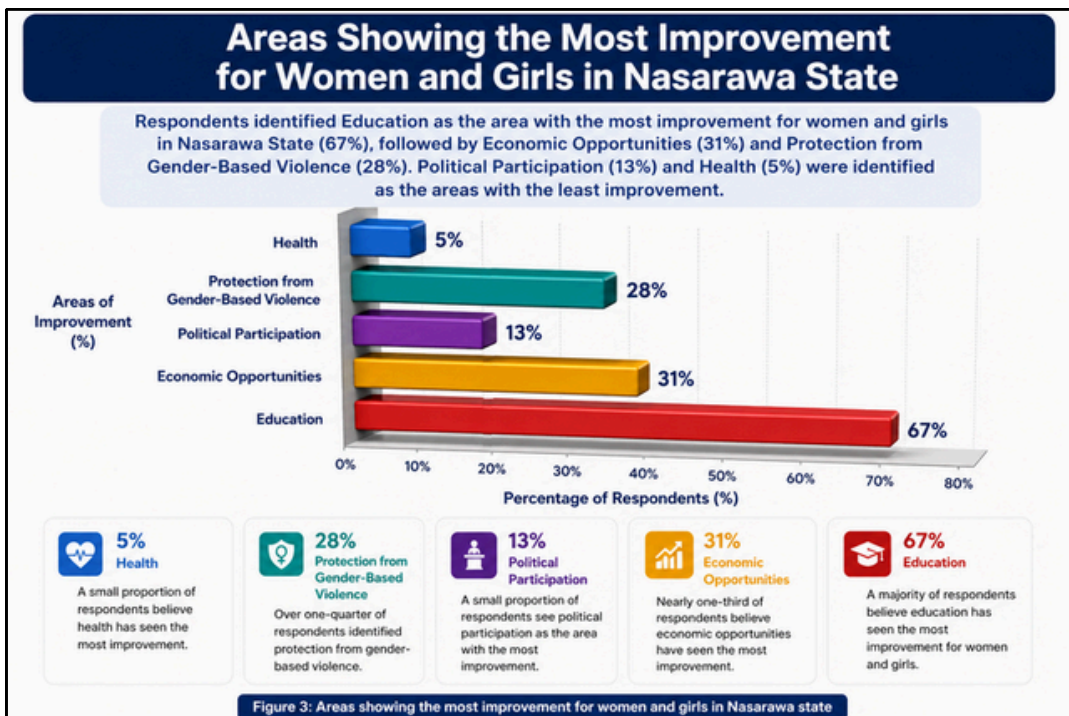
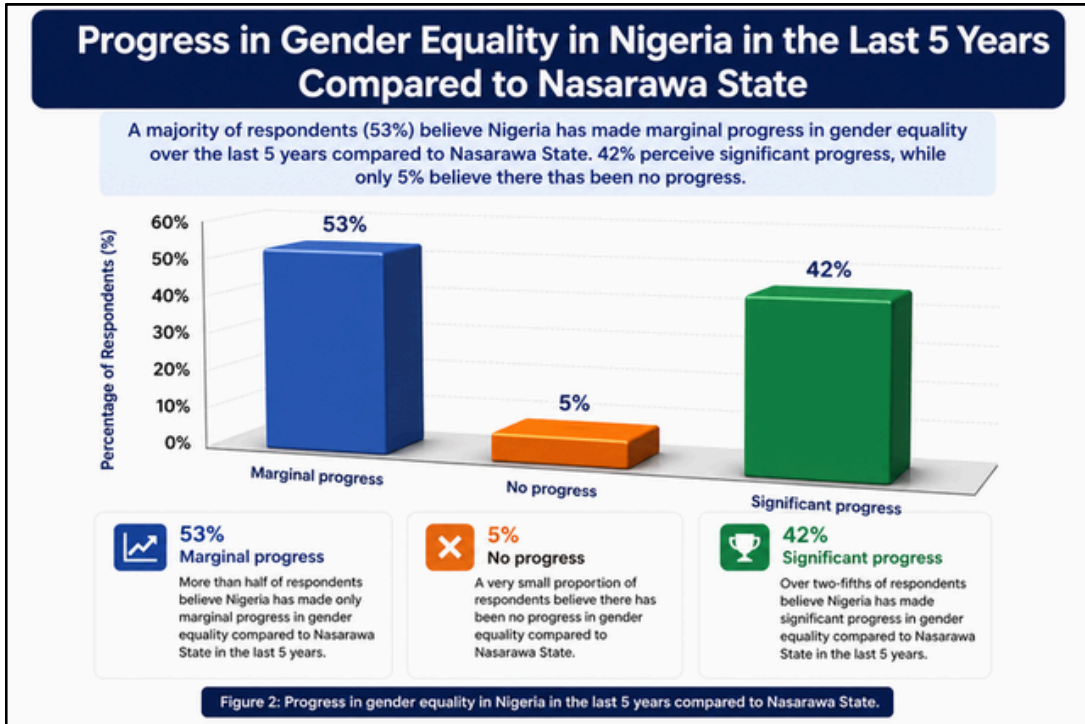
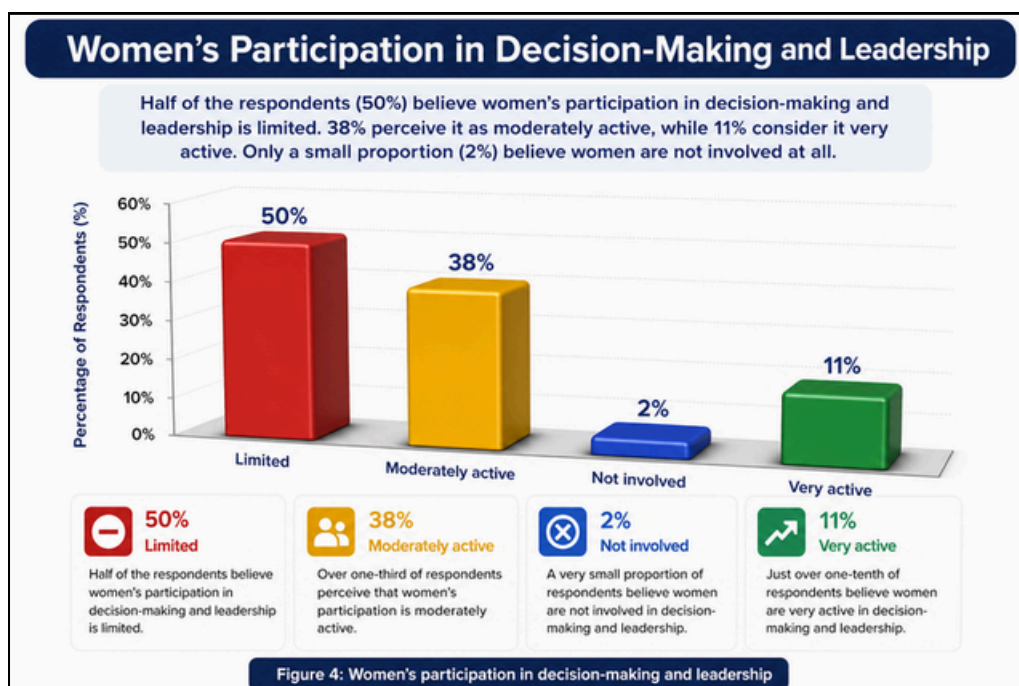


FIGURE 3: A large majority of the respondents show that 67% of the respondents agree that Education has witnessed the most improvement for girls and women in Nasarawa State. 31% said Health has experienced the most improvement, 25% of the respondents said Protection from Gender Based Violence has seen the most improvement for women and girls in Nasarawa State. However, a relatively lower percentage of the respondents identified Political participation and Economic opportunities as the most improved areas for women and girls in Nasarawa State.

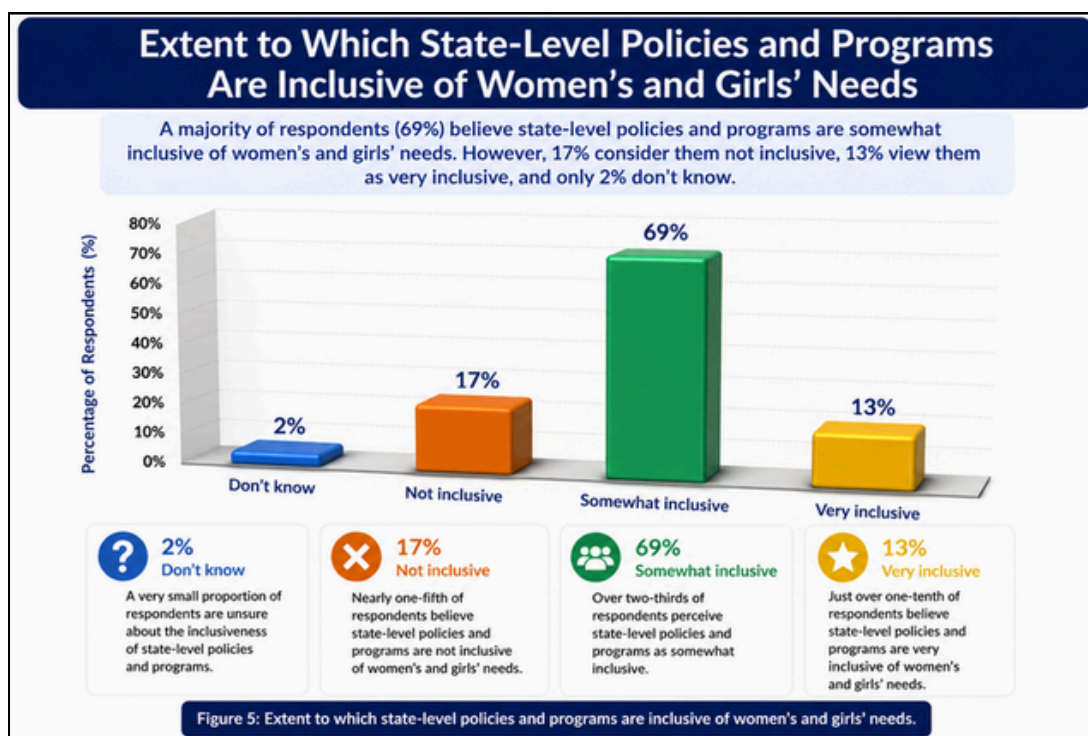


The Figure above displays the responses to the survey question under review. The report shows that 50% of the respondents said Women's participation in decision making and leadership in Nasarawa state is limited, 38% of those who responded to the survey said women's participation is moderately active, while a relatively low 11% percentages agree that women's participation in decision making and leadership is very active.

Table 2: Barriers women face in accessing equal opportunities in Nasarawa state

| SN | Perceived barriers | Weighted percentage | Comments |
|----|--|---------------------|----------|
| 1 | Cultural/traditional norms | 52% | |
| 2 | Poverty and lack of resources | 42% | |
| 3 | Limited access to education and skills | 30% | |
| 4 | Gender-based violence and insecurity | 23% | |
| 5 | Weak legal/policy enforcement | 33% | |
| 6 | Limited access to finance/economic resources | 30% | |

The table above shows that 52% of those who responded agree that Culture/Traditional is the greatest barrier women face in accessing equal opportunities in Nasarawa state. 42% identified Poverty and lack of resources as the greatest barrier women face, 33% of the respondents chose weak legal policy implementation, while 30% and 23% chose limited access to education and skills/Gender gender-based violence and insecurity, respectively, as the greatest barriers women face to accessing equal opportunities in Nasarawa State.

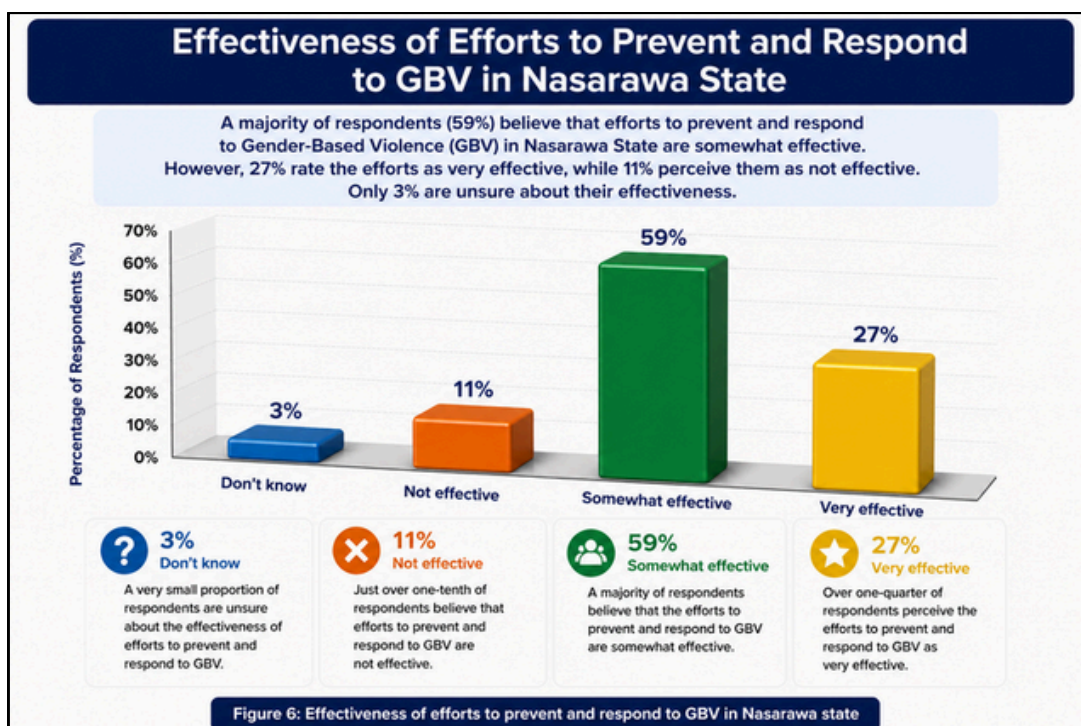


Majority of the respondents (69%) say government policies and programs to include women's and girls' issues have been somewhat inclusive, while 13% say government policies and programs include women's and girls' interests, and 17% of the respondents say the government does not consider women's and girls' issues into consideration.

Analysis of the aggregate shows that there is appreciable and noticeable accommodation of the interests of Women and Girls by the government in policy formulation

Table 3: Most common GBV in the state

| SN | Common GBV | Weighted percentage | Comments |
|----|--|---------------------|----------|
| | Domestic violence/intimate partner violence | 56% | |
| | Sexual harassment/assault/digital facilitated violence | 52% | |
| | Harmful traditional practices (e.g., widowhood rites, FGM, early marriage) | 34% | |
| | Human trafficking | 9% | |
| | Workplace discrimination/harassment | 33% | |
| | Political violence and intimidation | 33% | |



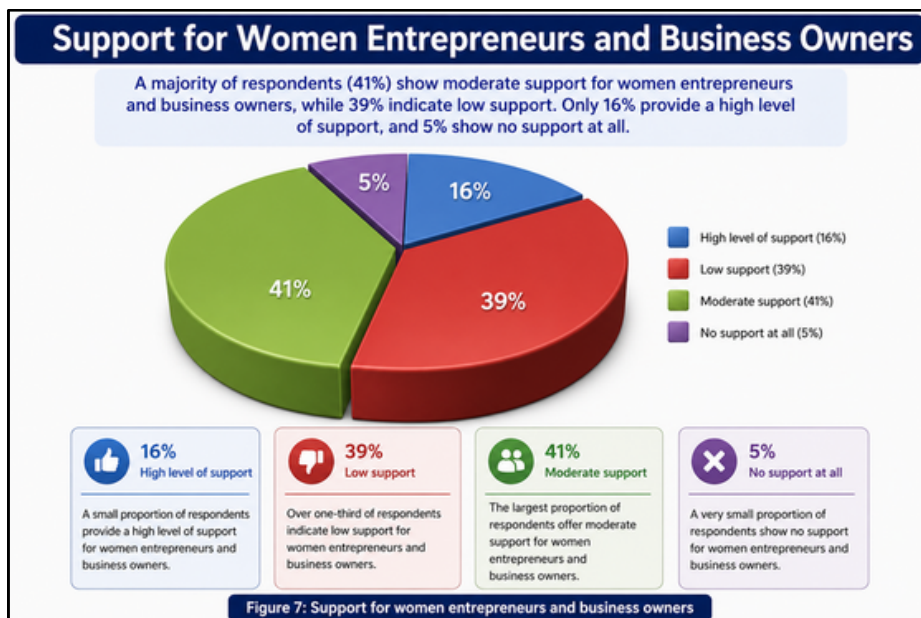
59% of the respondents believe that Efforts to prevent and respond to GBV in Nasarawa state are Somewhat Effective, 27% of the respondents say it is very effective, while a low 11% say it is not effective.

The summary of their responses indicates that tangible efforts are going to address gender based violence in Nasarawa State.

Table 4: Emerging issues affecting women and girls in Nasarawa State.

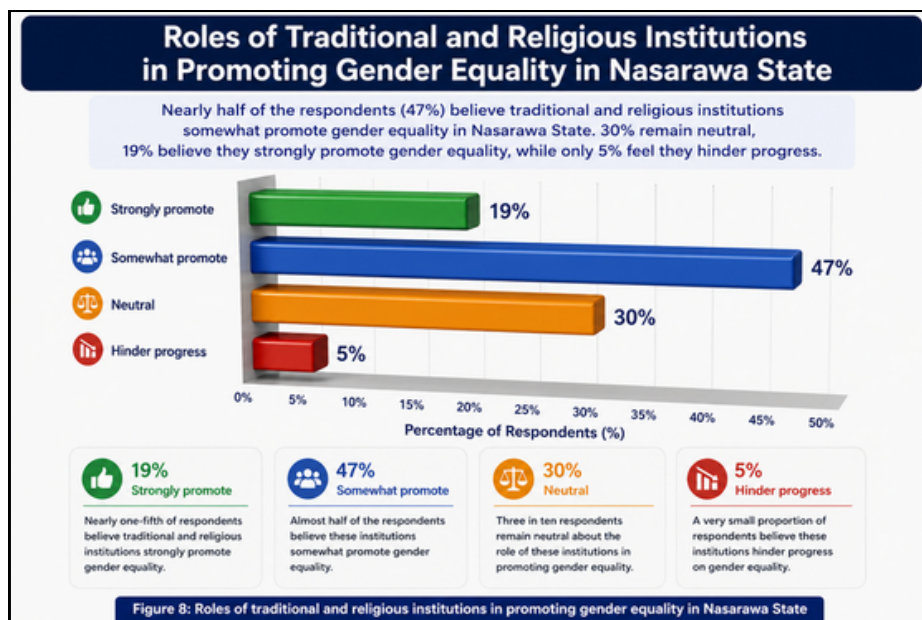
| SN | Emerging issues | Weighted percentage |
|----|--|---------------------|
| 1 | Economic hardship/unemployment | 70% |
| 2 | Insecurity and displacement | 38% |
| 3 | Climate change/environmental issues | 13% |
| 4 | Health crisis (e.g. maternal mortality, reproductive health) | 39% |
| 5 | Digital exclusion (limited access to ICT and digital tools) | 20% |
| 6 | Lack of access to Inheritance rights | 31% |
| 7 | Lack of access to land | 22% |

On emerging issues affecting women and girls in Nasarawa State, majority of the respondents (70%) say Economic hardship/Unemployment is greatest emerging issues, 38% pointed out that insecurity has affected women and girls more than any other factors, appreciable number of 39% say, health crisis, (eg: maternal mortality, reproductive health are also major emerging issue affecting women in Nasarawa State.



The majority of the respondents (51%) say women entrepreneurs and business owners receive very low support to compete fairly in Nasarawa State, 41% say minimal support, while 5% agree that women entrepreneurs and business owners receive the highest in Nasarawa State.

The outcome of the responses shows that women have been given enough support to succeed in entrepreneurship.



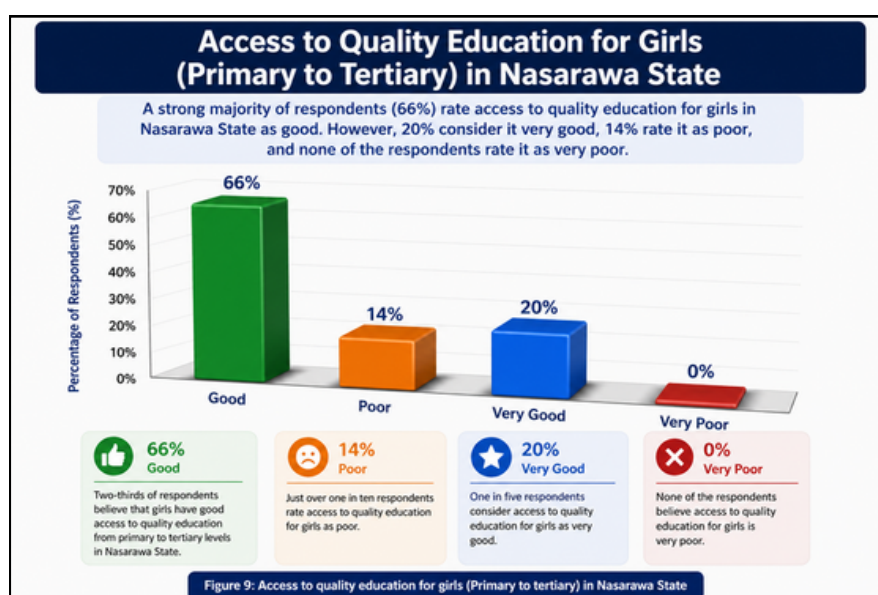
The outcome of the survey of the Roles of traditional and religions institutions in promoting gender equality in Nasarawa State, majority of the respondents say that Traditional and religious institutions play “Somewhat roles in promoting gender equality in Nasarawa State, 19% say they strongly promote, 30^ say they are neutral on the issue of gender equality and 5% of the respondents say the hinder issue of gender equality

This result is a clear clarion call that our traditional and religious institutions need to strongly support gender equality, as the report of the survey shows they are not doing enough.

Table 5: Reasons for school drop-out by girls

| SN | Reasons for school drop-out | Weighted percentage | Comments |
|----|---|---------------------|----------|
| 1 | Early/child marriage | 50% | |
| 2 | Teenage pregnancy | 42% | |
| 3 | Poverty and inability to afford school fees | 64% | |
| 4 | Cultural/traditional restrictions | 25% | |
| 5 | Poor school infrastructure or safety concerns | 17% | |
| 6 | Preference for boys' education | 19% | |

The responses from the reasons for school drop out by girls show that 50%, 42% and 64% of the respondents respectively agree that factors such as “Early/child marriage, Teenage pregnancy, poverty and inability to afford school fees are the major factors causing school drop out by girls.



The report shows that access to quality education for girls from primary to Tertiary in Nasarawa State has witnessed tremendous improvement. About 70% of the respondents agree that access to quality education for girls in Nasarawa State is good, 20% said it is very good, while a relatively 14% said it is POOR.

The result of the responses shows that Nasarawa has witnessed massive improvement in girls having access to quality education from Primary to Tertiary Institutions.

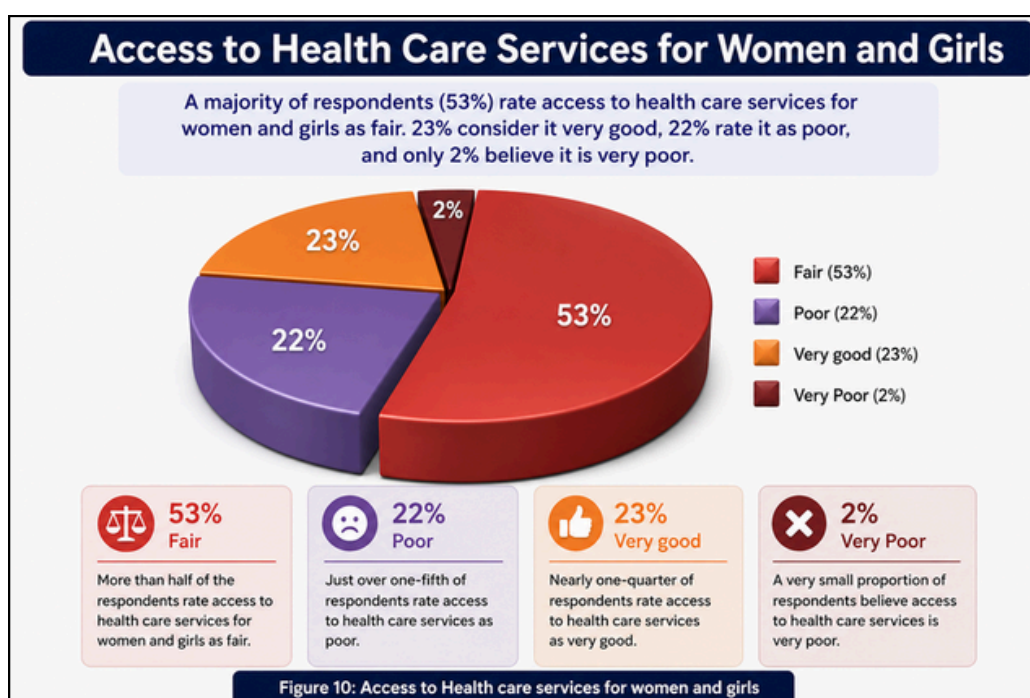
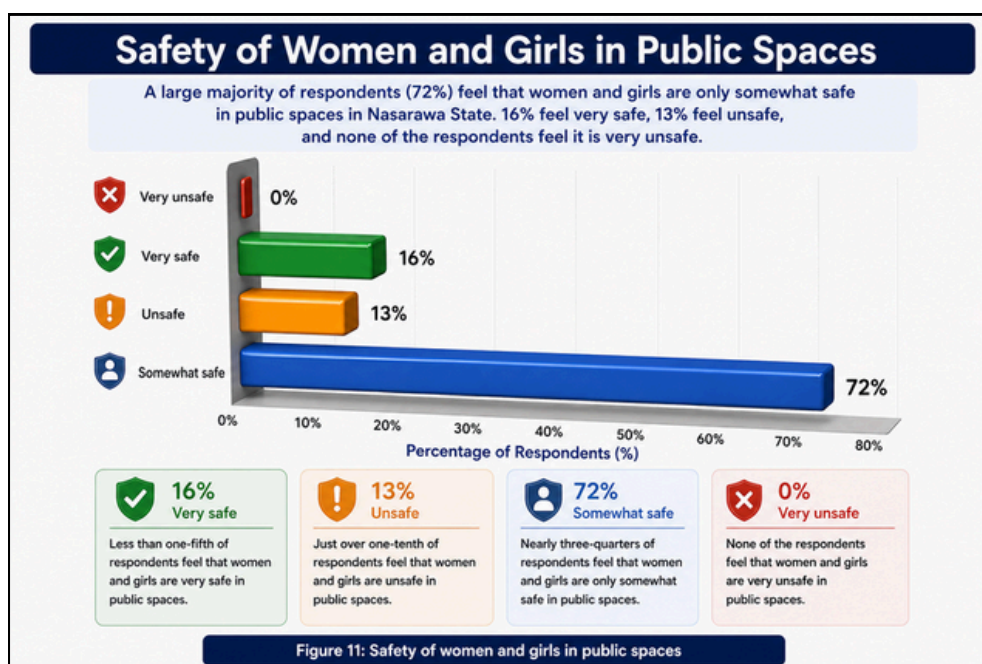


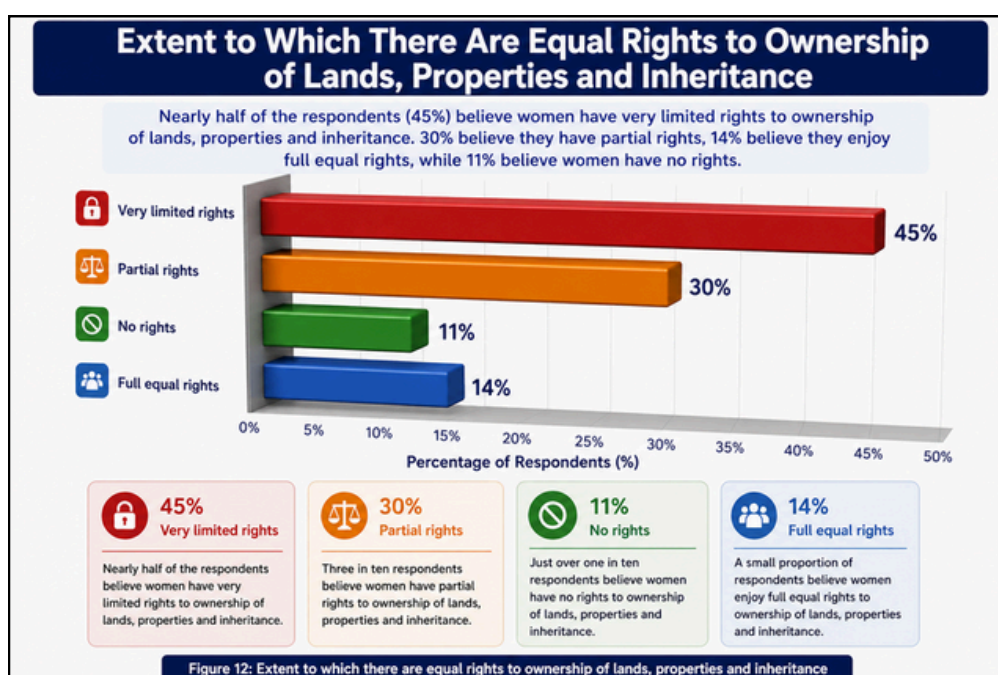
Table 4: Most pressing health challenges for women and girls

| SN | Most pressing health challenges | Weighted percentage |
|----|--|---------------------|
| 1 | Maternal mortality | 44% |
| 2 | Limited access to reproductive health services | 53% |
| 3 | Gender-based violence and trauma | 34% |
| 4 | Mental health challenges | 30% |
| 5 | HIV/AIDS and other infectious diseases | 36% |
| 6 | Malnutrition | 25% |

The majority of the respondents listed – Maternal mortality, limited access to reproductive health services, gender-based violence and HIV/AIDS and other infectious diseases as major health challenges for women

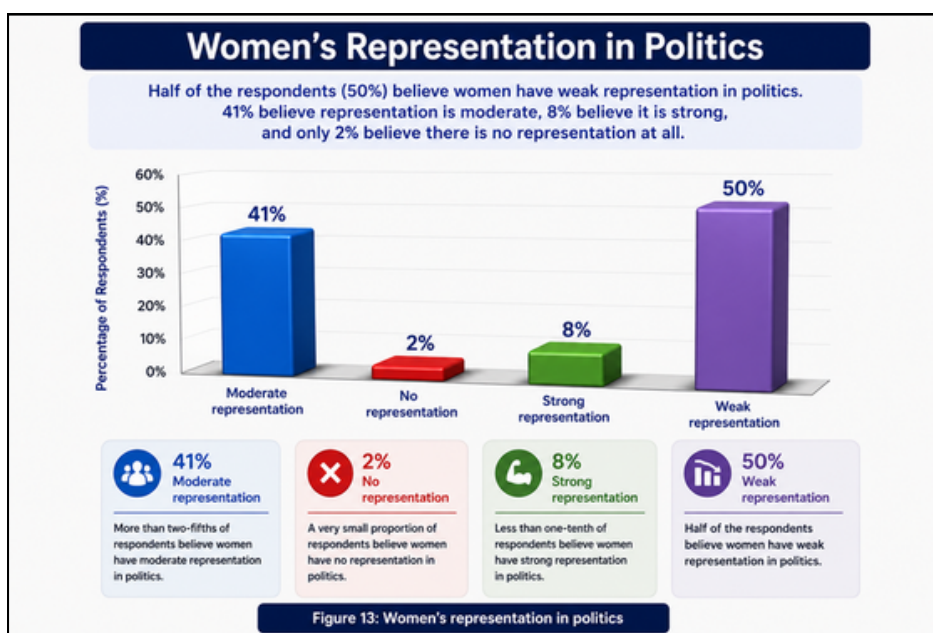


75% of the respondents believe that women and girls are somewhat safe in public spaces, 15% said they are very safe, while 12% said they are not safe. The report shows that there are still gaps to cover to ensure the safety of women and girls in public places.



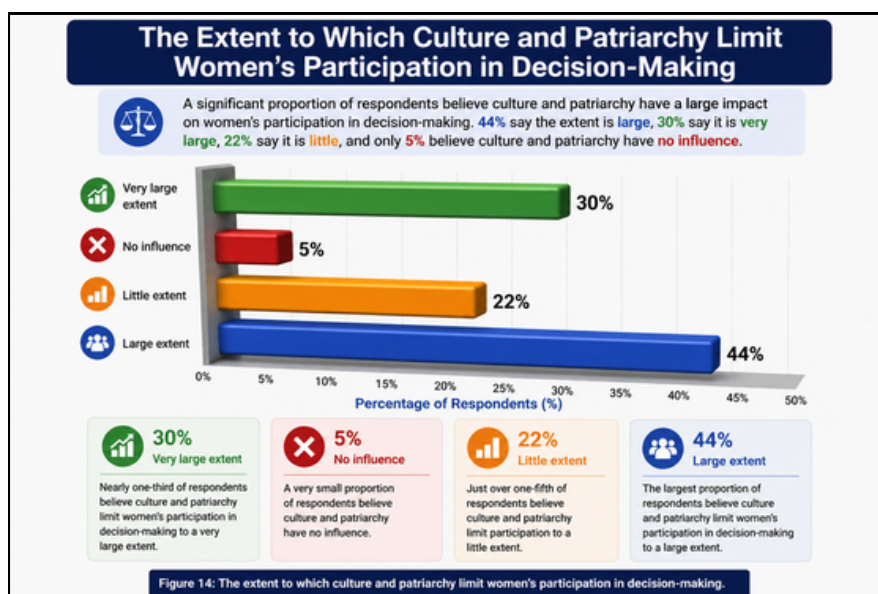
The majority (45%) said women have very limited rights to ownership of lands, properties and inheritance. This they attributed to socio-cultural norms of the society where men own everything, including the woman. 30% think that there is a partial right for women to own property, 14% said there is a full right, but 11% said there is no right at all for women to own property.

The report means that there has been an improvement in the last five years on women’s rights to own land and properties in Nasarawa State.

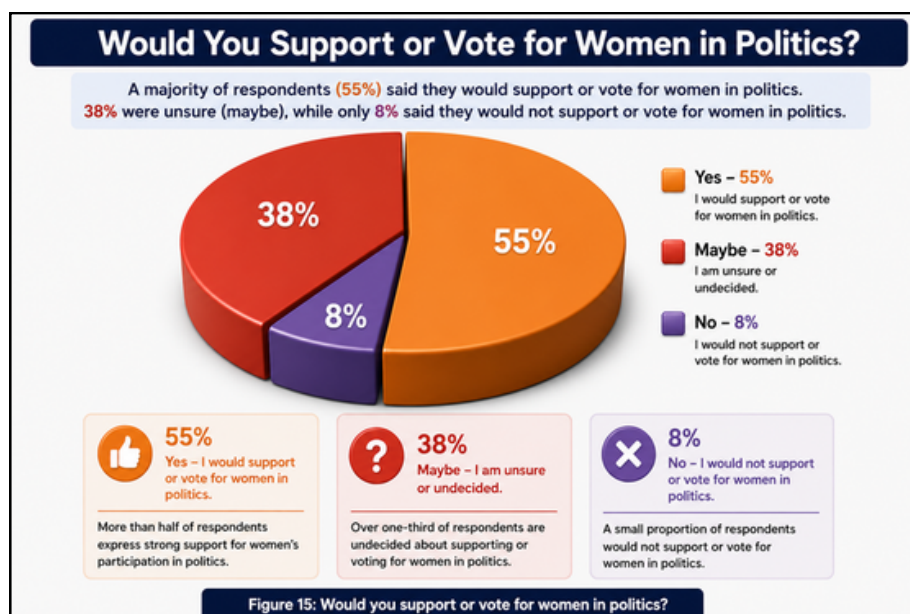


The responses suggest that women's representation in politics has been skeletal and comparatively still not given the desired attention. The majority of the respondents say representation of women in politics in the state is WEAK, 41% say the representation of women is moderate. Only 8% said it is VERY STRONG.

The result shows a disproportionate representation of women in Nasarawa State in politics.



On the extent to which Culture and Patriarchy limit women’s participation in decision making, 44% of the respondents agree that to a very large extent Culture and Patriarchy limit women, 30% of the respondents say these limit women to a very large extent.



Summary of findings on the review research

The study revealed that approximately 85% of respondents were students, tertiary institution graduates, and working-class men and women within the age bracket of 24–55 years. This demographic profile indicates that the majority of participants belong to the youthful and economically active population. Their educational background suggests that respondents were well-informed, conversant with governance and gender issues, and capable of providing informed perspectives during the questionnaire and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs).

A significant majority (95%) of respondents agreed that women’s inclusion in governance in Nasarawa State requires substantial improvement. This reflects widespread recognition of the persistent gender gap in political representation and decision-making structures.

Furthermore, respondents emphasized the need for deliberate legislative measures to enhance women’s representation. A large proportion advocated for laws that would allocate a specific percentage of seats to women in both the National Assembly and State Houses of Assembly, indicating strong support for affirmative action and quota-based systems.

The study also found that 90% of respondents identified socio-cultural beliefs and traditional practices as major barriers to women's participation in politics and decision-making in Nasarawa State and the broader North Central region. Patriarchal norms, gender stereotypes, and entrenched community expectations were cited as key constraints.

Similarly, 90% of participants recommended that political parties should integrate women into their highest decision-making organs. Respondents stressed the importance of fully implementing the 35% Affirmative Action policy, ensuring that women have a voice during candidate selection and the distribution of elective and appointive positions.

Notably, 100% of respondents expressed the view that government pronouncements and institutional commitments to improving women's political participation have largely remained rhetorical, with limited tangible or measurable outcomes. This reflects a widespread perception of weak implementation and a gap between policy declarations and actual practice.

Additionally, 90% of respondents believed that cultural beliefs and practices pose significant obstacles to the passage and enforcement of legislation reserving seats for women in legislative bodies.

Despite these challenges, 99% of respondents acknowledged observable improvements over the past five years in areas such as healthcare access, education for girls, safety, responses to gender-based violence, and women's political appointments. Participants attributed these gains primarily to sustained advocacy and engagement by non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the media, academia, and new media platforms, rather than to direct government-led structural reforms.

Conclusion

The review research indicates that Nasarawa State has recorded measurable progress in promoting women's access to political participation and governance over the past five years. However, substantial gender gaps persist, particularly in leadership and decision-making roles across political parties, community structures, the executive, legislature, and parastatals.

Statistics on women's representation highlight a stark disparity when compared to men, reflecting the systemic exclusion of women from governance structures. Despite constituting a significant proportion of the population and the electorate, women remain underrepresented, limiting their ability to contribute meaningfully to policy formulation and decision-making processes.

Addressing these gaps is critical. Implementing the recommendations in this report will enhance the representation and participation of women, thereby enabling Nasarawa State to benefit from the perspectives, skills, and contributions of its female population. Exclusion of women from decision-making not only perpetuates inequality but also constrains the state's social, economic, and political development.

Recommendations

Policy and Legislative Reforms

- **Implement Gender Quotas:** Introduce and enforce legislated quotas for female candidates on party lists, in Federal and State Houses of Assembly, and in government appointments. Temporary special measures have proven effective in rapidly increasing women's representation.
- **Strengthen Anti-Discrimination Laws:** Adopt and enforce laws prohibiting discrimination against women in political and public life, with clear sanctions for non-compliance within political institutions and parties.
- **Address Violence Against Women in Politics:** Enact and enforce legislation to prevent and respond to all forms of harassment and violence, including online abuse, ensuring perpetrators are held accountable.
- **Ensure Gender-Sensitive Policies:** Implement policies that support work-life balance, such as parental leave and childcare services, creating a more inclusive and accommodating environment for both men and women in politics.

Capacity Building and Support Systems

- **Leadership Training and Mentorship:** Establish comprehensive programs to develop women's skills in campaigning, public speaking, negotiation, and media engagement. Pair aspiring female leaders with experienced mentors.
- **Bridge the Funding Gap:** Regulate campaign financing to provide targeted financial support or matching funds for women candidates, reducing economic barriers to participation.
- **Create Safe and Supportive Networks:** Facilitate women's wings within political parties and cross-party caucuses, providing platforms for collaboration, strategy sharing, and advocacy for gender equality.
- **Media and Civil Society Engagement:** Conduct campaigns that challenge gender stereotypes, highlight women's achievements in leadership, and educate the public on the value of women's participation in governance.
- **Engage Men as Allies:** Involve men actively in initiatives promoting gender equality, fostering shared responsibility for inclusive governance.
- **Integrate Gender Education:** Introduce civic and gender equality education in schools and communities to cultivate awareness of democratic processes and the importance of equal participation from a young age.
- **Challenge Socio-Cultural Barriers:** Implement community awareness programs to shift perceptions of traditional gender roles. Engage religious and traditional leaders as champions of women's leadership.
- **Enhance Education and Economic Independence:** Expand access to quality education, vocational training, and business support programs to strengthen women's confidence, skills, and financial independence, which are critical for effective leadership.

By implementing these strategies, Nasarawa State can foster an inclusive and equitable governance environment, enabling women to fully participate in leadership roles and contribute meaningfully to the state's social, economic, and political development.

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5.3 Annex 3 - The North-East Report

Adamawa State

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the findings from the revalidation of the Gender in Nigeria Report for the North-East geopolitical zone, with Adamawa State serving as the representative sample. The revalidation process drew on three primary data sources: a comprehensive desk review of existing gender-related policies and documents, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) conducted across diverse demographic groups, and a structured questionnaire survey administered within the state. Together, these methods provide a robust and evidence-based assessment of the current gender landscape in Adamawa State, highlighting both measurable progress and persistent structural barriers affecting women and girls.

Findings reveal that while awareness of gender equality has improved significantly, deeply rooted cultural norms continue to constrain women's leadership and political participation. Women remain underrepresented in decision-making positions across political, economic, and community structures.

The report further underscores the need to address gender inequality at the grassroots level, particularly through targeted poverty reduction and economic empowerment initiatives. Limited access to productive resources, finance, and livelihood opportunities continues to reinforce gender disparities in the state.

The Ministry of Women Affairs (MWA), alongside civil society organizations such as Adamawa Women in Politics (AWIP), has played a critical role in promoting women's empowerment and advancing women's participation in leadership and governance. Their interventions span agriculture, political engagement, and community mobilization efforts.

To accelerate progress, the report recommends strengthening gender equality frameworks and improving enforcement of laws addressing Gender-Based Violence (GBV). It further calls for enhanced support for women's political participation, expanded access to education and economic opportunities, increased community sensitization, and stronger coordination among government institutions, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), and development partners.

Overall, the revalidation affirms that while progress is evident, sustained, coordinated, and community-driven action is required to achieve meaningful and inclusive gender equality in Adamawa State.

1. Introduction

This report focuses on Adamawa State, representing the North-East geopolitical zone, which comprises Borno, Bauchi, Gombe, Taraba, and Yobe States. The North-East region has an estimated population of over 30 million people.

Women in Adamawa State face significant barriers to economic independence and political participation. Despite their active contributions to the local economy, they encounter systemic challenges that hinder empowerment and leadership opportunities.

Women's access to formal financial institutions is limited, restricting their ability to secure loans, invest in businesses, or scale agricultural activities. Access to land, technology, and other productive resources is constrained, and opportunities for vocational training, literacy programs, and skills development remain insufficient. Consequently, many women engage in low-income informal economic activities, such as petty trading, food processing, and subsistence agriculture, which lack social protection.

Politically, women in the North-East are underrepresented in elective and appointive positions at both state and local government levels. Early marriage, limited access to education, economic dependence, and vulnerability to gender-based violence - including domestic violence and sexual assault further exacerbate their marginalization.

2. Methodology

The revalidation exercise employed a mixed-method approach:

- **Quantitative Surveys:** Administered to 90 respondents across Adamawa State, covering parameters such as political participation, gender equality, socio-cultural influences, and access to services.
- **Desk Review:** Analyzed recent developments on gender issues, policy initiatives, and existing research.
- **Focus Group Discussion (FGD):** Conducted on 11th October 2025 with 10 participants from the three senatorial districts, including adult and young women and men.

Data were analyzed to capture the perspectives of residents on gender equality, women's empowerment, political participation, and socio-economic challenges.

3. Key Findings

3.1 Opportunities and Barriers for Women and Girls' Advancement

Findings indicate a critical need for awareness, sensitization, and advocacy on women's empowerment in Adamawa State, particularly in rural areas. Many communities remain uninformed about available programs and political participation opportunities.

The Ministry of Women Affairs (MWA), in partnership with organizations such as Adamawa Women in Politics (AWIP), has made efforts to boost women's morale through empowerment initiatives. Adolescent girls emphasized the importance of education, vocational training, and digital literacy as essential tools for improving their prospects (UNICEF, 2022).

3.2 Women's Participation in Decision-Making, Leadership, and Governance

Women's representation in politics and leadership remains extremely low. Few women hold elective or appointive positions at the state and local levels. Notably, Aishatu Dahiru (Binani) was the only female gubernatorial candidate of the ruling APC, running against Governor Ahmadu Fintiri (PDP) in the 2023 elections.

Barriers to women's political participation include:

- High costs of contesting elections
- Limited family and social support
- Low awareness of political and gender policies, including the 35% affirmative action
- Religious and cultural biases

MWA, NGOs, and community-based organizations (CBOs) are actively promoting women's political and economic empowerment. For example, AWIP supported the election of the female representative for Demsa in the State House of Assembly. Women have also been appointed as vice-chairpersons in 21 Local Government Areas, reflecting the ruling party and governor's directives.

3.3 Access to Education and Health Services

Access to education has slightly improved due to sensitization campaigns, but dropout rates remain high in rural areas because of early marriage, economic hardship, insecurity, and cultural preferences for boys' education.

Healthcare services, especially maternal and reproductive healthcare, remain inadequate. Rural communities often rely on under-resourced public health centers. Key challenges include:

- High maternal mortality
- Limited reproductive health services
- GBV-related health complications
- Malnutrition and mental health issues

Women prioritize access to food, healthcare, reproductive services, and security, while men emphasize livelihood opportunities and capital for business (UN Women, 2023).

3.4 Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and Women's Safety

GBV remains pervasive in Adamawa State, but underreporting is common due to stigma, family pressure, and distrust in law enforcement. The high prevalence of GBV, particularly in conflict-affected areas, requires comprehensive humanitarian and development responses, including:

- Medical, psychological, and legal support for survivors
- Economic empowerment and education initiatives
- Integrating GBV prevention into conflict resolution and peacebuilding efforts

Most prevalent forms of GBV include:

- Domestic violence (most common)
- Sexual harassment
- Economic and psychological abuse

3.5 Socio-Economic Empowerment and Access to Resources

Women face restricted access to credit, financial services, and formal institutions, limiting their ability to grow businesses. Many operate in low-income informal sectors, including small-scale trading, tailoring, food processing, and subsistence agriculture.

Barriers include limited awareness of financial programs, collateral requirements, and bureaucratic hurdles. Expanding microfinance programs, vocational training, digital literacy, and market access can enhance women's economic resilience.

3.6 Social Norms and Culture

Patriarchal social and cultural norms strongly influence women's roles in Adamawa State. Early marriage, limited access to education, and constrained economic opportunities are prevalent. Survey data indicate that cultural attitudes significantly restrict women's leadership potential, though there is mixed perception about women's capabilities in decision-making. Religious leaders, scholars, and CSOs need to actively engage to shift cultural and societal attitudes and foster greater gender equality.

Recommendations

1. Strengthen Legal and Institutional Frameworks on Gender

- Establish a gender desk across all states and geopolitical zones to coordinate gender initiatives.
- Support survivors of gender-based violence (GBV) with legal, medical, and psychosocial services.
- Enforce laws protecting girls and women from harmful cultural practices and GBV.

2. Education

- Implement targeted interventions addressing poverty, early marriage, and lack of family support, which are major drivers of school dropout among girls.
- Increase awareness and sensitization campaigns promoting girls' education, especially for adolescent mothers and married girls in rural communities.
- Introduce gender-sensitive curricula at primary, secondary, and tertiary levels to promote positive gender norms.
- Provide scholarships and financial assistance for girls and adolescent mothers to support school enrollment and retention.

3. Enhance Women's Political Participation and Representation

- Implement measures to increase women's representation in politics, including quotas, training, and mentorship programs.
- Conduct advocacy and visibility campaigns to improve women's participation in leadership and political appointments.
- Engage men and boys as allies in promoting women's leadership and participation in decision-making.

4. Economic Empowerment and Access to Resources

- Implement programs promoting women’s economic empowerment, including vocational training, entrepreneurship support, and access to finance.
- Address structural inequalities in property ownership and inheritance rights.
- Enforce laws enabling women to access inherited land and engage in farming without community obstruction.
- Establish networks of women farmers to support sustainable agricultural businesses and decision-making participation.

5. Strengthen GBV Prevention and Response

- Implement awareness campaigns addressing domestic violence, sexual harassment, economic abuse, and psychological abuse.
- Establish robust GBV response systems and support services for survivors.
- Provide regular training for law enforcement and development workers on GBV response and survivor support.
- Ensure provision of psychological support and legal aid for survivors.

6. Cultural and Religious Engagement

- Promote intergenerational dialogue to foster acceptance of women’s leadership.
- Engage community and traditional leaders to challenge patriarchal norms and support gender equality.
- Implement programs to raise awareness and shift social beliefs limiting women’s participation in governance, politics, and economic activities.

Conclusion

The revalidation of the Gender in Nigeria Report for the North-East, represented by Adamawa State, highlights persistent structural and cultural barriers to women's empowerment.

Key findings include:

- High rates of girls dropping out of school due to poverty, early marriage, lack of family support, and insecurity.
- Insufficient access to maternal, reproductive, and general healthcare services, with maternal mortality as the most pressing concern.
- Persistent gender-based violence, economic inequalities, and cultural practices restricting property ownership and inheritance rights.

Despite moderate improvements in education, health, and political engagement, systemic gaps remain. Coordinated efforts from the state government, NGOs, and community actors are essential to address these barriers and create an enabling environment for women's empowerment.

Focus Group Discussion (FGD) Findings

Introduction

The FGD was conducted in Adamawa State on 10th October 2025, with 10 participants from diverse backgrounds, including lecturers, politicians, women leaders, youth representatives, civil society actors, and traditional representatives. Participants comprised adult females, young females, adult males, and young males. Discussions focused on gender equality, women's empowerment, barriers to participation, and strategies for inclusive engagement in social, economic, and political spheres.

Findings by Theme

Opportunities and Barriers for Women and Girls' Advancement

- Cultural and religious beliefs remain significant barriers to gender equality.
- Women face limited access to education, economic opportunities, and healthcare.
- Economic empowerment is crucial, yet women often struggle to access finance, land, and resources.
- Engaging traditional leaders and communities is essential to promoting gender equality and challenging harmful norms.
- Awareness campaigns and strong policy enforcement are necessary for sustainable change.

Women's Participation in Decision-Making, Leadership, and Governance

- Women remain underrepresented in politics and leadership, with men dominating decision-making positions.
- Violence against women, social stigma, and exclusion from key forums hinder women's political participation.
- Increased training, mentorship, and awareness programs are needed to create a level playing field for women.

Gender-Based Violence

- GBV is prevalent but underreported due to stigma, lack of support, and distrust in law enforcement.
- Strengthened legal frameworks, prevention strategies, and survivor support services are critical.

Recommendations from FGD

- Governments, CSOs, and educational institutions should collaborate to improve gender equality and women's leadership opportunities.
- Address socio-cultural barriers and stigmatization preventing women from occupying leadership positions.
- Provide skills development programs, vocational training, and literacy programs.
- Increase access to healthcare services, including reproductive and maternal care.
- Enact laws to ensure widows and women have equal rights to land, property, and inheritance.

Analysis of the Questionnaires

Introduction

Response was obtained from 90 participants in Adamawa state, which is the North East Geopolitical zone.

Different parameters from the participants were analyzed, which include education, health care, women's empowerment and leadership.

The response shows an overwhelming level of education, and this suggests a high level of gender-based issues. It also reflects a mixed economic base with significant informal sector participation.

The survey findings indicate that the most cited reasons for girls dropping out include: poverty, early marriage and lack of family support, and insecurity.

Summary of Key Insights

1. Gender Equality Progress

- Majority of respondents perceive gender equality improvement as marginal.
- Persistent constraints include cultural norms, poverty, early marriage, and limited political participation.

2. Access to Opportunities

- Education and healthcare services show improvement.
- Economic empowerment remains low due to limited access to capital and business support.
- Insecurity and economic hardship are major emerging threats.

3. Barriers to Gender Equality

- Cultural and patriarchal norms restrict women's public participation.
- High rates of GBV domestic violence, harassment, forced marriages limit women's agency.
- Policies exist but are only partially inclusive and weakly enforced.

4. Leadership & Decision-Making

- Women's leadership remains low across all levels.
- Social beliefs influence attitudes toward women in leadership, though a significant majority supports electing women to high office.

5. Education & Health

- Girls' access to education remains hindered by poverty, early marriage, and insecurity.
- Healthcare services are moderately accessible, with maternal mortality and reproductive health gaps still pronounced.

Overall Recommendations

1. Strengthen Legal and Policy Enforcement

- Enforce the 35% affirmative action quota in political appointments and elective positions.
- Strengthen enforcement of gender-based violence (GBV) laws and improve reporting and support systems for survivors.
- Localize and implement national and international commitments, including CEDAW and the Beijing Declaration, to ensure compliance at state and community levels.

2. Expand Education Opportunities

- Increase investments in girl-child education, through:
 - Scholarships and cash transfers
 - Safe transportation to and from schools
 - Provision of STEM and vocational programs
- Curtail early marriage through legal enforcement, community sensitization, and advocacy.

3. Enhance Economic Empowerment

- Improve women's access to:
 - Microcredit schemes
 - Grants and business loans
 - Business training and skills development programs
 - Market linkages and networks
- Promote women's ownership rights, including access to land, inheritance, and property.

4. Promote Women's Leadership

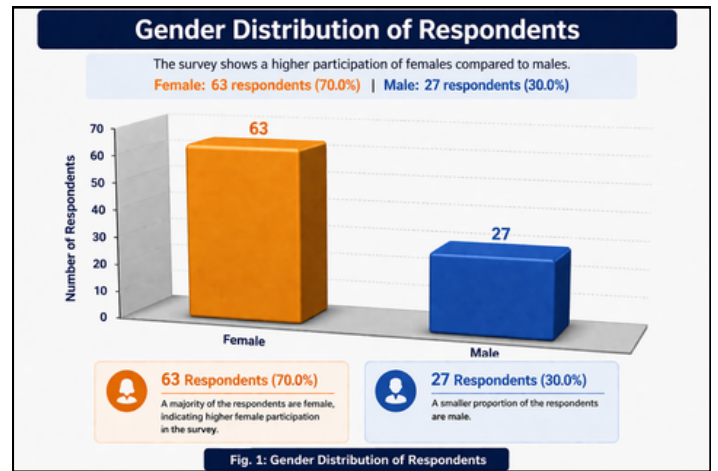
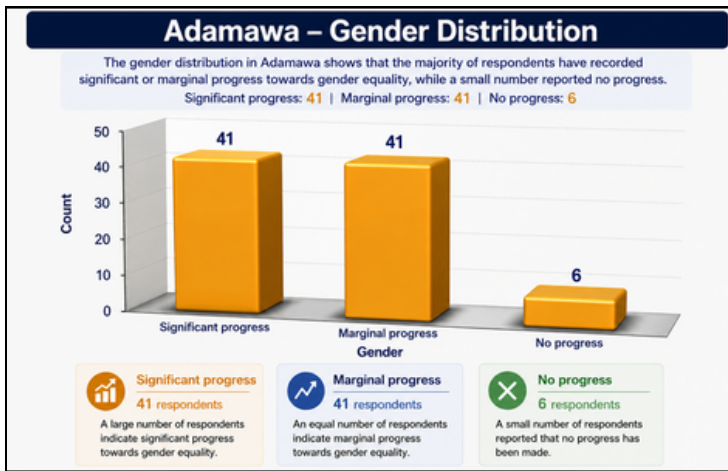
- Implement leadership development programs targeting women and girls.
- Engage male allies, religious leaders, and traditional authorities to foster positive gender attitudes.
- Reduce political violence and intimidation that deter women from contesting for political office.

5. Improve Healthcare Access

- Strengthen maternal and reproductive health services, prioritizing underserved areas.
- Invest in rural health facilities and infrastructure.
- Recruit and deploy more female healthcare workers to enhance accessibility and trust.
- Expand state health insurance coverage to reach more women, including those in rural and marginalized communities.

6. Engage Communities and Institutions

- Ensure the active involvement of:
 - Traditional institutions
 - Religious leaders
 - Civil society organizations (CSOs) and NGOs
 - Community associations and youth groups
- Identify and train community-based gender equality champions to advocate for and sustain local change.



The gender distribution shows that 63% of respondents were female, while 27% were male. This female-majority sample provides strong insight into women’s perspectives, which is valuable for a gender-focused study. It means that the data set obtained will give great insight and relevance to the issue being analyzed.

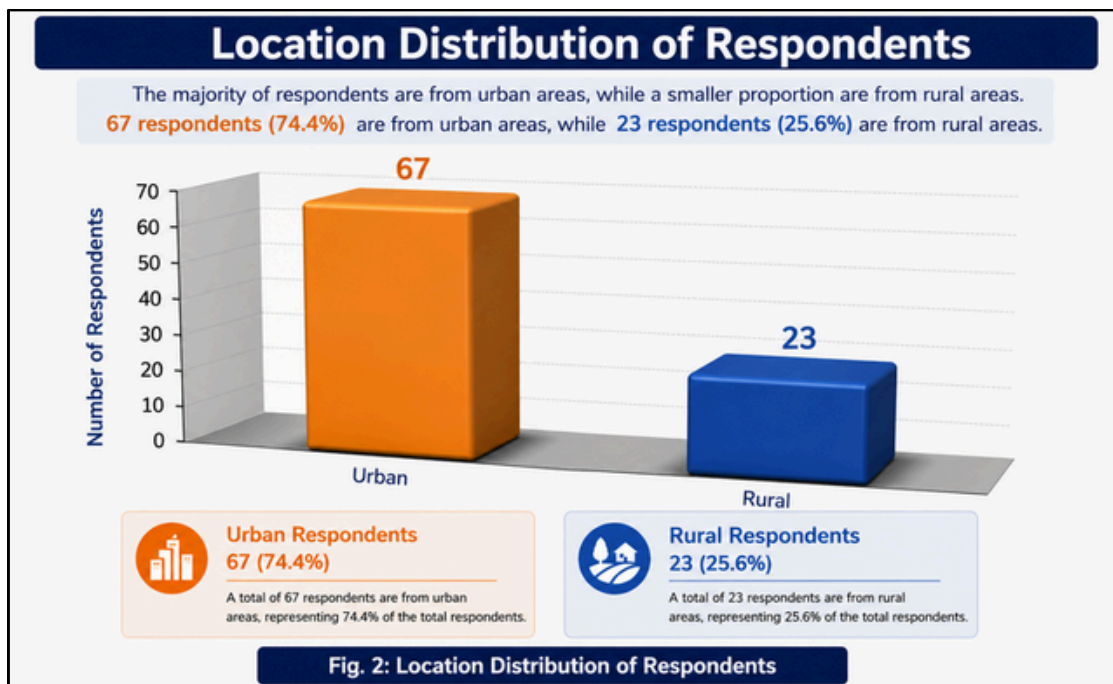
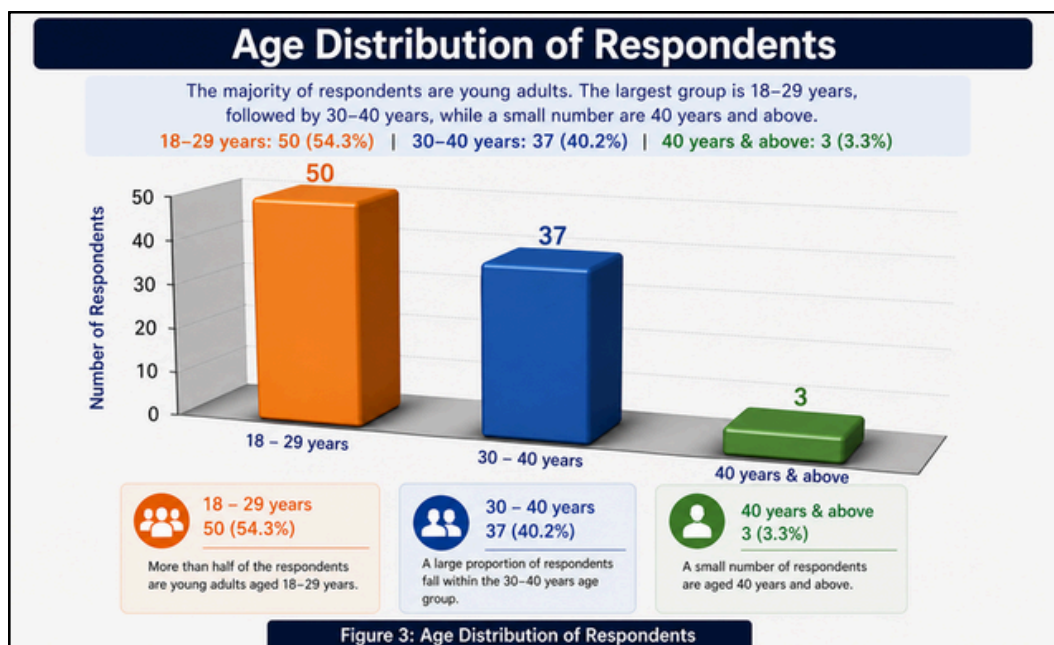
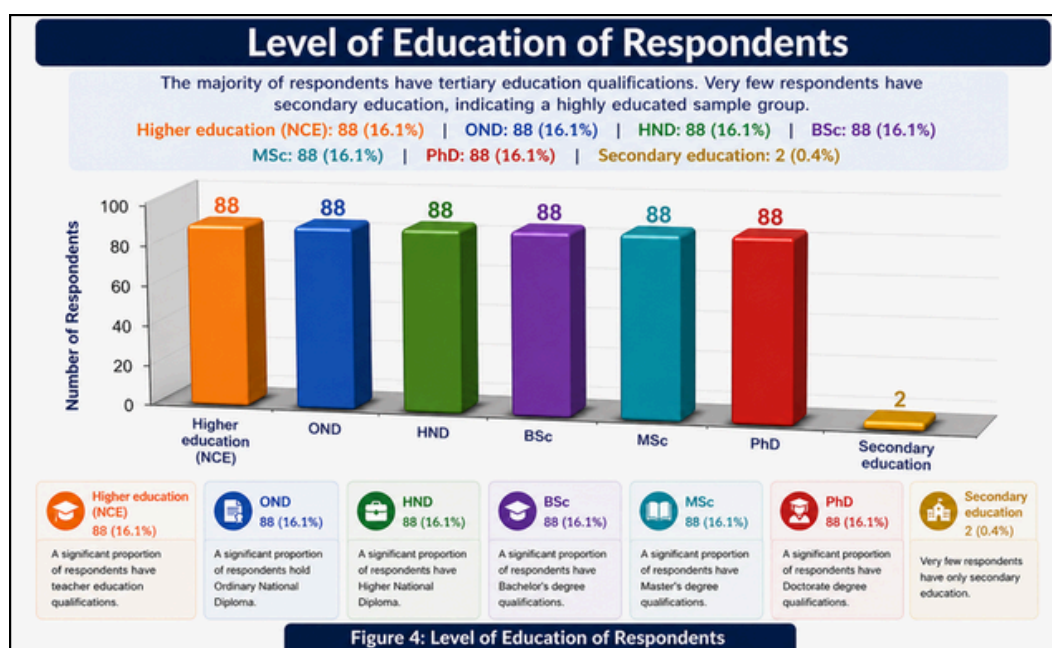


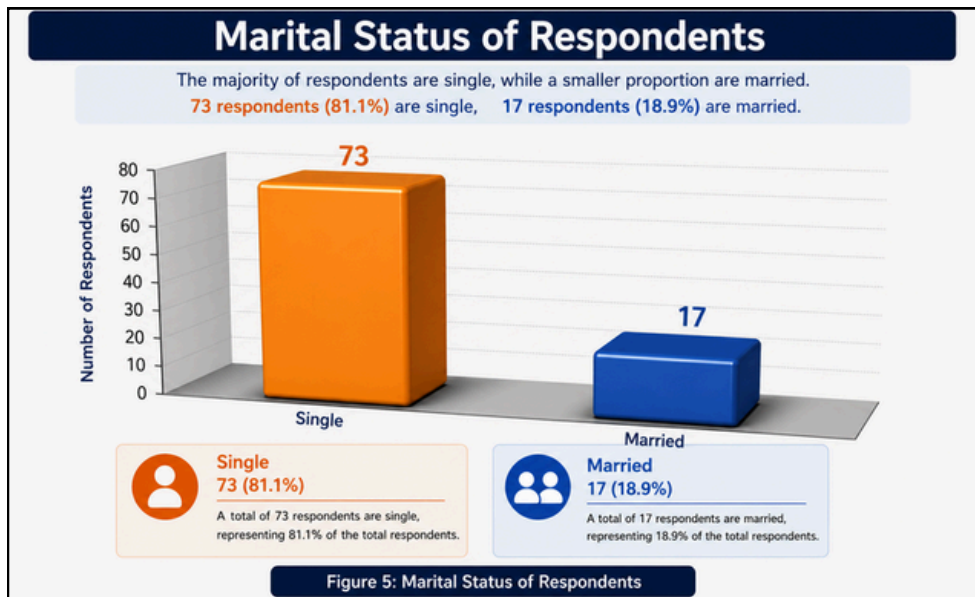
Figure 2 indicates that Urban residents constitute 67%, while Rural residents represent 23%. This shows heavier participation from urban communities, suggesting that rural voices may be underrepresented in the dataset.



The age distribution reflects that 18–29-year-olds accounted for 50 respondents, 30–40-year-olds for 37, and only 3 respondents were above 40. This indicates that younger adults formed the majority of the survey sample.



The dataset shows an overwhelmingly high level of education: 88 respondents each reported higher education categories (NCE/OND/HND/BSc/MSc/PhD), while only 2 respondents had secondary education. This highly educated sample suggests strong awareness of gender issues.



Survey results reveal that 73 respondents (majority) are single, while 17 are married. This indicates that younger, unmarried adults were more represented in the study.

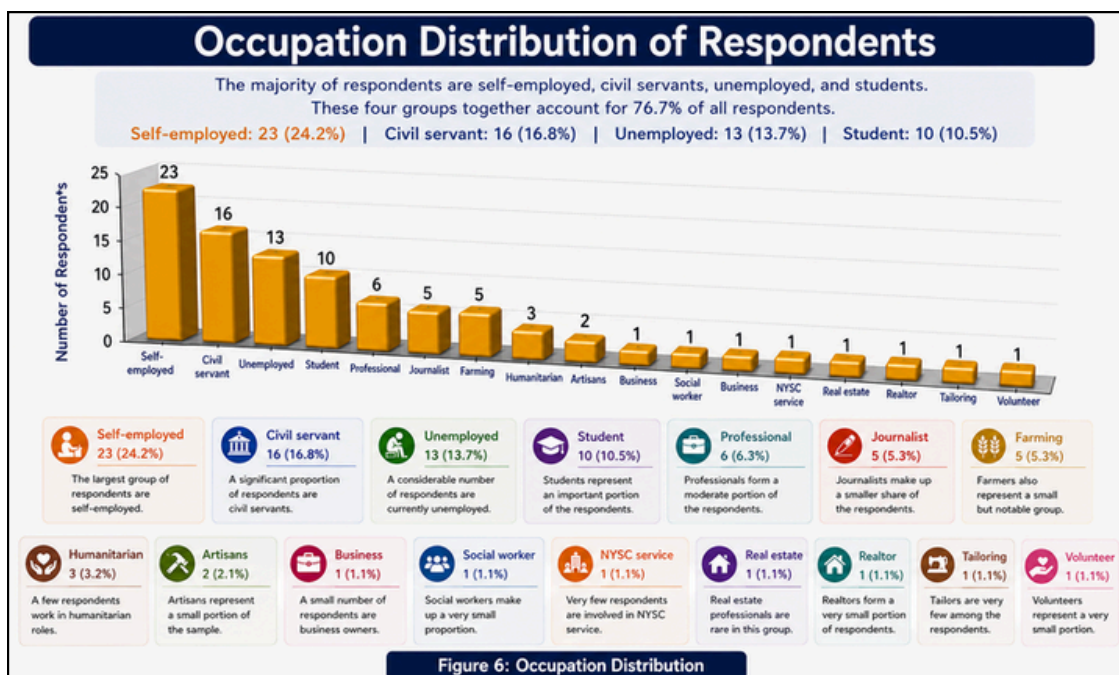
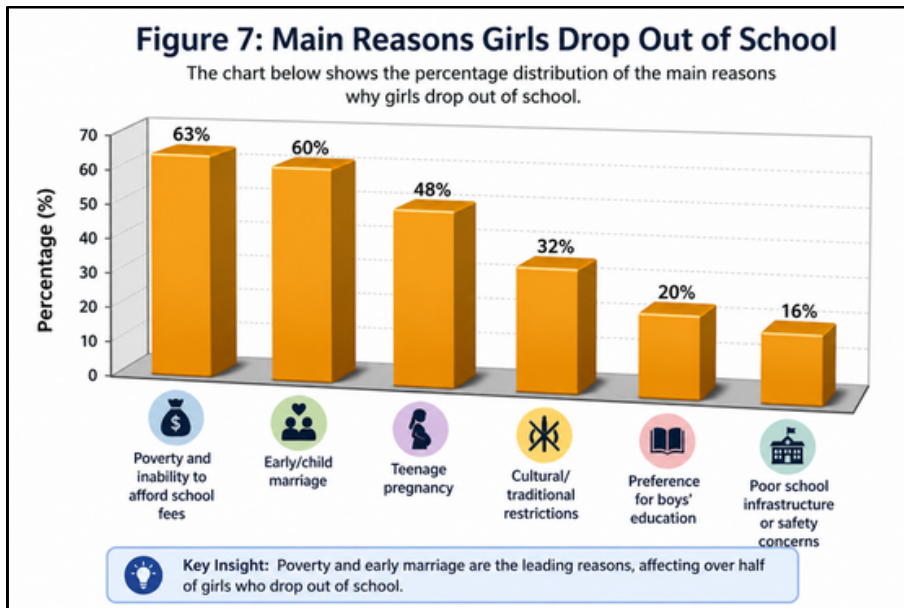
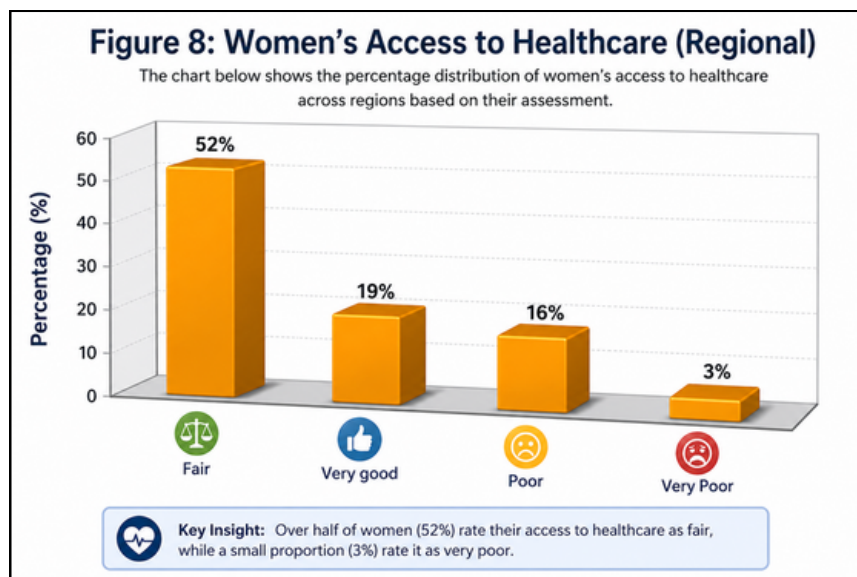


Figure 6 shows that self-employed respondents were the largest group (22), followed by civil servants (16), unemployed individuals (13), students (10), and professionals (6). This reflects a mixed economic base with significant informal-sector participation.



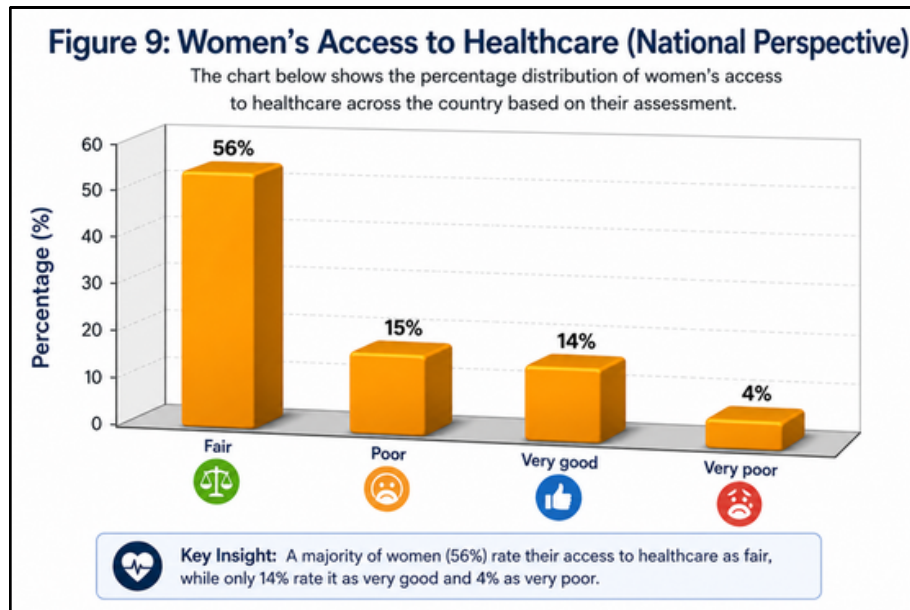
Survey findings indicate that the most cited reasons for girls dropping out include: Poverty (highest), early marriage, lack of family support, and insecurity. These mirror national patterns and highlight the need for targeted interventions.



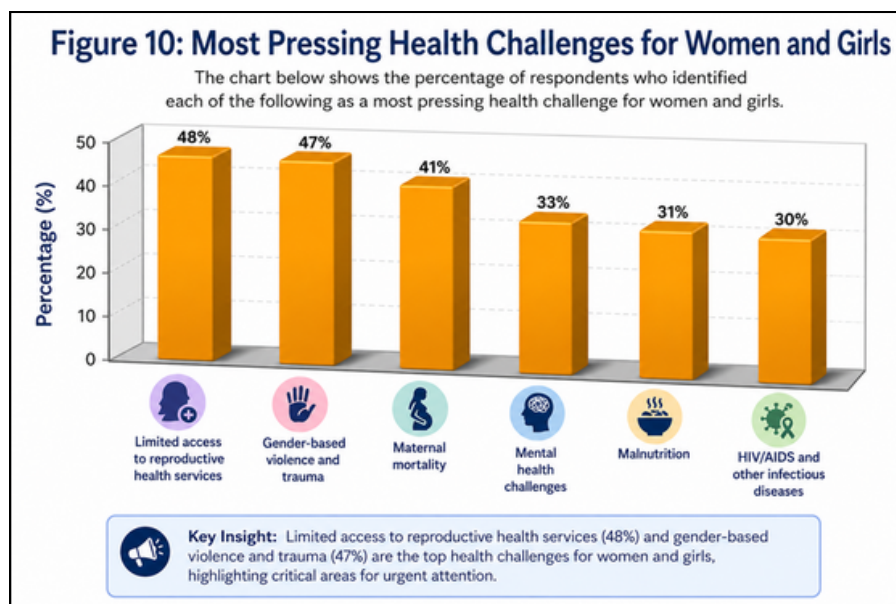
Respondents were asked to rate regional access to healthcare, with the following responses:

- Fair – highest response
- Good
- Poor

These results indicate that while some healthcare services are available, access to maternal, reproductive, and general healthcare for women in the region remains moderate but insufficient, highlighting persistent gaps in service coverage and quality.



At the national level, respondents reported slightly better access, with more ratings shifting toward “Good” and “Very Good”. This indicates that healthcare inequalities persist between national and regional systems.

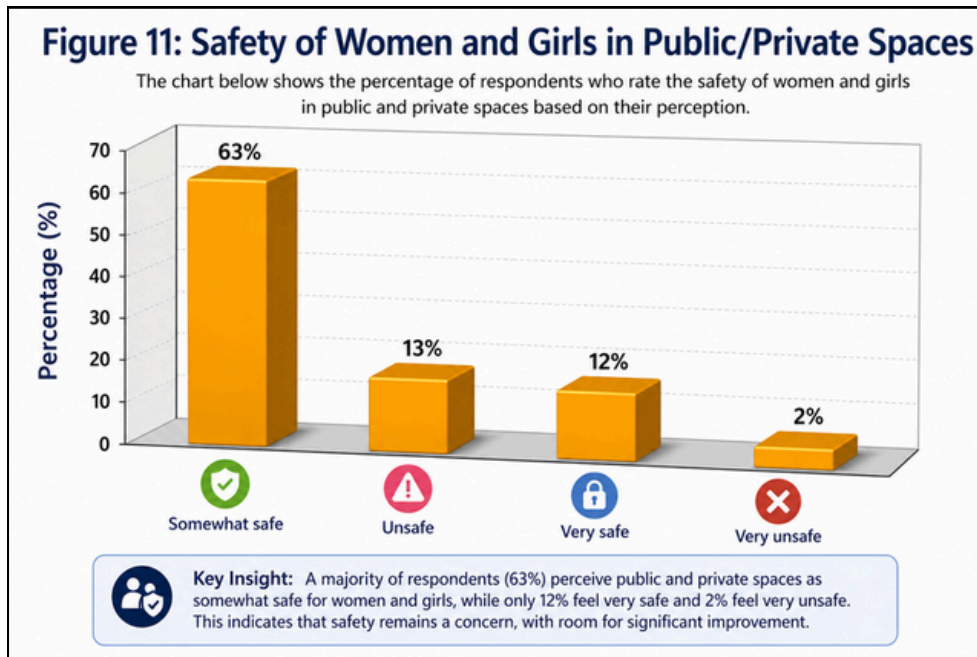


The top concerns identified include:

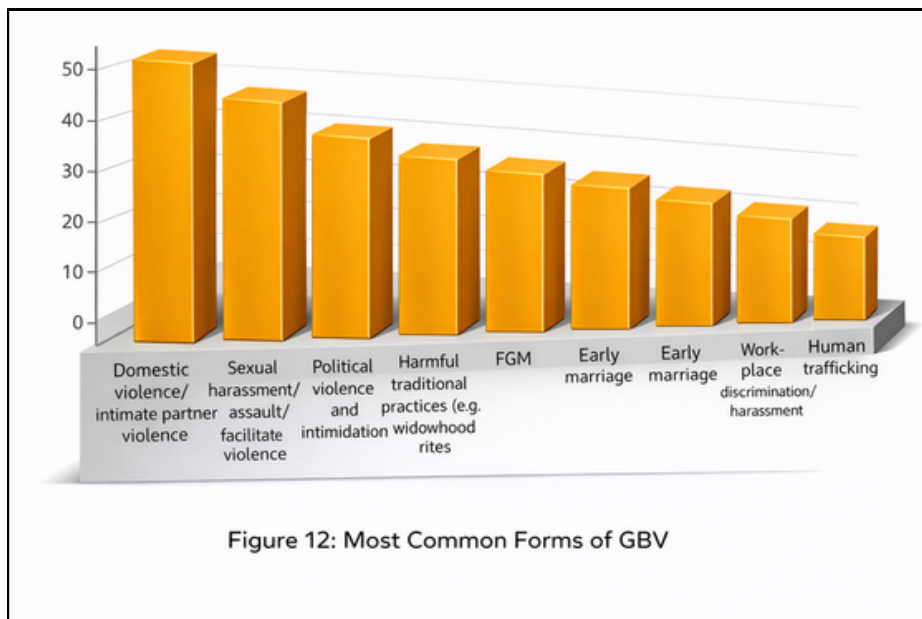
- Maternal mortality (highest)
- Limited reproductive health services
- GBV-related health complications

Malnutrition & mental health issues

This underscores persistent systemic gaps in women’s health services.



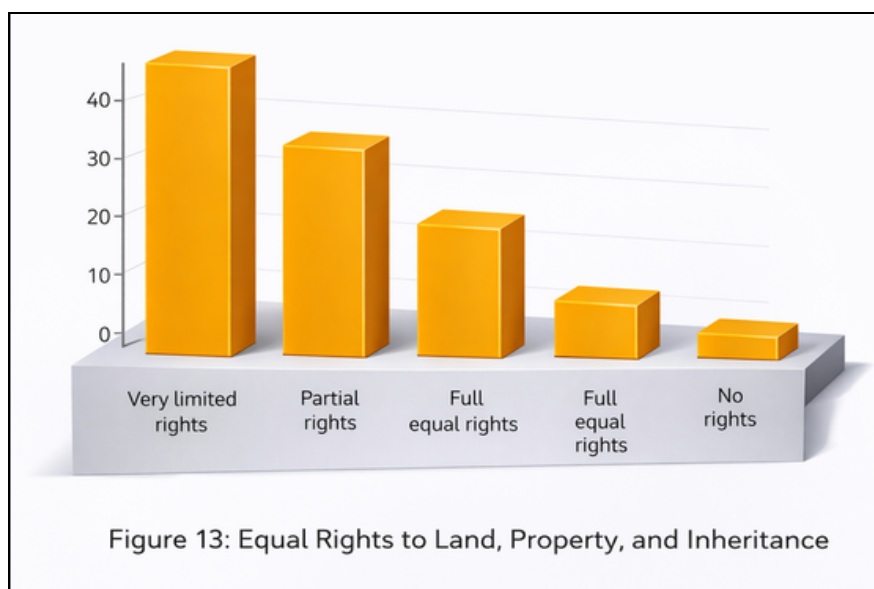
A majority of respondents rated safety as “somewhat safe”, while a significant number rated it as unsafe. This shows ongoing vulnerability for women in public spaces, workplaces, schools, and at home.



Respondents identified the following as the most prevalent:

- Domestic violence (most common)
- Sexual harassment
- Economic and psychological abuse

This reinforces the need for stronger GBV response systems.

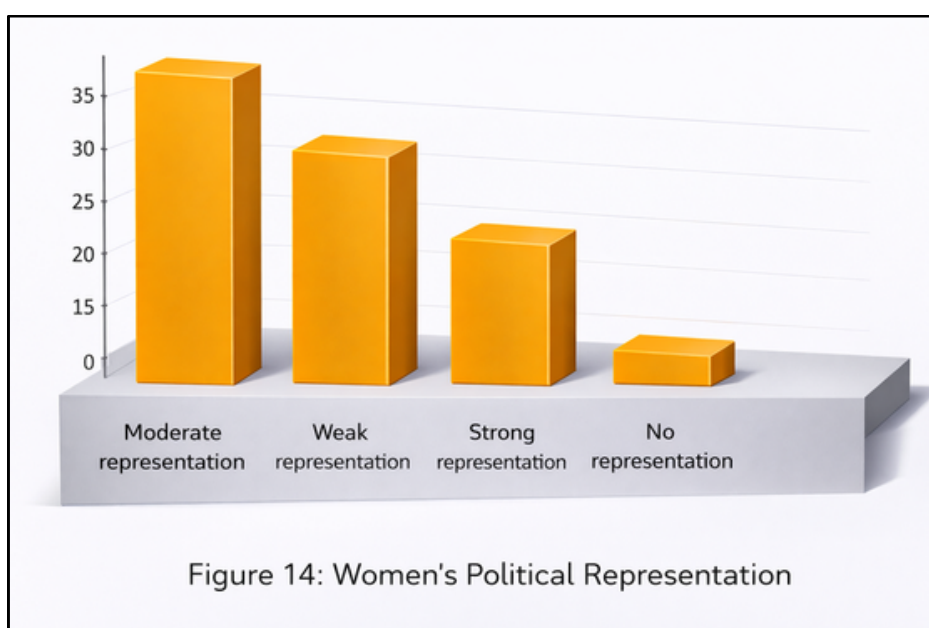


Findings show that only a small number of respondents believe women have “full equal rights.”

Most respondents selected:

- Partial rights
- Limited rights

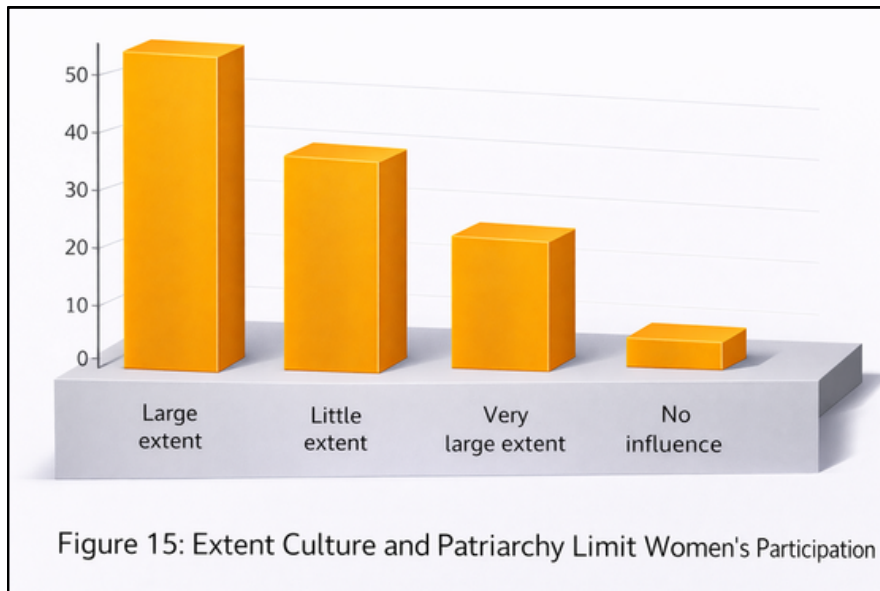
This reveals persistent structural inequality in property ownership.



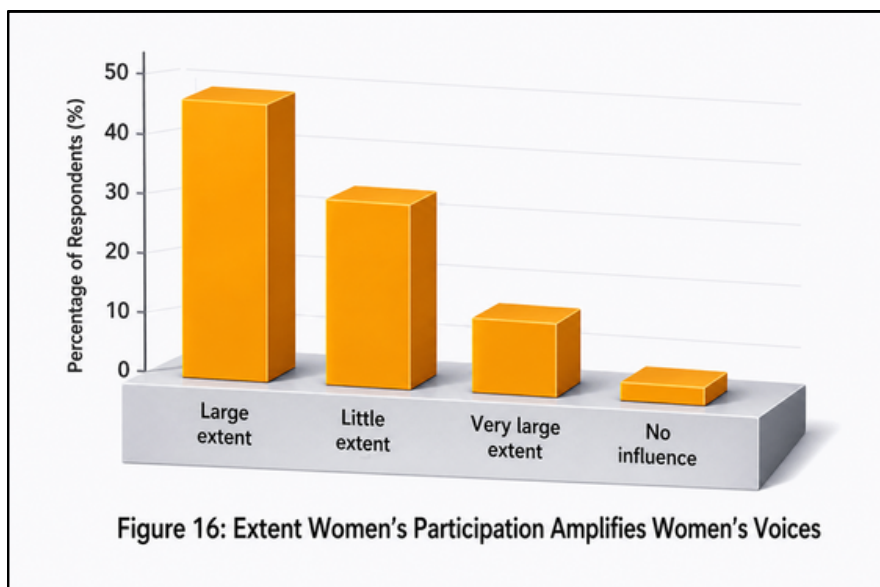
Respondents assessed women’s political representation as:

- Moderate (37 respondents)
- Weak (32 respondents)
- Strong (19 respondents)
- No representation (2 respondents)

This indicates that women remain underrepresented in governance structures.



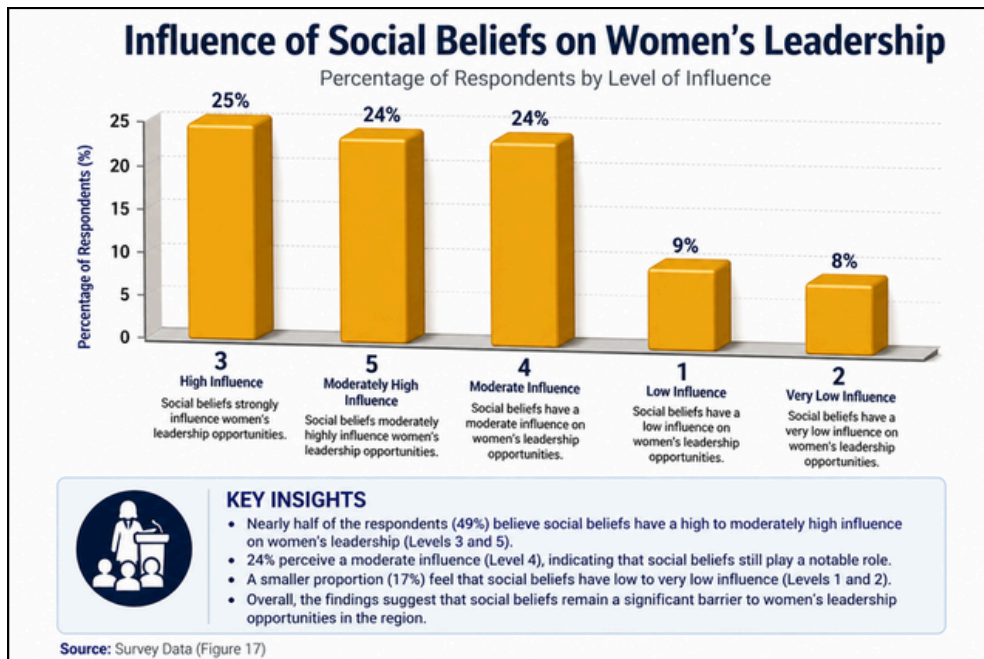
Most respondents reported that patriarchy limits women’s participation to a large extent (49) or very large extent (15). Only a few reported no influences. This highlights strong cultural constraints on women’s leadership.



Respondents agreed that women’s participation enhances gender equity:

- Moderately active – 46 respondents
- Limited participation – 35
- Very active – 8
- Not involved – 1

This indicates growing acceptance but limited empowerment.



Responses ranged widely:

- Strong influence (scores “5” and “4”)
- Moderate influence (score “3”)
- Low or no influence (“1” and “2”)

This mixed perception shows evolving but inconsistent cultural attitudes toward women in leadership.

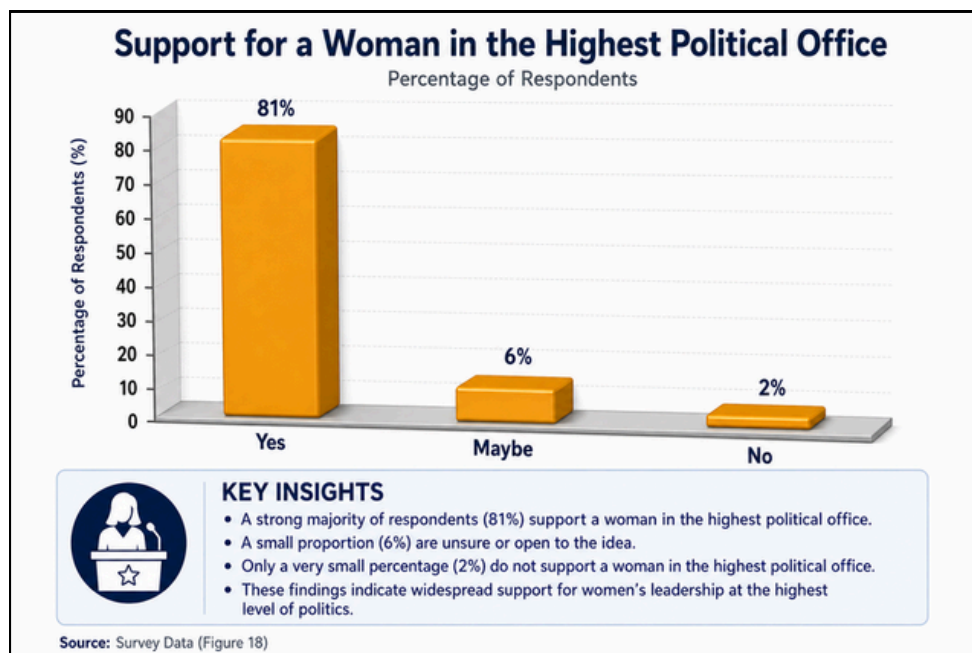


PHOTO GALLERY



Photos from Adamawa state

5.4 Annex 4 - The South East Report

Ebonyi State

Introduction

This report presents the findings of the Ebonyi State component of the ongoing revalidation of the National Gender in Nigeria Report (2023), commissioned by the Nigerian Women Trust Fund (NWTF). The revalidation exercise was designed to assess progress and emerging gaps in gender equality and women's empowerment across the six geopolitical zones, with specific attention to governance, women's economic participation, peace and security, and the enduring impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on women's lives. In line with Nigeria's commitments under the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goals 5, 8, 10 and 16 and the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda, the study seeks to generate updated, evidence-based insights that can guide policy, advocacy, and programming at both state and national levels.

The Ebonyi State study drew from three complementary data sources: a desk review of laws, policies, and gender-responsive programs; an online survey of 511 respondents across Nigeria (with disaggregated analysis for the South-East region); and a focus group discussion (FGD) with ten participants comprising community leaders, youth representatives, civil society actors, and officials from the State Gender Desk and GBV Taskforce. Together, these sources provide a multidimensional understanding of gender realities in the state, capturing both policy-level progress and the lived experiences of women and girls navigating entrenched structural barriers.

Findings from the desk review indicate that Ebonyi State has made commendable strides in legislative reform, notably through the domestication of the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) (VAPP) Law in 2018 and the establishment of a State GBV Taskforce and referral pathways. These frameworks have contributed to heightened awareness around gender-based violence (GBV) and have created formal mechanisms for survivor referral and response. However, the report finds that enforcement remains

uneven, particularly in rural areas, where weak institutional capacity, limited funding for shelters and legal aid, and low awareness continue to impede access to justice. Furthermore, the absence of an updated State Gender Policy and the non-domestication of the Gender and Equal Opportunities (GEO) Bill have created significant policy gaps, limiting accountability for gender inclusion across government sectors.

The study finds that women’s participation in governance remains largely symbolic. Despite the presence of women in high-profile positions such as the Deputy Governor and the Secretary to the State Government, female representation in elective offices and key decision-making structures remains negligible. The FGD revealed that women are systematically excluded from political party structures through mechanisms such as excessive nomination fees, late-night meetings, and the absence of security guarantees during primaries. Participants described these practices as “a calculated plot to exclude women,” reflecting a widespread belief that such procedural barriers are deliberately maintained to preserve male dominance.

Economic disempowerment emerged as a recurring theme throughout the study. Both the desk review and FGD highlighted that patriarchal norms around land ownership and inheritance remain deeply entrenched, denying women access to vital productive assets. One participant recounted: “My mother used to benefit from the proceeds of the plantation until when her father died. Her younger brothers denied her access to the palm plantation.” Such experiences are not isolated. They reflect a persistent structural inequality where women’s labour and contributions are unacknowledged, and their economic agency constrained by cultural and legal ambivalence. The online survey reinforces this pattern, with 72 percent of respondents in the South-East reporting that women have “very limited” or “partial” access to land and inheritance. Without control over assets or access to credit, women’s participation in both the formal economy and political processes remains severely limited.

The report also finds that gender-based violence remains pervasive and underreported. Despite the existence of protective laws, many survivors continue to face institutional indifference. Participants in the FGD described instances where police officers dismissed cases as “family matters,” or pressured victims into private settlements. This culture of impunity not only erodes women’s trust in formal systems but also perpetuates the normalization of violence.

Survey data further substantiates these accounts, showing that domestic violence, sexual harassment, and economic abuse remain the most common forms of GBV across the country. Rural women, adolescent girls, and persons with disabilities face even greater risks due to stigma, limited awareness, and inadequate service provision.

The study also explored the intersections of gender with peace and security. Although Ebonyi experiences periodic communal and boundary-related disputes, women's participation in peacebuilding remains largely informal and unrecognized. While women often play mediatory roles at the community level, they are rarely included in formal security or conflict resolution structures. This exclusion runs counter to the commitments outlined in the National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security, which Ebonyi has yet to domesticate.

Taken together, the evidence from all three sources underscores that Ebonyi State's gender progress is real but fragile. Legislative reforms and symbolic representation coexist with deep structural inequalities sustained by patriarchal norms, weak enforcement, and economic exclusion. Culture remains the strongest single barrier, shaping women's access to resources, their safety within households, and their participation in public life. Legal frameworks exist, but they remain under-implemented, and donor-funded interventions, though impactful, are not yet embedded within state systems for sustainability.

The report concludes that advancing gender equality in Ebonyi requires a systemic shift from policy formulation to institutional accountability. Priorities include: adopting and funding a State Gender Policy; domesticating the GEO Bill; strengthening enforcement of the VAPP law through survivor-centered services; creating economic empowerment pathways that link asset ownership with leadership training; and institutionalizing gender-responsive budgeting and monitoring across ministries. There is also a pressing need to integrate gender-sensitive frameworks into peacebuilding and post-crisis recovery initiatives and to expand programs addressing adolescent health, digital inclusion, and climate resilience for women.

In sum, while Ebonyi State demonstrates encouraging signs of commitment to gender equity, progress remains uneven and vulnerable to reversal. To sustain and scale these gains, government institutions must translate political will into consistent action, ensuring that women are not merely included in governance but empowered to influence, decide, and lead.

Background

Nigeria's trajectory toward gender equality has been shaped by a series of international and national commitments that frame both policy direction and accountability. Globally, Nigeria is a signatory to the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995), which remains “the most progressive blueprint for advancing the rights of women and girls everywhere” (UN Women, 2020). This declaration, alongside the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goals 5 (Gender Equality), 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), 10 (Reduced Inequalities), and 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions) and the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda under UN Security Council Resolution 1325, forms the foundation for gender equality interventions in Nigeria.

At the national level, Nigeria reaffirmed these commitments through several instruments, including the National Gender Policy (2021–2026) and the National Women's Economic Empowerment Policy (2023). The Federal Ministry of Women Affairs (FMWA) describes the renewed policy direction as part of “a coordinated national effort to accelerate women's full participation in political, economic and public life, as enshrined in the 1999 Constitution and reinforced by the Sustainable Development Goals.” (FMWA, 2023).

Yet, the gap between commitment and implementation remains wide. The Global Gender Gap Report (2022) ranked Nigeria 139th out of 146 countries, with a gender gap index score of 0.627, indicating that “Nigeria continues to record one of the lowest female political representation rates in Sub-Saharan Africa” (World Economic Forum, 2022). UN Women Nigeria further observes that “after the elections in 2019, only 5.8% of House of Representatives members and 7.3% of senators were women,” describing the situation as a “power gap that weakens governance inclusivity” (UN Women, 2020).

Governance and Women's Political Participation

While Nigeria's National Gender Policy calls for 35% affirmative action for women in elective and appointive positions, this benchmark remains unmet in most states. Ebonyi State exemplifies this national pattern: despite commendable appointments such as Hon. Patricia Obila as the first female Deputy Governor and Professor Grace Umezurike as the first female Secretary to the State Government, women remain severely underrepresented in both elective and lower-level political structures.

As reported by Premium Times (2023), “the appointment of Prof. Umezurike as Ebonyi’s first female SSG marks progress, but observers caution that it remains largely symbolic unless followed by broader reforms to increase women’s inclusion in state governance.” Similarly, civil society groups interviewed during this revalidation study argued that token appointments have not dismantled the structural barriers that keep women marginalized in decision-making.

Barriers to participation are rooted in political culture. The Ebonyi FGD participants described entrenched exclusionary practices: “Political parties fix meetings at very late hours; it’s nothing but a calculated plot to exclude women,” one participant asserted, while another noted that “cultural and religious settings still consider it taboo for women to speak in the village square.” These lived experiences mirror findings from broader national research (UN Women, 2021) which identified cultural bias, gender-based political violence, and financial barriers as the top three obstacles to women’s political participation.

Legal and Institutional Framework

The Ebonyi State Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Law, No. 002 of 2018 is a notable legislative achievement, aligning with the national VAPP Act (2015). The law explicitly states:

“The objective of this Law is to eliminate violence in private and public life; prohibit all forms of violence against persons; and provide maximum protection and effective remedies for victims and punishment of offenders.” (Government of Ebonyi State, 2018, p. 1).

However, as the EU–UN Spotlight Initiative (2023) observed, “despite the law’s passage, enforcement remains inconsistent due to weak institutional capacity, limited awareness, and absence of specialized GBV courts or adequately resourced shelters.” The Initiative further noted that rural communities continue to rely on traditional mechanisms that often prioritize reconciliation over justice.

The state has yet to adopt a comprehensive Gender Policy or domesticate the Gender and Equal Opportunities (GEO) Bill, which would legally entrench equal opportunities across public life, inheritance, and employment. According to Learning Partnership (2018), the failure to pass the GEO Bill nationally has “perpetuated legal ambiguity on affirmative action, inheritance, and equal pay, leaving women’s rights subject to interpretation rather than enforceable law.”

Economic Empowerment and Structural Inequality

Ebonyi State’s economy is predominantly agrarian, with agriculture accounting for over 70% of household livelihoods (Ebonyi State Government, 2024). A study by Okorie et al. (2022) found that “palm oil processing is one of the most viable income sources for rural women in Ohaozara Local Government Area, contributing significantly to household income and local trade.” Yet, the same study noted that “women lack ownership and control of the palm plantations that sustain the processing sector due to cultural inheritance restrictions.”

During the Ebonyi FGD, a participant shared a lived account of this exclusion:

“My mother used to benefit from the proceeds of the plantation until her father died. Her younger brothers denied her access to the palm plantation.”

This statement underscores how customary norms deprive women of productive assets, reinforcing their economic dependency and limiting their political agency.

The World Bank (2023) emphasizes that “women’s inability to own or inherit land in Nigeria reduces agricultural productivity by up to 20%, constraining rural economic growth.” Such structural inequalities, replicated in states like Ebonyi, perpetuate both poverty and political marginalization.

COVID-19 and Emerging Gender Risks

The COVID-19 pandemic deepened existing inequalities. According to UN Women (2021), “women were disproportionately affected by the pandemic relative to men, accounting for higher job losses, increased unpaid care work, and greater exposure to domestic violence.” In Nigeria, the Ministry of Women Affairs reported that incidents of GBV rose by 149% during lockdowns (FMWA, 2021).

The EU–UN Spotlight (2023) notes similar trends in Ebonyi, where rural women traders and informal workers “experienced loss of income, market closures, and spikes in domestic violence that further entrenched economic vulnerability.” These shocks highlight the need for gender-responsive economic recovery that prioritizes female-headed households, informal workers, and survivors of GBV.

Peace, Security, and Community Governance

While Ebonyi has experienced intermittent communal tensions, women’s participation in formal peace and security structures remains limited. The National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security (2021–2026) emphasizes that “women are indispensable agents in conflict prevention and peacebuilding,” yet state-level domestication and implementation have been minimal.

FGD participants observed that women often act as mediators in local disputes but receive no formal recognition or institutional support for these roles. This exclusion reduces the effectiveness of community governance systems and perpetuates the perception that security and mediation are male domains.

In summary, Ebonyi State illustrates both the progress and paradox of gender equality in Nigeria: strong legal frameworks coexist with weak enforcement; visible women leaders exist alongside deep-rooted patriarchy; and donor-funded programs flourish without sustainable institutional embedding. Understanding these contradictions within the context of Nigeria's international commitments and post-COVID realities is central to this revalidation study.

Methodology

Study Design

This revalidation study adopted a mixed-method research design combining quantitative and qualitative techniques to generate a comprehensive understanding of gender equality and women's empowerment in Ebonyi State within the broader context of governance. The approach aligns with the Nigerian Women Trust Fund (NWTF)'s framework for the Revalidation of the 2023 National Gender in Nigeria Report, which emphasizes triangulation between policy review, public perception, and lived experience.

The study focused primarily on women's participation in governance, while also exploring intersecting themes such as economic empowerment, gender-based violence (GBV), peace and security, and social inclusion.

Evidence was drawn from three complementary data sources:

1. Desk Review – analysis of key policies, frameworks, and institutional reports on gender and governance;
2. Quantitative Online Survey – to capture public perceptions of gender equality progress, challenges, and recommendations; and
3. Qualitative Focus Group Discussion (FGD) – conducted in Ebonyi State to contextualize quantitative findings and explore underlying socio-cultural dynamics.

This design ensured that both structural data (laws, institutions, and policies) and experiential data (perceptions and lived realities) were incorporated into the analysis.

Desk Review

The desk review formed the foundational layer of the study. It entailed a systematic appraisal of national and state-level gender-related documents published between 2018 and 2025.

The review covered:

- National frameworks such as the National Gender Policy (2021–2026), National Women’s Economic Empowerment Policy (2023), and the National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (2021–2026);
- State-level laws and policies including the Ebonyi State Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Law (2018) and related GBV enforcement frameworks; and
- Institutional and donor reports such as the EU–UN Spotlight Initiative (2023), UN Women Nigeria Gender Reports, and Ebonyi State Outgrower and Food Security Toolkit (2024).

Selection criteria for inclusion were:

1. Relevance to gender governance, women’s empowerment, or GBV;
2. The desk review primarily relied on publications, policy documents, and research reports published between 2018 and 2025, with a few pre-2018 sources retained solely for historical and contextual referencing; and
3. Authorship by a recognized government, intergovernmental, or research institution.

Findings from the desk review established the policy, legal, and institutional context in which women’s participation and empowerment in Ebonyi are situated.

Quantitative Online Survey

The online survey provided empirical data on perceptions of gender equality and governance in Nigeria. It was administered via Google Forms between September and October 2025, reaching respondents across the six geopolitical zones, with significant participation from the South-East (including Ebonyi State).

Sampling and Respondent Profile

The survey employed a purposive, open online sampling approach, allowing voluntary participation from adult Nigerians (18 years and above) who had access to the internet. Although not random, this approach captured diverse perspectives across gender, age, geography, and professional backgrounds.

- Female respondents: 71.28 %
- Male respondents: 26.60 %
- Ages 18–29: 49.3 %
- Respondents with tertiary or higher education: 57.4%

Survey Instrument

The instrument used for this study was organized into two principal sections, comprising a total of 31 structured questions:

Section B: Demographic Characteristics (7 questions)

This section gathered information on gender, age group, geopolitical zone, state, marital status, educational level, occupation, and urban/rural location. These demographic variables allowed for disaggregation and comparative analysis.

Section C: Progress, Challenges, and Recommendations (24 questions)

This section explored respondents' experiences and perceptions of gender equality in the following thematic areas:

- Women's participation in governance and decision-making – representation, inclusivity, and leadership barriers;
- Economic empowerment and access to resources – employment, entrepreneurship, credit, and ownership of assets;
- Gender-based violence and protection systems – awareness, reporting, and enforcement mechanisms;
- Social inclusion and access to services – disparities in education, healthcare, and social protection; and
- Recommendations for improving gender equality and institutional accountability.

Questions were a mix of closed-ended (multiple-choice) and open-ended items, designed to elicit both quantitative frequencies and qualitative insights.

Data Analysis

Survey responses were exported into Excel and analysed descriptively, using frequencies and percentages. The data were grouped by thematic areas and cross-tabulated by gender and region to identify patterns in perception and experience. Charts and tables in the General Analysis Results document illustrate the summarized findings.

Qualitative Focus Group Discussion (FGD) – Ebonyi State

To complement the survey findings and capture contextual depth, a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) was conducted in Ebonyi State.

Composition

The FGD comprised 10 participants drawn from:

- State ministries and gender desks;
- Civil society and women’s rights groups;
- Community and youth leaders;
- Media and faith-based organizations.

Discussion Themes

The session explored six key areas aligned with the study framework:

1. Women’s participation in governance and decision-making;
2. Economic empowerment and access to productive assets;
3. Gender-based violence and justice responses;
4. Social inclusion in health, education, and public life;
5. Women’s role in peace and security; and
6. Institutional accountability and policy implementation.

Data Collection and Processing

The discussion was guided by a semi-structured FGD guide and moderated by a trained facilitator. Participants were briefed on confidentiality and provided verbal consent before participation. The 90-minute session was recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Transcripts were analysed thematically using both inductive and deductive coding. Patterns were identified and cross-referenced with survey and desk-review data to ensure internal validity. Verbatim quotes are included in the Data Analysis section to illustrate key points and retain the authenticity of participants’ voices.

Data Triangulation and Validation

The study employed triangulation to strengthen reliability by cross-verifying data from multiple sources.

- The desk review established the structural and policy context.
- The survey quantified public perceptions and experience-based attitudes.
- The FGD provided in-depth, localized insights explaining why certain patterns persist.

Findings were harmonized during analysis to highlight both convergences and discrepancies among policy intentions, institutional practices, and lived realities of women in Ebonyi State.

Ethical Considerations

All research activities adhered to the NWTF Research Ethics Protocol (2023) and global best practices on confidentiality and informed consent.

- Online participation was anonymous, with no personally identifiable information collected.
 - FGD participants' names were replaced with codes (e.g., Participant 1, Participant D).
 - Sensitive discussions on GBV were handled with empathy, and referral information for psychosocial or legal support was provided when necessary.
 - No financial incentives were offered to participants beyond light refreshments and reimbursement of transport fare during the FGD.

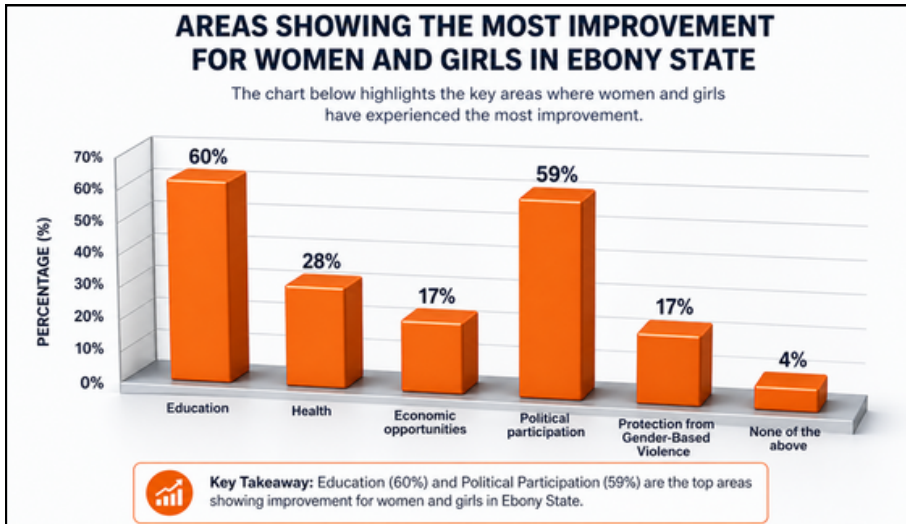
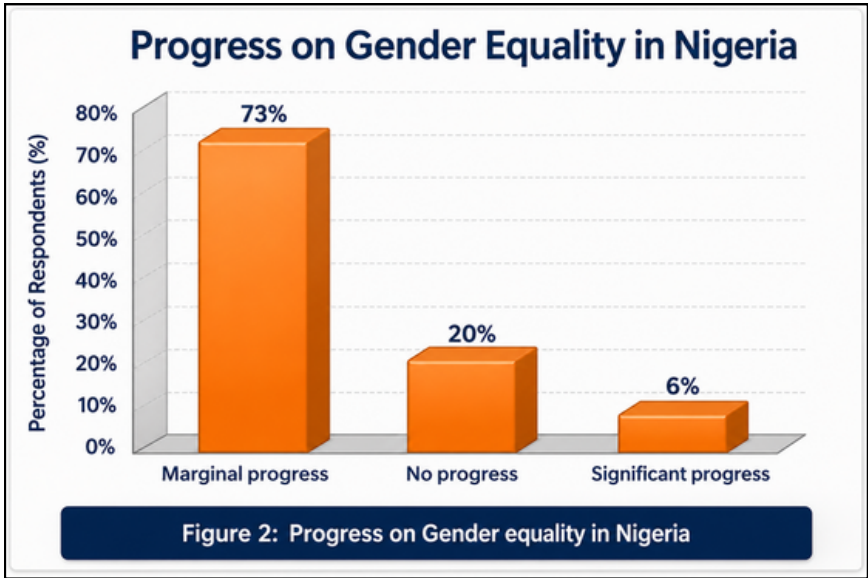
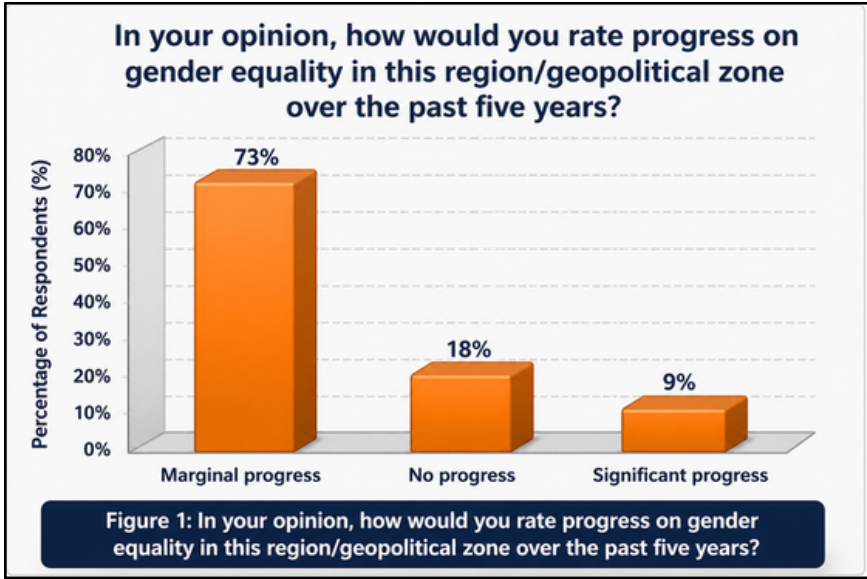
Summary

In sum, this study used a triangulated, ethically grounded mixed-methods approach to generate robust evidence on gender equality and governance in Ebonyi State. The integration of policy review, survey data, and lived experiences provides a credible, multidimensional picture of progress and persistent challenges, forming a solid empirical foundation for the findings and recommendations presented in subsequent sections.

Ebony state analysis

Table 1: Demographics

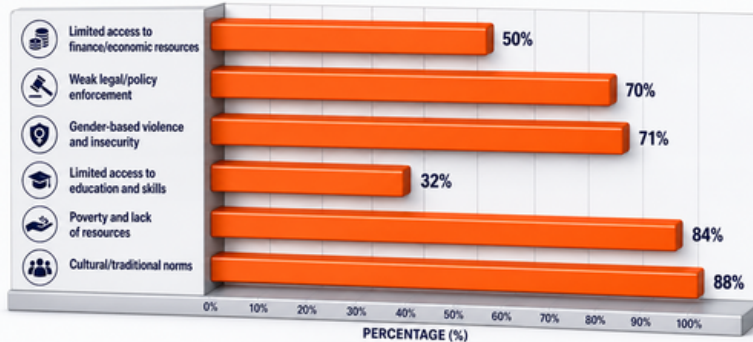
| Indices (N=94) | | % |
|--|---|--------|
| 1. Sex | Female | 71.28% |
| | Male | 26.60% |
| | Prefer not to say | 2.13% |
| 2. Age | 18 - 29 | 49.3% |
| | 30 - 40 | 30.8% |
| | 40 Years & above | 20.2% |
| 3. Level of Education | Higher education (NCE, OND, HND, BSc, MSc, PhD) | 57.4% |
| | No formal education | 2.1% |
| | Primary education | 8.5% |
| | Secondary education | 41.4% |
| 4. Marital Status [Please choose one] | Divorced | 0 |
| | Married | 43.6% |
| | Never Married | 1.06% |
| | Separated | 2.1% |
| | Single | 47.8% |
| | Widow | 5.3% |
| 6. Disability status | No | 67% |
| | Prefer not to answer | 6.3% |
| | Yes | 26.5 |
| 7. Religion | African Tradition Religion | 2.1% |
| | Christian | 96.8 |
| | Muslim | 0% |
| | Prefer not to answer | 1.06% |



BARRIERS TO ACCESSING EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS



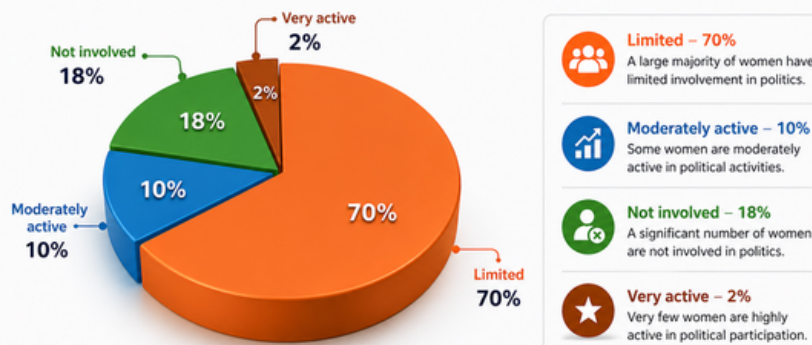
These barriers continue to limit the ability of women and girls in Ebony State to access and benefit from equal opportunities.



KEY TAKEAWAY: Cultural/traditional norms (88%) and Poverty and lack of resources (84%) are the biggest barriers, followed by Gender-based violence and insecurity (71%) and Weak legal/policy enforcement (70%).

WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN POLITICS

This chart shows the level of women's involvement in political activities in Ebony State.



Limited – 70%
A large majority of women have limited involvement in politics.



Moderately active – 10%
Some women are moderately active in political activities.



Not involved – 18%
A significant number of women are not involved in politics.



Very active – 2%
Very few women are highly active in political participation.

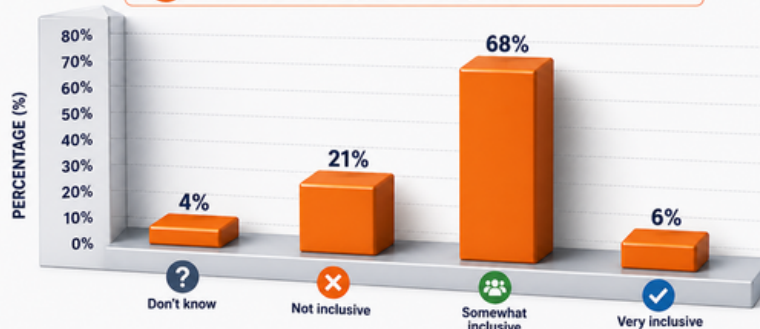


KEY TAKEAWAY: 70% of women in Ebony State have limited participation in politics, while only 2% are very active. This highlights the need for more inclusive opportunities and support to encourage greater women's involvement in political processes.

EXTENT TO WHICH STATE-LEVEL POLICIES ARE INCLUSIVE OF WOMEN'S NEEDS AND PRIORITIES



This chart shows the perception of how inclusive state-level policies are of women's needs and priorities in Ebony State.

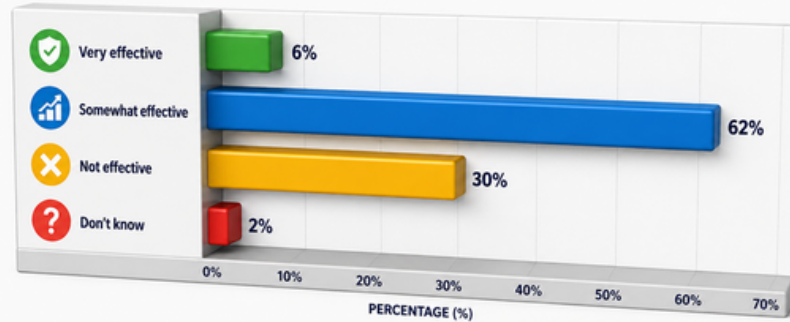


KEY TAKEAWAY: A majority (68%) believe state-level policies are somewhat inclusive of women's needs and priorities. However, 21% feel policies are not inclusive, while only 6% believe they are very inclusive. This highlights the need for stronger integration of women's priorities into state policies.

Figure 6

EFFORTS TO ADDRESS GBV IN THE STATE

This chart shows how effective stakeholders perceive current efforts to address Gender-Based Violence (GBV) in Ebony State.

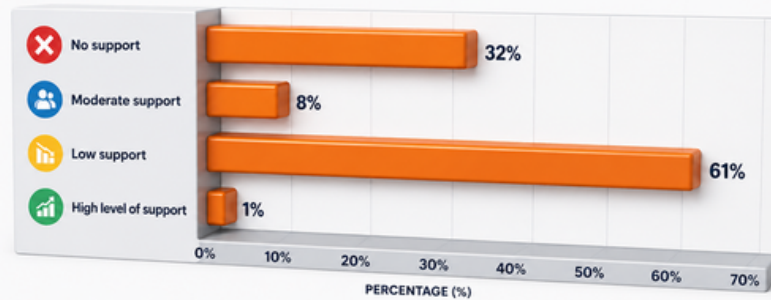


KEY TAKEAWAY: A majority (62%) of respondents believe that efforts to address GBV in Ebony State are somewhat effective. However, 30% feel these efforts are not effective, while only 6% believe they are very effective. This indicates a need to strengthen and improve GBV intervention strategies for greater impact.

Figure 7

SUPPORT FOR WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS AND BUSINESS OWNERS IN EBONYI STATE

This chart shows the level of support available for women entrepreneurs and business owners in Ebonyi State.

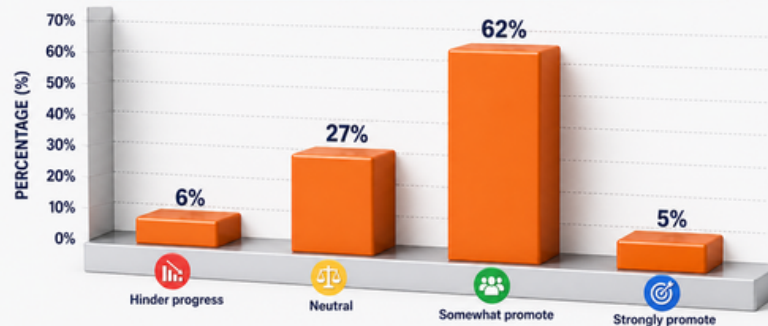


KEY TAKEAWAY: A majority (61%) of respondents indicated low support for women entrepreneurs and business owners in Ebonyi State. Only 8% reported moderate support, while a very small percentage (1%) experience a high level of support. This highlights the need for stronger policies, funding, and empowerment initiatives.

Figure 8

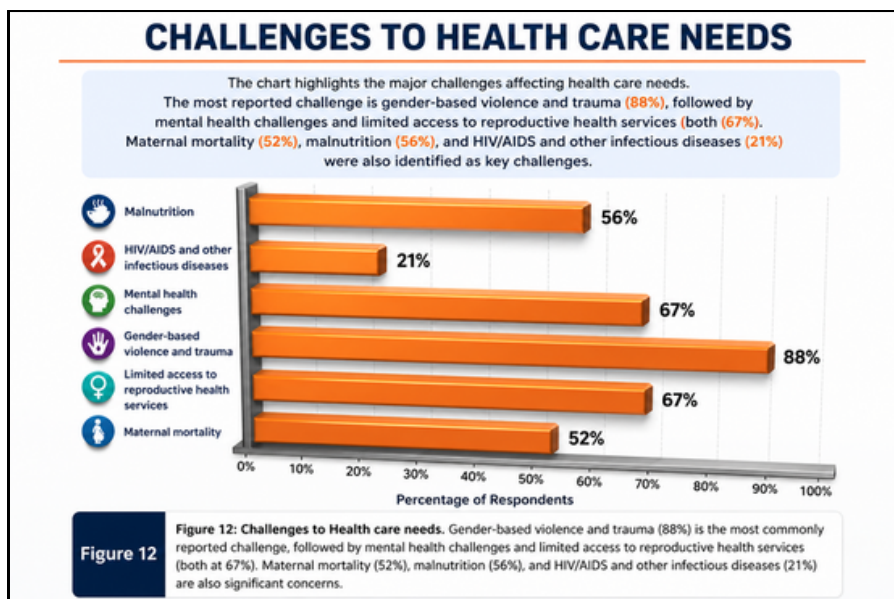
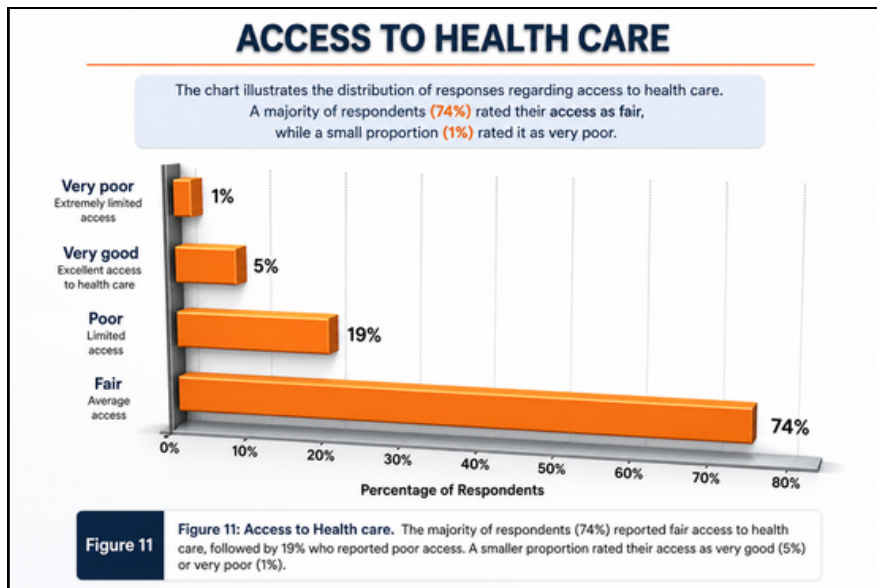
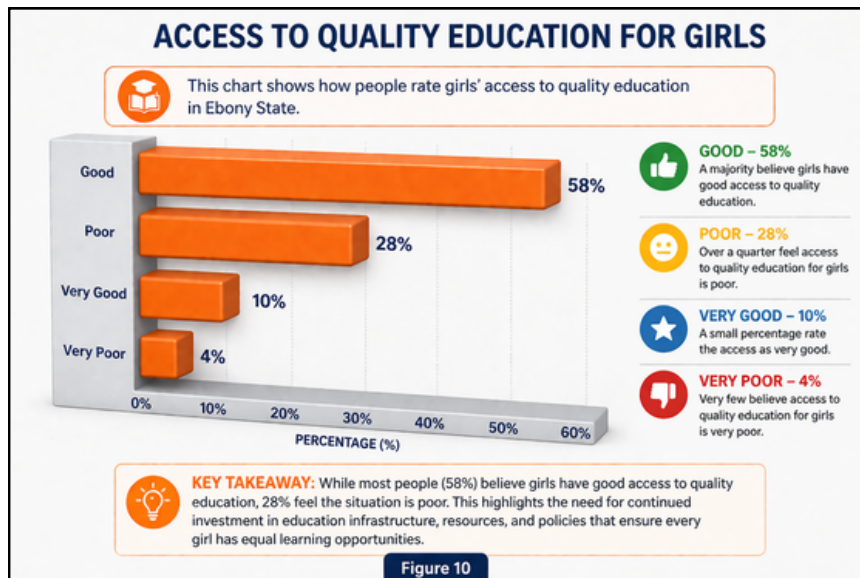
ROLE OF TRADITIONAL/RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS IN PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY

This chart shows how people perceive the role of traditional and religious institutions in promoting gender equality in Ebonyi State.



KEY TAKEAWAY: A majority (62%) believe traditional and religious institutions somewhat promote gender equality, while 27% feel their role is neutral. However, 6% think they hinder progress, and only 5% believe they strongly promote gender equality. This suggests there is room for stronger advocacy and engagement by these institutions.

Figure 9



SAFETY OF WOMEN AND GIRLS IN PUBLIC SPACES AND HOMES

The chart shows perceptions of the safety of women and girls in public spaces and homes. A majority of respondents (54%) believe women and girls are somewhat safe, while 29% consider them unsafe. Only 4% view them as very safe, and 13% believe they are very unsafe.

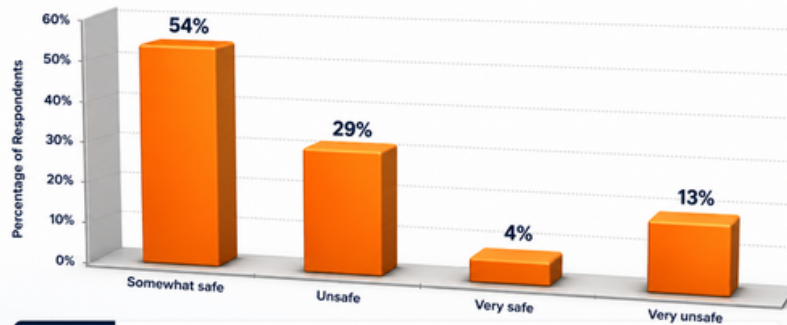


Figure 13

Figure 13: Safety of women and girls in public spaces and homes. More than half of the respondents (54%) perceive women and girls as somewhat safe in public spaces and homes. However, a considerable proportion (29%) feel they are unsafe, while 13% believe they are very unsafe. Only a small minority (4%) consider them very safe.

EXTENT TO WHICH WOMEN HAVE EQUAL RIGHTS TO LAND PROPERTIES AND INHERITANCE

The chart illustrates the extent to which women have equal rights to land properties and inheritance. A majority of respondents (72%) believe women have very limited rights. Meanwhile, 19% report no rights, 4% report partial rights, and only 4% believe women have full equal rights.

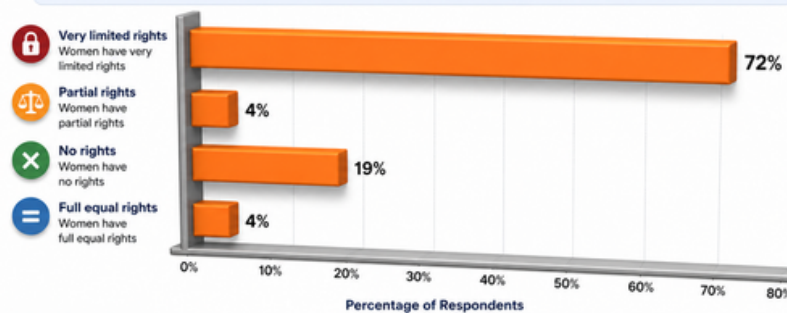


Figure 14

Figure 14: Extent to which women have equal rights to land properties and inheritance. A large majority of respondents (72%) believe women have very limited rights to land properties and inheritance. Additionally, 19% report no rights, 4% report partial rights, and only 4% believe women have full equal rights.

WOMEN POLITICAL REPRESENTATION IN EBONYI STATE

The chart shows perceptions of women's political representation in Ebonyi State. A significant majority of respondents (74%) believe women have weak representation. Meanwhile, 13% see it as moderate, 10% report no representation, and only 3% believe women have strong representation.

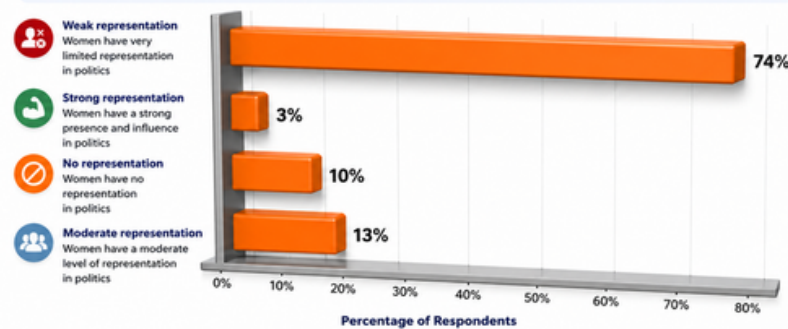
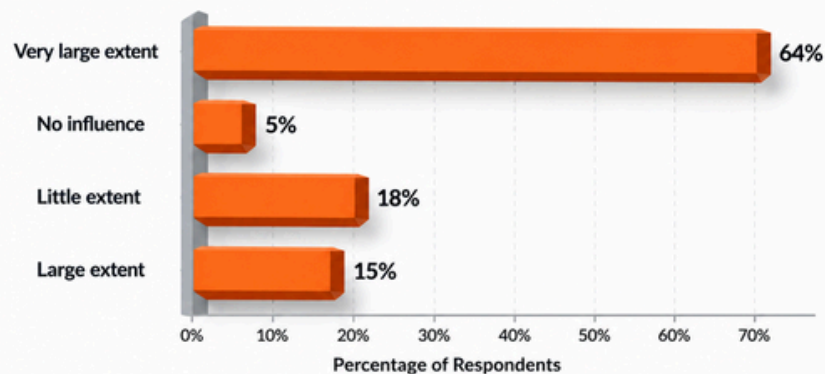


Figure 15

Figure 15: Women political representation in Ebonyi state. A significant majority of respondents (74%) perceive women's political representation as weak. Additionally, 13% view it as moderate, 10% report no representation, and only 3% believe women have strong representation.

Figure 16: Extent to which culture and patriarchy limits women's participation in decision making

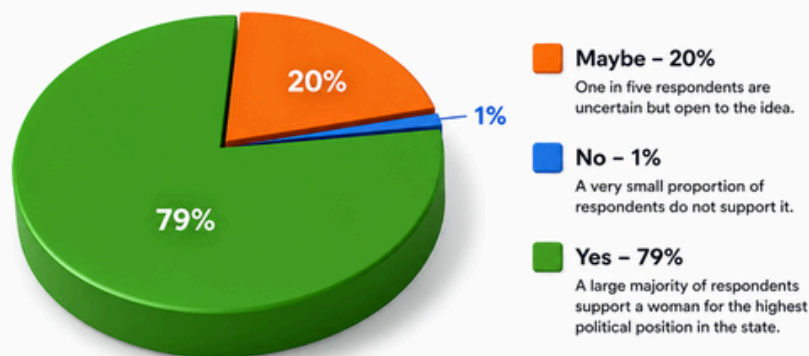
The chart shows the extent to which cultural norms and patriarchy limit women's participation in decision making.



A significant majority (64%) believe that culture and patriarchy limit women's participation in decision making to a **very large extent**.

Figure 17: Would you support a woman for the highest political position in the state?

The chart shows the level of support for a woman to hold the highest political position in the state.



A significant majority (79%) of respondents support a woman for the highest political position in the state.

Table 1: Emerging issues affecting women and girls in Ebonyi state (Q)

| SN | Emerging issues affecting women and girls | Relative weight | Comments |
|----|--|-----------------|--|
| 1 | Economic hardship/unemployment | 88% | Economic issues take up 88% among the emerging issues affecting women and girls in the state. Data shows that most women are either unemployed or are engaged in unpaid care work, limiting their potential for paid employment. |
| 2 | Insecurity and displacement | 90% | Insecurity and displacement affect women and girls in various ways, |
| 3 | Climate change/environmental issues | 51% | |
| 4 | Health crisis (e.g. maternal mortality, reproductive health) | 44% | |
| 5 | Digital exclusion (limited access to ICT and digital tools) | 47% | |
| 6 | Lack of access to Inheritance rights | 47% | |
| 7 | Lack of access to land | 12% | |

Table 2: Reasons for school drop-out by girls

| Reasons for drop out | Relative weight | Comments |
|---|-----------------|----------|
| Early/child marriage | 48% | |
| Teenage pregnancy | 95% | |
| Poverty and inability to afford school fees | 98% | |
| Cultural/traditional restrictions | 61% | |
| Poor school infrastructure or safety concerns | 26% | |
| Preference for boys' education | 18% | |

Table 3: Most common forms of GBV

| Forms of GBV | Relative Weight | Comments |
|--|-----------------|----------|
| Domestic violence/intimate partner violence | 78% | |
| Sexual harassment/assault/digital facilitated violence | 88% | |
| Harmful traditional practices (e.g., widowhood rites, FGM, early marriage) | 81% | |
| Human trafficking | 51% | |
| Workplace discrimination/harassment | 24% | |
| Political violence and intimidation | 61% | |

Data Analysis

Overview

The analysis of data collected from both the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) and the online survey provides an integrated understanding of the progress, challenges, and opportunities for women’s empowerment and gender equality in Ebonyi State. While the FGD offered deep contextual and narrative insights into local perceptions and lived realities, the survey captured measurable patterns from respondents across the six geopolitical zones, including Ebonyi State.

Demographic Profile

According to the survey data (N =94), 71.28% of respondents were female while 26.60% were male. Most respondents were between 18–29 years (49.3%), and a substantial majority (57.4%) possessed higher education qualifications (NCE, OND, HND, BSc, MSc, or PhD).

This demographic spread underscores that both young and educated Nigerians are actively engaged in issues relating to gender and women’s empowerment.

Understanding of Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment

FGD participants defined gender equality as the equal opportunity for men and women to participate in governance, politics, and development. Respondent D stated:

Gender equality is when women are given the same opportunity as men, to participate in politics, community governance, and so on.

Similarly, women’s empowerment was perceived as a multifaceted process of economic and social liberation. Respondent F added:

Women can also be given financial empowerment; that is, supporting them with money to start their own businesses.. to remove complete dependence on men for financial support.

Similarly, women’s empowerment was perceived as a multifaceted process of economic and social liberation. Respondent F added:

Progress in Women’s Political Participation

From the survey, 73% of respondents in the South East rated progress on gender equality as “marginal,” while only 9% rated it as “significant.” However, Ebonyi-specific responses highlighted tangible improvements. FGD participants cited the appointment of a female Deputy Governor, female Commissioners, and female Local Government Chairpersons as unprecedented milestones.

Respondent J noted:

Women have access to leadership positions. Currently, the Deputy Governor is a woman, the first in the history of Ebonyi State.. The SSG is also a female.

Despite these advancements, representation remains limited compared to men, especially at legislative and party executive levels.

Barriers to Women’s Political Participation

Both data sources identified economic limitation, cultural norms, and party structures as the most significant constraints. In the survey, 86% of South East respondents cited cultural/traditional norms as a barrier, while 84% mentioned poverty and lack of resources. FGD participants reinforced this view:

Women are structured differently, tender in nature, not violent. The men feel that leadership demands masculine and violent nature. -RB

The patriarchal nature of the society favours the men to be in leadership positions. Economic factor, political party structure and mode of operation favour the men. - RD

This intersection of cultural and financial constraints highlights why women’s inclusion efforts must target both social reorientation and resource access.

Stakeholders and Their Influence

Respondents in the FGD identified multiple actors influencing women's representation, including political leaders, traditional institutions, and religious and community figures.

The Governor is the dominant State actor.. Others are the party chairman, deputy governor.. Senators and Rep Members also command some influence.

— Respondent F

CSOs and INGOs were acknowledged for advocacy and technical support, while political parties and the private sector play critical roles in candidate sponsorship. Respondent H explained:

The NGOs help fund the programmes and activities of the CSOs and also lobby the government at the federal and State levels.

Attitudes Toward Women's Leadership

Survey results showed 79% of Ebonyi respondents expressed willingness to support or vote for a woman for the highest political position, while 20% were uncertain and 1% declined support. This cautious optimism reflects ongoing social reorientation efforts in the state.

Social Beliefs and Gender Norms

Cultural beliefs continue to shape gender relations. About 64% of respondents agreed that patriarchy limits women's capacity to participate in decision-making, while 16% believed there are little extents in which culture and patriarchy limits women's participation in decision-making. In the FGD, Respondent E emphasized:

Our social and gender norms should also be revisited.. A woman should be able to make decisions on her own, not waiting for her husband to decide for her.

This reinforces that gender transformation requires both institutional reform and mindset change.

Recommendations from Respondents

Key strategies proposed by participants include:

- Implementation of 35% affirmative action and reservation of elective and appointive positions for women.
- Reduction of party form costs to enhance accessibility.
- Gender-sensitive reforms in political party structures and constitutional amendments to entrench equity.

As Respondent A put it:

Reserve some elective and appointive positions for women. Also, implement the 35% affirmative action and make party forms affordable.

Summary of Insights

The integration of both datasets highlights that Ebonyi State has made visible progress in women's inclusion at the executive level but continues to grapple with structural and cultural challenges that impede equitable political representation. Respondents demonstrated nuanced awareness of both policy-level enablers and community-level barriers, aligning with trends across the South East region.

Recommendations

Overarching aim: convert symbolic gains and legal frameworks into durable, systemic improvements that increase women's economic agency, reduce GBV, and open political pipelines targeting both institutional reform and community norm change.

PRIORITY RECOMMENDATIONS (high level, with justification)

A. Strengthen VAPP enforcement and survivor-centered GBV services (Immediate — 0–6 months)

Why: Desk review shows VAPP domestication but implementation gaps; FGD reports survivors being told to “settle at home,” and survey data show GBV as highly prevalent.

What to do (high level):

1. Rapid enforcement audit of VAPP implementation (hotspot mapping of shelters, prosecution rates, police GBV training).
2. Expand or operationalize one-stop/survivor centres and ensure rural referral pathways.
3. Establish emergency legal aid and community paralegal rosters.

B. Create an Economic–Political Pipeline for Women (Immediate - Medium)

Why: FGD repeatedly links asset denial (land, economic trees) with inability to fund campaigns; survey flags poverty as a top barrier.

What to do:

1. Seed fund/grant + mentorship program for aspiring women leaders (paired with financial literacy).
2. Legal aid + mediation support to adjudicate inheritance/land claims (casework + strategic litigation).
3. Pilot community land-rights mediation model in two LGAs (one Afikpo, one Ohaozara).

C. Political party reforms and candidate access (Immediate → Medium)

Why: Parties deliberately exclude women via high form fees, late meetings, and intimidation — FGD called it “a calculated plot to exclude women.” Survey shows limited participation.

What to do:

1. Convene a multi-party engagement with NWTF, INEC, and state party chairs to adopt a women-friendly code: cap/waive fees for women, schedule reasonable meeting times, guarantee security at primaries.
2. Introduce party-level quotas or reserved slots for women, and require transparent candidate vetting.
3. Provide party-level training on gender inclusion for local party officials

D. Domesticate GEO provisions / Strengthen state gender policy & budget (Medium term)

Why: Desk review indicates lack of an operational State Gender Policy and GEO Bill not domesticated, limits accountability and budgetary commitments.

What to do:

1. Fast-track a State Gender Policy and adopt gender budget lines in MDAs.
2. Launch a domestication campaign for the Gender & Equal Opportunities (GEO) principles at state level (legal review, Cabinet briefings).
3. Establish a Gender and Inclusion Monitoring Committee with civil society representation.

E. Community norm change & male engagement (Immediate → Long term)

Why: Culture and traditional practices are repeatedly cited as the top barriers (survey: 85% in SE) and FGD confirms ritual exclusions (sacred decision spaces).

What to do:

1. Long-running radio and town hall campaigns with traditional rulers, faith leaders, and male champions.
2. Community dialogues paired with accountability scorecards (public tracking of appointments, party reforms, and GBV response).
3. Integrate gender modules into existing adult education and leadership programs.

F. Strengthen data systems & accountability (Immediate → Medium)

Why: Desk review flags data gaps; survey skew is urban/educated; state needs gender-disaggregated dashboards.

What to do:

1. Build a simple Gender Scorecard for Ebonyi (candidacy, elected women, VAPP prosecutions, shelters, GBV referrals).

| Recommendation | Key activities | Lead(s) | Timeline | Indicators (measurable) | Resources/Notes |
|--|---|--|--------------------|--|--|
| A. VAPP enforcement & survivor services | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Rapid enforcement audit (shelters, prosecutions). 2. Expand one-stop centers; hire/ train GBV caseworkers. 3. Create legal aid/paralegal rosters in target LGAs. | MWASD, State GBV Taskforce, Police, NWTF, Spotlight partners | Immediate | Audit report produced; operational survivor centers; prosecutors trained; increase in prosecutions/referrals | Technical support from INGO partners; funding for shelters; MOUs with MoJ & Police |
| B. Economic-political pipeline (grants mentorship) | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Design merit-based seed grant + micro-loan facility for women aspirants. 2. Mentorship & campaign training. | NWTF, Local Political orgs, CSOs, banks, training | Immediate → Medium | Women grantees; women trained; who contest/are appointed within cycle | Small grants, mentorship stipends, training venues |
| C. Land & inheritance legal support | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Set up legal aid clinics; 2. Strategic case selection for precedent; 3. Community mediation with legal orientation. | Legal Aid Council, CSOs, Traditional leaders, NWTF | Medium | Cases supported; successful settlements; publicized precedents | Legal aid lawyers, community mobilizers |
| D. Party reforms & candidate access | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Convene party chairs; draft gender-friendly code; | INEC (observatory), State party chairs, NWTF | Immediate | Parties adopting code; primaries with monitored | Advocacy, convening costs, monitoring observers |

| | | | | | | | |
|---|--|---|-----------------------------------|--------------------|--|---|---|
| | 2. Pilot fee waivers/meeting time policies; | | | | | compliance; women contesting | |
| | 3. Security protocols for primaries. | | | | | | |
| E. Policy & gender budgeting | 1. Draft State Gender Policy & costed action plan; | MWASD, State Ministry of Finance, House | State of NWTF, Committee on Women | Medium | | Gender policy adopted; budget line items; budget execution for gender | Technical drafting team, budget advocates |
| | 2. Integrate gender lines in state budget; | | | | | | |
| | 3. Parliamentary briefings. | | | | | | |
| F. Norm change & male engagement | 1. Radio series & community dialogues; | CSOs, Faith/traditional leaders, Media houses, NWTF | | Medium → Long | | Dialogues; media reach; change in attitude metrics (pre/post) | Radio airtime, community facilitators, monitoring surveys |
| | 2. Male champion network; | | | | | | |
| | 3. Community scorecards. | | | | | | |
| G. Data systems & gender scorecard | 1. Design dashboard (INEC/NBS/MDAs & CSO inputs); | NWTF (lead), MWASD, INEC, NBS, CSOs | | Immediate → Medium | | Dashboard live; datasets disaggregated; published annual scorecard | Data analyst, M&E software, stakeholder verification workshop |
| | 2. Annual verification & publish; | | | | | | |
| | 3. LGA disaggregation pilot. | | | | | | |
| H. Youth & adolescent SRH (compl | 1. Integrate school WASH & menstrual supplies; | MoH, CSOs | MoE | Medium | | Schools with WASH supplies; adolescents reached | Procurement for supplies, training for school health staff |

| | | | | | |
|--|--|-----------------------------|---------------|---|---------------------------------------|
| ementa ry) | 2. Safe referral mapping for adolescent SRH. | | | | |
| I. Institutionalization of donor gains | 1. Review Spotlight/UN interventions; 2. Cost-transfer plan to MDAs; 3. Budget absorption. | MWASD, Donor partners, NWTF | Medium → Long | Interventions absorbed into state budget; funding sustained | Transition planning, donor-state MOUs |
| J. Media & public visibility | 1. Media training for women candidates; 2. Positive profiling campaigns. | Media houses, CSOs, NWTF | Immediate | Media pieces; media sentiment analysis | Media trainers, PR budget |

2. Annual publication & civil society co-validation workshop.
3. Push for LGA-level disaggregation of appointments and GBV reporting.

IMPLEMENTATION MATRIX (detailed)

Below is a condensed matrix. Timelines are bucketed (Immediate: 0–6 months; Medium: 6–18 months; Long: 18–36 months). Replace or adapt leads as NWTF sees fit.

MONITORING & EVALUATION — Proposed Indicators & Data Sources

Core indicators (examples — disaggregated by gender, age, LGA where possible):

- Number of women who register as aspirants (by party, LGA). — Source: Party registers, INEC.
- Number of women supported with seed grants/financial packages. — Source: NWTf program records.
- Number of GBV cases reported and prosecuted (VAPP related). — Source: Police/GBV referral centres.
- Number of operational GBV one-stop centres and their rural coverage. — Source: State GBV Taskforce.
- Number of land/inheritance cases supported and resolved in favour of women. — Source: Legal aid clinic records.
- Adoption of gender policies and budget lines (presence and % execution). — Source: State Budget Office, MWASD.
- Changes in public attitudes (pre/post community dialogue surveys). — Source: Rapid perception surveys.

Suggested frequency:

- Operational indicators: quarterly.
- Outcome indicators (representation, prosecutions, budget execution): annual.

Conclusion

The Ebonyi State validation under the National Gender in Nigeria Revalidation Study (2025) reveals a complex but coherent picture of progress, persistence, and possibility. The combined evidence from the desk review, online survey, and focus group discussion (FGD) underscores that while women's visibility in leadership has improved reflected in symbolic appointments such as a female Deputy Governor and Secretary to the State Government genuine structural transformation remains limited.

Across the data sources, culture, socio-economic inequality, and institutional inertia continue to shape women's lived realities in governance, economic participation, and personal security. The desk review confirms the existence of a supportive legal and policy environment, with instruments such as the National Gender Policy (2021–2026), National Women's Economic Empowerment Policy (2023), and the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Law (2018) providing strong normative frameworks. However, findings from the FGD and survey indicate that these frameworks are unevenly implemented, particularly in rural communities where awareness, funding, and enforcement mechanisms remain weak.

The online survey, which engaged a largely educated and urban demographic, reflects cautious optimism about the trajectory of gender equality but highlights that economic barriers and traditional norms still constitute the most significant impediments to women's empowerment. Over 80% of respondents reported that access to financial resources and insecurity and displacement are major determinants of women's ability to participate in politics or business. Similarly,

political exclusion remains entrenched with high nomination fees, late-night party meetings, and pervasive insecurity constraining women's political aspirations.

The FGD data reinforce these quantitative findings through lived narratives that lay bare the personal dimensions of systemic exclusion. Participants described inheritance denial, institutional bias, and normalized gender-based violence as everyday realities. One participant noted, "Political parties fix meetings at very late hours; it's nothing but a calculated plot to exclude women," These testimonies, supported by desk review insights, demonstrate how culture and gendered power structures intersect to limit women's voice and agency across spheres.

Despite these challenges, the study also records encouraging signals of resilience and reform. Civil society organizations, donor-funded initiatives, and active state gender structures including the Ministry of Women Affairs and the State GBV Taskforce have strengthened collaboration and advocacy around women’s rights, political participation, and protection services. The survey and FGD participants collectively recognize these developments and propose tangible solutions: enforcing the 35% affirmative action principle, expanding women’s access to economic resources, and institutionalizing gender-responsive budgeting and data systems.

In essence, Ebonyi State stands at a critical juncture, one where policy foundations are in place, but implementation, funding, and sociocultural transformation must accelerate to translate legal and symbolic gains into everyday realities for women and girls. The path forward demands multi-stakeholder collaboration, government commitment to domesticate and finance gender frameworks, political parties’ internal reforms to ensure equitable access, and community-driven dialogues to dismantle harmful norms.

If these recommendations are pursued with political will, sustained funding, and robust monitoring, Ebonyi State could emerge as a model for subnational implementation of Nigeria’s gender commitments bridging the persistent gap between policy intent and lived experience.

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5.5 Annex 5 - The South South Report

Cross River State

1.0 Executive Summary

This report presents the validated findings of the Gender in Nigeria Report for the Cross-Rivers State, South-South geopolitical zone. The analysis draws on evidence from a desk review, focus group discussions (FGDs), and a field-based questionnaire survey, collectively offering a nuanced assessment of progress, persistent gaps, and emerging challenges in advancing gender equality and women's empowerment within the region.

The findings indicate that there are increasing opportunities for women in education, politics, business, and leadership, particularly in Cross River State. However, persistent cultural, religious, and gender-based stereotypes continue to limit women's full participation and advancement in Nigeria's South-South region. To close this gap, gender-responsive reforms must be complemented by social reorientation, policy enforcement, and leadership empowerment for women and girls. Women's political advancement depends heavily on party systems and alliances, inclusive media narratives, institutional reforms, and sustained community engagement are key to improving fair representation at state and national levels.

The report concludes with strategic recommendations aimed at accelerating gender equality in the South-South zone including strengthening stakeholder advocacy and coordination for localizing laws like CEDAW and the Maputo Protocol, targeted investment in women's capacity building and entrepreneurship, especially at the community level, increased sensitization campaigns to shift harmful gender stereotypes and promote women's leadership and deepening accountability mechanisms to ensure that policies translate into measurable action, as advocated by NWTF and partners.

2.0. Introduction

In line with its mandate of closing the gender gaps at all levels of governance, the Nigerian Women Trust Fund (NWTF) conducted research to revalidate the national gender report reflecting new developments and trends in women leadership and political participation since publishing the last report in 2023¹⁵⁰. The broad objective of the research in Cross-Rivers State is to underscore trends in women's leadership and political participation against the background of the socio-economic state of women in Nigeria. This will contribute to national level research to revalidate the current National Gender in Nigeria capturing gender-disaggregated multi-sector indices and statistics, while highlighting new trends and occurrences shaping the subject matter.

The report encapsulates respondents' opinions on the trajectory of women leadership and political participation in Cross-Rivers State, formal and informal recruitment pathways for women participation in leadership, gender equity and the broader context of women participation. Analysis of data from desk review, Focused Group Discussion (FGD) and Survey, provides relevant findings and recommendations that will elicit stakeholders' actions towards improving women's representation at the decision-making table and the general standard of living for women and girls in Nigeria.

3.0. Methodology

Research Design

The revalidation of the Gender in Nigeria Report for the Cross-Rivers, South-South geopolitical zone, adopted a mixed-method qualitative research design. This approach combined desk-review analysis, participatory Focused Group Discussion, and field-based survey data collection to ensure a comprehensive and triangulated understanding of gender equality, women's empowerment, and socio-cultural dynamics within the state.

1. Desk Review

A systematic desk review was undertaken to collate and synthesize existing data sources. The review included relevant policy documents, government reports, gender indices, statistical datasets, and previous edition of the Gender in Nigeria Report. This process enabled the identification of prevailing gender trends, policy frameworks, and institutional responses to gender inequality. It also provided a foundation for aligning field-level data with existing evidence and national priorities such as the National Gender Policy (2021) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

2. Focus Group Discussion (FGD)

A Focus Group Discussion (FGD) was conducted in Cross Rivers serving as a participatory platform for community voices. A total of 10 participants (6 females, 4 males) were purposively selected across the Senatorial Districts in Cross-Rivers State, to ensure gender, age, and sectoral representation from civil society, traditional leadership, politics, and youth, women and groups. The FGD explored perceptions, lived experiences, and community-level insights on gender equality, socio-cultural norms, access to services, and the enabling environment for women's participation in leadership, politics, social and economic life.

3. Field-Based Questionnaire Survey

A structured questionnaire survey was administered through ODK Kobo collect across selected local government areas (LGAs) in Cross-Rivers State. The tool was designed to capture respondents' perceptions of gender equality, barriers to women's empowerment, and access to economic, political, and social opportunities. Field enumerators were trained on gender-sensitive data collection to ensure inclusivity and ethical integrity in engagement.

4. Data Analysis

Collected data were subjected to thematic analysis following transcription, cleaning, and coding. Qualitative data from FGDs and open-ended survey responses were analyzed inductively to identify recurrent patterns and themes, which were then aligned with the study's objectives. Quantitative responses from the field survey were summarized using descriptive statistics to complement qualitative insights. Findings were triangulated across all data sources (desk review, FGD, and field survey) to strengthen validity and reliability.

5. Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to international standards for research ethics and participant protection. All participants provided informed consent prior to participation. Privacy and confidentiality were maintained throughout data collection and reporting. Discussions were conducted in safe and non-discriminatory spaces, with sensitivity to participants' gender, cultural norms, and personal experiences. No personally identifiable information was disclosed in the analysis.

6. Data Quality Assurance

- To ensure the credibility and reliability of the findings, multiple quality control measures were implemented:
- Enumerator training on ethical engagement and gender-sensitive data collection.
- Pre-testing of instruments to refine clarity and contextual relevance and sign off by NWTF.
- Field supervision and spot checks to ensure adherence to protocols.
- Triangulation of data sources to enhance validity and reduce bias.

4.0 Key Findings

Data analysis of cross-rivers focus group discussion

Objective 1: Questions to determine opportunities and barriers for women and girls' advancement in Nigeria

Summary Deductions

What does gender equality and women empowerment mean to you?

Overall, FGD participants exhibited a strong conceptual understanding of gender equality and empowerment. Participants demonstrated a strong awareness that gender equality is fundamentally about equitable access to rights and opportunities. They recognize it as a human rights issue that should cut across social, cultural, and institutional boundaries. However, the conversation reveals a gap between knowledge and structural realities. There is an underlying awareness of structural and socio-cultural barriers that restrict women's advancement. However, most responses focus more on ideals than lived barriers, suggesting that conceptual understanding is stronger than practical engagement with real constraints.

From the responses, many participants equate gender equality with ensuring that men and women have equal access to opportunities, rights, and responsibilities.

P10: *"It's about equal opportunities for all the sex, particularly women, especially those that are vulnerable, so that they will have equal right to participate in whatever that is happening."*

P4: *"Gender equality is the equal rights, responsibilities, duties and opportunities for both men and women, even girls and boys."*

(P2) *"Empowerment is breaking the barrier that exists between men and women by either culture or family standards."*

(P5) *"Whatever thing I have the rights to do every lady also has the rights to do so."*

Source: FGD Cross-Rivers State

Recommendations Based on Findings

- Conduct community-based sensitization programs to translate conceptual understanding into practical advocacy and behavior change.
- Engage traditional, religious, and community leaders in dialogue to challenge discriminatory norms that limit women's empowerment.
- Encourage gender-responsive budgeting and inclusion in policy processes to ensure that women's voices are embedded in institutional reforms.

OBJECTIVE 1, QUESTION 2

Summary Deductions

What are the opportunities and challenges women and girls face in this region?

Participants across the FGD acknowledged increasing opportunities for women in education, politics, business, and leadership, particularly in Cross River State. However, persistent cultural, religious, and gender-based stereotypes continue to limit women's full participation and advancement. The data shows that while enabling structures (such as education, free political forms, and gender-focused policies) exist, socio-cultural norms and patriarchal practices still constrain women's confidence, land ownership, and political ambitions.

Formal systems increasingly promote gender inclusion such as free political nomination forms for women, gender allocation quotas, and equal access to education. However, structural access does not guarantee participation due to informal cultural and social restrictions.

***There are educational opportunities.. they give opportunities for both male and female to contest. (P3) "In politics here.. women are practically involved, unlike the north." (P1)
Source: FGD Cross-Rivers State***

Respondents, affirmed persistent cultural and religious barriers exacerbated by cultural beliefs and traditions, especially around marriage, inheritance, and leadership which reinforces inequality as major barriers. "They tell you that as a lady, you must follow the tradition of this family and worship certain gods." (P1) "Women are not allowed to own land in some parts." (P10), "Some churches preach against women joining politics or leading." (P9) FGD Cross-Rivers State

Patriarchal systems remain deeply entrenched, manifesting in both traditional customs and religious doctrines. Women's advancement often clashes with social expectations of submission and domesticity. Even where formal equality exists, internalized inferiority and social ridicule suppress women's assertiveness in leadership spaces. These norms are self-perpetuating, sometimes internalized even by women. Similarly, although women are active in business and farming, they lack access to capital, ownership rights, and decision-making platforms. Women's economic participation is visible but not empowered. Ownership insecurity especially in land and property weakens women's financial independence and limits their leadership potential.

A woman's wisdom is compared to that of a goat. P2)

Women have insecurity; the fear of the unknown stops them from acting. - (P1)

Even if women buy land, when the husband dies, the family takes it. (P4) "Women can own land, but marriage becomes a barrier. (P7) Source: FGD Cross-Rivers State

Nevertheless, respondents affirmed the existence of opportunities even though they are unevenly distributed and socially constrained. While, education and gender-focused policies in the region are strong enablers, but culture, religion, and inheritance norms remain core obstacles. Women's progress is further hindered by economic disempowerment, lack of confidence, and male dominance in political spaces. Even in socially progressive states like Cross Rivers, traditional practices subtly undermine gender equality.

Recommendation

Despite notable progress in education and political awareness, cultural and structural inequalities still limit women's full advancement in Nigeria's South-South region. To close this gap, gender-responsive reforms must be complemented by social reorientation, policy enforcement, and leadership empowerment for women and girls.

OBJECTIVE 1, QUESTIONS 3

Summary Deductions:

How do women in these states, in the state cross river states now and the communities access health care? Is it affordable? Is it safe for both genders and age?

Respondents affirmed that while healthcare facilities exist across Cross-Rivers State, particularly at the primary health care (PHC) level, there are significant disparities in access, affordability, service quality, and manpower. Perceptions of accessibility differ between urban and rural communities, and free healthcare programs are inconsistently implemented. It portrays a picture of a healthcare system with visible infrastructure but invisible barriers. Accessibility without affordability or quality does not translate into equitable healthcare. Bridging this gap requires sustained government funding, community engagement, and gender-inclusive reforms in Cross River State's health system.

Healthcare facilities exist, but accessibility varies by location. Urban residents experience better service availability, while rural dwellers face geographic and infrastructural barriers - (P4). Almost every local government has primary health centers.. it's highly accessible to women.- (P5), In the communities.. the facility is there but the people are not there to give the services.” (P9), Source: FGD Cross-Rivers State

For affordability of health care services and cost burden respondents affirmed that:

It's free.. but when I went again, everything was being paid for. They say it's free but you still have to pay. - (P6) A woman in emergency for CS was asked to pay #200,000 before treatment. - (P9) Free healthcare is often nominal; hidden or inconsistent fees undermine affordability. Many poor women and single mothers struggle to pay for delivery or surgery, even in public hospitals. Respondents also affirmed inequities between Public and Private Healthcare Public health centers lack services, so you go to the private.. but it's too expensive. - (P4) Source: FGD Cross-Rivers State.

The private sector fills service gaps but is unaffordable to the poor. Public health centers lack key services, forcing patients into high-cost private care.

While women are targeted for maternal health services but still face economic and social vulnerability during emergencies. Men and elderly groups are often excluded from outreach priorities. Moreover, shortages in human resource and capacity gaps have continued to reduce service quality. Even when facilities exist, skilled health workers (especially midwives and specialists) are insufficient

***. Most free medical outreaches are for women and children. (P5)“Some women have to deliver alone or borrow money for CS. - (P9)
Source: FGD Cross-Rivers State.***

Deductively, while Cross River State has made notable strides in expanding healthcare access, significant challenges persist in affordability, workforce distribution, and service quality. The FGD respondents highlight that healthcare access is not equitable it favors urban areas, those who can afford private services, and those who are informed about available programs.

Recommendation

- Deploy mobile health units and equip PHCs in remote areas and monitor maternal and child health policies to eliminate hidden charges.
- Recruit, train, and motivate health workers, especially midwives and nurses.
- Strengthen community outreach on preventive health, cancer awareness, and early diagnosis.

OBJECTIVE 1, QUESTION 4

Analysis of Violence Against Women and Girls in Cross River State Communities

Summary Deduction

The focus group data reveals that women and girls in Cross River communities experience multiple forms of violence, including sexual violence, domestic abuse, economic deprivation, and neglect by social protection systems. Sexual violence is rampant at night, often perpetrated by street gangs known as “**Scolombo boys**”, while domestic violence and partner neglect are common within households.

As Participant 1 (P1) noted,

You can see women like this, these street boys.. you see them raping women.. they will just hide somewhere if you're alone, you're gone. - Source: FGD Cross-Rivers State

The perpetrators, often referred to locally as “**Scolombo boys**” and “**Lacasera girls**”, are described as street-involved youth who operate from “barracks” in areas such as Atekong, Ikon, and Bayside. This reflects a breakdown of community security and normalization of gang-related violence against women.

Many women remain in abusive situations due to poverty, lack of awareness, and weak institutional support. Participant 6 (P6) recounted a friend’s experience of chronic spousal abuse, saying,

She was having a blue eye and bruises all over her face.. my husband has been beating me. - Source: FGD Cross-Rivers.

Another case involved a young mother abandoned by her partner, starved, and left to care for her baby alone. These stories underscore entrenched gender power imbalances and economic dependency that trap women in abusive relationships.

Although social welfare services exist, they are poorly known, underfunded, and ineffective, leaving survivors without real protection or justice. Therefore, violence is systemic and normalized, worsened by insecurity and poverty, awareness and access to support services are very low and existing protection systems lack enforcement and responsiveness. In essence, the data reflects a cycle of gendered violence sustained by poverty, silence, and weak protection systems. Breaking this cycle requires multi-level intervention from community sensitization to institutional reform and empowerment of survivors.

Recommendations:

- Deepen awareness on women's rights and reporting channels through anonymous and accessible helplines
- Empower women economically to reduce dependency on abusers.

OBJECTIVE 1, QUESTIONS 5

Summary Deductions

Analysis of the Connection Between Violence and Women’s Political Participation

The data reveals that violence particularly emotional, psychological, sexual, and verbal abuse profoundly limits women’s agency, voice, and leadership, especially in political spaces. Respondents highlight that these forms of violence are not isolated incidents but are embedded in both domestic and political structures, creating a culture that discourages women from active participation and leadership.

These violence undermines women’s confidence, voice, and participation in politics. FGD respondents noted that constant disrespect and verbal abuse in political spaces make women feel unwanted and inferior. As one said,

when women are abused.. they lose the inner energy to participate. Source: FGD Cross-Rivers.

Early-life sexual abuse also leaves lasting trauma that causes many women to withdraw from public life, especially without access to therapy or support.

Another respondents also noted that in politics, women face “emotional violence and verbal violence... shouting, commanding, and disrespect in front of people”, underscoring how humiliation and verbal abuse diminish confidence and authority in public spaces. This social dynamic reinforces the stereotype that politics is a “male space,” pushing women to withdraw rather than compete.

when women are abused.. they will be demoralized.. they will lose this inner energy to participate.- Source: FGD Cross-Rivers.

This suggests that violence erodes women’s intrinsic motivation and sense of belonging in political or leadership environments. The repeated emotional and psychological undermining causes women to self-censor, doubt their abilities, and disengage from leadership opportunities.

The discussion also connects childhood sexual abuse to adult withdrawal from public life. One participant observed that

A woman abused as a child.. grows up not wanting to be involved.. she always wants to withdraw. Source: FGD Cross-Rivers.

This indicates that violence has long-term psychological effects that can silence women's voices from early life, perpetuating generational cycles of underrepresentation and exclusion. The lack of access to therapy or psychosocial support further compounds this, leaving survivors without the means to heal or reclaim agency.

Conclusively, violence against women is not only a human rights violation but also a barrier to democratic participation, weakening societies, silences women and weakens democracy by excluding their voices from leadership and decision-making.

Recommendations:

Create safe, respectful political environments; provide psychosocial support; mentor women leaders; enforce laws against political and gender-based violence; and promote awareness to challenge gender stereotypes.

OBJECTIVE 1, QUESTION 6

Summary Deductions

What are the enablers of Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) and Its Impact on Political Participation

Respondents provided insight into how community norms, leadership attitudes, and local justice structures shape responses to violence against women. While it is evidenced that some communities appear to be taking steps to discourage domestic violence, the response also reveals underlying gender biases and social hierarchies that may indirectly perpetuate inequality and hinder women's agency and political participation.

For instance, the village head's pronouncement against men who beat women indicates emerging awareness and leadership intervention to curb gender-based violence. However, the community's reaction "what if a woman beats a man?" still dominates local discourse. The leader's selective handling of cases involving women suggests that justice remains personalized and informal, lacking institutional mechanisms that ensure fairness and protection.

The participant affirms that that **"it is generally perceived in my community that women do not abuse men,"** which reinforces stereotypical gender roles men as aggressors and women as victims. While this perception may create sympathy for women, it also infantilizes them, positioning women as subjects of protection rather than active agents of change or leadership. Such societal framing limits women's perceived capacity to hold authority or participate equally in governance. The respondent admits, **"there are no enablers that even help women come out of whatever abuse they have."** which reflects the limited formal support systems, such as referral centers, community-based protection committees, or state-level gender desks, that can respond to violence or empower survivors to rebuild confidence an essential prerequisite for political participation.

Recommendations

- Strengthen and or establish community-based gender desks or committees that include women leaders, to ensure fair handling of violence cases and reduce male-centered decision-making.
- Develop monitoring mechanisms linking traditional institutions with formal justice systems to track and sanction cases of gender-based violence.
- Implement continuous community dialogues, media campaigns, and male engagement programs that challenge patriarchal perceptions and promote mutual respect. Collaborate with youth and women's groups to foster intergenerational change in attitudes toward women's rights and political leadership.

OBJECTIVE 1, QUESTION 7 & 8

Summary Deductions

What are the Actions Discouraging Violence and Persistent Areas of Disadvantage for Women?

The narratives (P7, P9, and P10) reveal a complex social dynamic where some communities are beginning to take visible actions against gender-based violence and abuse of authority, yet deep-rooted patriarchal, economic, and cultural barriers continue to limit women's voice, autonomy, and political participation.

P7: You slapped the first female vice chairman, and now you have slapped another female leader, why have you not slapped the chairman who is a man? .. he was impeached. - Source: FGD Cross-Rivers

This example demonstrates accountability and collective community action against violence and abuse of power. The community leaders' decision to impeach the male councillor for repeatedly assaulting female political figures shows that local governance systems can serve as deterrents to gender-based violence when leadership takes a stand. There is a growing intolerance for violence against women in politics, signaling gradual social progress. However, such actions may still be reactive rather than institutional, relying on moral outrage rather than clear laws or policies.

Consequently, the home environment remains a primary site of women's disempowerment, particularly for married women. Economic exclusion and social conditioning within marriage translate to low self-efficacy and reduced political participation. Even when educated or career-driven, women face pressure to conform to traditional gender expectations.

There are groups of men.. that it's only men that should position themselves, it's only men that should have the money, it's only men that should do everything and women should not have a say. Source: FGD Cross-Rivers

This quote underscores entrenched patriarchal belief systems that assign power, authority, and decision-making exclusively to men. Married women are particularly constrained by economic and psychological dependence, which limits their ability to express opinions or engage in public life.

Key areas where women are still disadvantaged.

Broadly, participants affirmed that women are still disadvantaged in terms of limited income, property ownership, and livelihood opportunities as economic dependence heightens vulnerability to abuse, cultural/religious and gender ascribed roles still prioritize men's authority and restricts women's voice and leadership aspirations while political violence and intimidation against women in leadership discourages women's political participation undermining their self-confidence and public engagement.

OBJECTIVE 1, QUESTION 9

Summary Deductions:

The Extent to Which Economic Background Influences Socioeconomic Status

The data reveals that economic background profoundly influences socioeconomic status, power, and dignity. Participants affirms that wealth dictates access to voice, opportunities, and social respect, while poverty breeds exclusion and vulnerability. To build an equitable society, Nigeria must address structural economic barriers through inclusive policies, ethical leadership, and cultural reorientation that restores human value beyond material wealth.

The data also reveals a strong consensus among participants that one's economic background plays a decisive role in shaping social standing, access to opportunities, and overall life outcomes. Participants highlight how wealth not only determines material stability but also affects social respect, political inclusion, educational mobility, and psychological confidence. The discussion cuts across economic, social, and moral dimensions, showing that economic inequality remains a major determinant of social hierarchy in Nigeria.

***He who does not have money does not speak in public.
P5. If you have a sustainable economic background, it
sustains you and keeps you stable.
P1 Source: FGD Cross-Rivers***

Deductively, economic background serves as a stabilizing force that allows individuals to maintain consistent livelihoods, plan for the future, and avoid vulnerability during crises. Conversely, economic instability leads to social and financial fragility, limiting one's ability to progress socioeconomically. Financial stability directly influences access to education, healthcare, and employment, which collectively define socioeconomic status.

***A young man is not by age, it is by the
amount of money that you have.
Source: FGD Cross-Rivers.***

This demonstrates a cultural internalization of materialism, where financial strength dictates public recognition and power. Poor economic foundations perpetuate cycles of poverty and exclusion from political and social life.

***Those from good economic backgrounds.. have safety,
insurance, savings.. and the confidence and aspiration. P6
Even in education, if you don't pay money to some people..
you won't be admitted." P1 Source: FGD Cross-Rivers***

These quotes reveal systemic corruption and monetization of opportunities, where wealth determines access to political power and education. The implication is that meritocracy is eroded, and economic privilege reproduces itself, excluding the poor from social mobility.

Recommendations

- Promote Equal Access to Opportunities
- Strengthen social protection policies (grants, scholarships, job creation schemes) that support individuals from poor economic backgrounds. Enforce anti-corruption mechanisms in education and public service recruitment to reduce the monetization of access.

OBJECTIVE 1, QUESTION 10

Summary Deductions:

Analysis: Stakeholders' Efforts to Promote Gender Equality and Women's Economic Empowerment

FGD respondents agree that Stakeholders in Cross River State ranging from government agencies and CSOs to religious bodies and community leaders are making measurable strides toward gender equality and women's economic empowerment. Through training, sensitization, and advocacy, women's participation in business and leadership is gradually improving. However, respondents opined that to achieve full transformation, efforts must move beyond short-term empowerment drives to systemic reform, mindset change, and institutional accountability that guarantee equal opportunity, confidence, and agency for all women.

More specifically, the discussion among FGD participants reveals a multi-stakeholder ecosystem government agencies, NGOs, CSOs, private sector, religious institutions, and individuals actively promoting women's empowerment and gender equality in Cross River State.

There are a lot of policies put in place here in Cross River State.. they identify women, they train them every day.. after the training, they will empower them.

P1 Source: FGD Cross-Rivers

Participants acknowledged that the state government, through the SME sector, is implementing policies and business development programs targeted at women. Women artisans, traders, and entrepreneurs are identified, trained, and empowered with resources. This shows a structured state intervention aimed at boosting women's participation in the economy. However, the impact is likely limited to selected beneficiaries and may not address systemic issues like market access, scaling, or long-term sustainability.

Recently, Her Excellency gathered women and empowered them with a token to start up something.. at least there was something.

P3 Source: FGD Cross-Rivers

Moreover, participants affirmed that CSOs like GEO Foundation and Dresbaugh Foundation are engaging in grassroots sensitization and skill-building, targeting adolescent girls and young women. These efforts are focused on early mentorship, capacity-building, and awareness creation to break cycles of marginalization.

Over the past three to four weeks I have been to different secondary schools addressing girls.. teaching them skills and things to know as young girls. P4

Over the months and years, we've been going out to different rural areas here in Cross River State.

P8 Source: FGD Cross-Rivers

Participants also affirms that gender equality requires male involvement and family-level mindset change. Engaging men as allies helps challenge stereotypes and foster a more supportive environment for women's empowerment.

It starts from the family.. we don't want to see the females in our lives as weaker vessels. P8

Source: FGD Cross-Rivers State.

Moreover, while some participants believe that there has been significant progress (estimated at 70%), with more women engaging in business, leadership, and public life. However, self-limiting attitudes, fear of leadership, and personal choices among women slow down progress.

Even though we are not yet there, at least we are a step ahead. P3 Source:

FGD Cross-Rivers

This reflects measured optimism about the trajectory of progress.

Recommendations

- Strengthen Institutional Frameworks to scale up state-led SME programs to reach rural and marginalized women, ensuring long-term funding and monitoring.
- Deepen Collaboration to foster partnerships between government, NGOs, and the private sector to pool resources and harmonize interventions.
- Promote Accountability and Evaluation to assess the effectiveness of empowerment initiatives beyond short-term outcomes.

OBJECTIVE 2: Women’s Participation in Decision making, Leadership and Governance

QUESTION 1

Do you think women and men are being well represented in political and appointment position in this geopolitical zone?

Summary Deduction

The data reveals a pervasive gender imbalance in political and leadership representation within the geopolitical zone, reflecting both structural and attitudinal barriers to women’s participation. Respondents repeatedly emphasized that women remain underrepresented in political and appointed positions. As P5 bluntly put it,

***women are not well represented; men are higher than the women.” Similarly, P2 noted that despite the national policy target of 35% affirmative action, we have not even reached that.. my community, they are just men in that council.
Source: FGD Cross-Rivers State.***

This statement underscores the persistent dominance of men in decision-making spaces and the exclusion of women from influential forums.

Several cultural and behavioral factors also hinder women’s active participation. As P5 explained,

***most women shy away from positions.. they have good qualities of a leader but still say, no, we cannot go.
Source: FGD Cross-Rivers State.***

This reflects how self-exclusion, intimidation, and gender stereotypes reinforce male dominance. P2 further illustrated this, recounting that in mixed-gender settings, women often feel “intimidated... especially in cases where it’s husband and wife.” These experiences highlight the psychological and social constraints limiting women’s political agency.

Nevertheless, participants recognized the need for sensitization and empowerment initiatives to break these barriers. One participant asserted, “Without sensitization, you can’t even pass information... it’s high time women come as a full force.” Source: FGD Cross-Rivers State. Role models like Aisha Yusuf were cited as examples of fearless women leaders who could inspire others to challenge the status quo.

OBJECTIVE 2, QUESTION 2

Do you think which gender, either the male or the female, have more leadership position and why?

Summary Deduction

The data clearly shows that men dominate leadership positions due to a mix of cultural norms, gender stereotypes, and family dynamics that continue to disadvantage women. As P1 confidently stated,

It’s the men of course, because we have this energy to thrive.. we don’t downplay ourselves.
Source: FGD Cross-Rivers State.

This perception reinforces the traditional belief that men are naturally more assertive and capable of leadership, while women are seen as “emotional” and easily “demoralized.” Such stereotypes create a psychological gap that discourages women from aspiring to leadership roles.

Cultural and traditional norms remain powerful barriers. P3 observed that “*culture plays a very significant role... in leadership,*” Source: FGD Cross-Rivers State. This shows how entrenched beliefs about gender roles still shape who is considered fit to lead. Similarly, P8 highlighted how family approval and marital expectations influence women’s participation: “*They are looking back at their marriage... if the husband agrees that yes, you can pick up that position... they don’t care what the society will say.*” Source: FGD Cross-Rivers State. This indicates that domestic consent and support are often prerequisites for women’s leadership in many communities.

However, some participants also reflected emerging supportive attitudes toward women’s empowerment. P5 shared, “I own a program for women in leadership... I said let these ladies lead,” Source: FGD Cross-Rivers State. Suggesting that advocacy and mentorship can help challenge traditional barriers. Yet, as P5 lamented, many women still decline leadership roles, saying “no, we cannot lead,” showing how internalized gender bias and lack of confidence persist. Albeit, while men currently dominate leadership spaces, intentional cultural shifts, family support, and institutional reforms are essential to closing the leadership gender gap.

Recommendations:

- Promote gender-sensitization programs targeting both men and women to challenge cultural stereotypes about leadership and capability.
- Strengthen mentorship and leadership training for women and girls to build confidence and skills for political and organizational leadership.
- Engage families and communities in awareness campaigns emphasizing the importance of supporting women’s public participation.
- Enforce gender quotas in leadership and governance structures to create equitable representation and model inclusion.

OBJECTIVE 2, QUESTION 3

In your opinion generally, what's your understanding of women's political participation and representation in elected position?

Summary Deduction

The data highlights that women’s political participation and representation in elected positions remain complex and challenging, shaped by biases, double standards, and societal expectations. Participants acknowledge that women leaders like Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala have been “outstanding,” demonstrating women’s capacity for excellence in governance. However, as P8 noted, “them being elected is one thing, and they representing the gender... is another, Source: FGD Cross-Rivers State.” suggesting that election does not automatically translate into meaningful gender advocacy or sustained leadership success.

Several participants pointed out that women leaders often face heightened scrutiny and unrealistic expectations. P5 observed that,

As a woman in leadership.. people are expecting so much from you.. if you do below the expectation, next time they won't give you again. P4 challenged this unfairness, stating, before we even go into power, you already assume that we cannot do.. when we now do something wrong, they will say it's because she's a woman.

Source: FGD Cross-Rivers State.

This illustrates the double bind women face expected to outperform men but judged more harshly when they falter. P3 added that such pressures cause women to “lose confidence” and disengage, perpetuating underrepresentation.

Cultural perceptions also play a role, with P1 and P10 describing cases where women leaders were removed from office due to alleged “attitude” or “character misfit.” As P8 explained, women often “have to act like men” to gain authority, but this assertiveness is later criticized as being “bossy.” Source: FGD Cross-Rivers State. These narratives reveal persistent gendered stereotypes that undermine women’s legitimacy in leadership roles.

Despite the negative stereotypes, women have proven capable and effective in politics, however, society’s double standards, cultural biases, and unrealistic expectations continue to hinder their political growth and representation.

Recommendations:

- Promote leadership training and mentoring to help women navigate political spaces with confidence and resilience.
- Implement gender-sensitivity programs for the public and political institutions to reduce bias and normalize women’s leadership styles.
- Create accountability and support systems for women in office—focusing on professional capacity-building rather than punitive removal.
- Encourage balanced media representation that highlights women’s achievements instead of amplifying their mistakes.

OBJECTIVE 2, QUESTION 5 & 6

What are the major stakeholder's involvement in determining representation of women in government at the state and national level? What are the constraint women face in participating in politics.

Summary Deduction

The data reveals that political parties, social networks, and the media are the most influential platforms in determining women's representation in government, while bias, favoritism, and lack of support continue to hinder equitable inclusion. P1 emphasized that "it's through the party... from the unit level to the central level," Source: FGD Cross-Rivers State illustrating that party structures remain the primary gatekeepers of women's political participation. Women who are active, consistent, and visible within party activities "she mobilizes women... so when opportunity comes, they will call her back" Source: FGD Cross-Rivers State... are more likely to be considered for leadership roles.

Beyond political parties, P3 and P8 highlighted community organizations and media as alternative channels of influence. P3 advised that women should "be relevant... even from the church or society," showing that religious and civic groups can also serve as steppingstones into political leadership. P8 underscored the media's role in shaping perceptions, noting that "the narratives media push out there is what frames our minds." This suggests that positive media representation can enhance women's visibility and challenge stereotypes.

However, several participants cited systemic constraints such as "financial constraints, violence, lack of support, and acceptance" (P6). P1 further noted that favoritism and political loyalty often favor men who "put in time, energy, and participation in day-to-day activities." Meanwhile, P5 pointed out that "favoritism comes in when... they bring in their wives," Source: FGD Cross-Rivers State indicating that nepotism and male gatekeeping limit opportunities for qualified women.

Recommendations:

- Strengthen women’s wings within political parties to ensure fair nomination processes and leadership development.
- Leverage media platforms to promote positive narratives of women leaders and counter bias.
- Provide financial and mentorship support to emerging female politicians to address funding and capacity gaps.
- Promote transparency and accountability within party systems to curb favoritism and nepotism.

OBJECTIVE 2, QUESTION 8

How has stakeholder’s role in endangering women political participation and representation, example the CSO, political parties, private sectors? so what has been stakeholder role in endangering, when we talk about endangering, you know what it means, like endangering political participation for women.

Summary Deduction

The data reveals that stakeholders such as political parties, civil society organizations (CSOs), community groups, and private sectors play crucial roles in promoting or hindering women’s political participation and representation. Respondents acknowledged that, while progress is being made, participation remains limited due to low visibility of women, cultural barriers, and inadequate structural support.

P1 highlighted the importance of community-based engagement, noting that in “the case of the Obubra... the men always, from the background, try as much as they can to encourage the women to be part of every activity.” Source: FGD Cross-Rivers State. This shows that local leadership and inclusive community dialogues can help build women’s confidence and presence in public spaces. Similarly, P5 described youth organizations’ efforts to intentionally include women in leadership, stating, “most times we sit back and have to say, let’s involve these ladies in leadership... but most times these ladies are not found.” This underscores that while stakeholders are creating opportunities, women’s limited participation and self-exclusion remain major obstacles.

On a more institutional level, P8 recognized the policy and advocacy roles of CSOs and NGOs, citing examples such as “reducing waiver fees for women contesting,” and “the Violence Against Persons Prohibition Act which protects women from political violence.” She also emphasized that “international organizations support through funding, research, and mentorship programs,” highlighting the positive contributions of external stakeholders in creating enabling environments for women.

Overall, the data suggests that while stakeholders are increasingly promoting inclusion, more needs to be done to translate policy commitments into active participation. In essence, stakeholder roles have evolved from passive endorsement to active promotion, but sustained engagement and accountability are needed to make women’s political participation truly inclusive and impactful.

Recommendations:

- Strengthen collaboration between CSOs, political parties, and communities to ensure continuous sensitization and mentorship for aspiring women leaders.
- Institutionalize gender-friendly reforms, such as fee waivers, quotas, and protection from political violence.
- Encourage women’s consistent participation in civic and political meetings to increase visibility and readiness for leadership opportunities.

OBJECTIVE 2, QUESTION 10

What do you recommend should be done to increase participation of women in politics as appointees and elected public officers in government?

Summary Deduction

The discussion reveals that increasing women's participation in politics requires both attitudinal change and structural reforms. Participants emphasized that while advocacy and policies exist, women must also "dare to go out and get these things" (P7) rather than wait for appointments. The statement "power is taken, not given" captures the urgency for women to become proactive and assertive in pursuing political roles. However, participants also identified multiple systemic barriers, sexual exploitation, lack of mentorship, weak policy implementation, inadequate funding, and religious discouragement that hinder women's advancement.

P7 observed the hypocrisy of political systems where "the same people that clamor support for women are the same people who will shut the door against women." This highlights the gap between rhetoric and real inclusion. P3 and P5 stressed the need for policy enforcement and financing mechanisms, arguing that "policies are very good, but they are not implemented," and that women need access to campaign funds comparable to men's. Religion and culture also emerged as influential factors; P7 shared how her pastor discouraged her from contesting, showing how religious gatekeeping can silence capable women.

Equally, participants highlighted the role of mentorship and early exposure. As P3 noted, "family should encourage the girl children to start even in school positions... grooming themselves to come out tomorrow." This reflects the need to build leadership confidence from the family to the public sphere.

Recommendations:

- Mass sensitization and political education to build women's confidence and emotional intelligence.
- Implementation of gender-friendly and enforceable policies ensuring equitable representation (e.g., 50-50 quotas).
- Establishment of dedicated funding and mentorship networks for aspiring female leaders.

- Religious and community leaders should champion women’s political inclusion, reframing faith as supportive of leadership.
- Men should act as allies, providing information, mentorship, and financial support without exploitation.
- Conclusively, increasing women’s participation demands both empowerment from within and systemic fairness from without, ensuring women are not just invited into politics but prepared and supported to lead effectively.

OBJECTIVE 3: Recommendations for Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment, particularly for Women's Political Participation and Leadership.

QUESTION 11

What would you recommend to improve the implementation of national, regional and international law that promotes gender equality and women economic health.

Summary Deduction

The data highlights the participants’ strong awareness of both the existence of legal frameworks promoting gender equality and the persistent gap in their implementation at the national, regional, and international levels. P5 referenced “Acidome... a law for the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women,” likely referring to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW, 1979), a key international treaty ratified by Nigeria in 1985 that commits states to end gender-based discrimination (UN Women, 2024). However, as participants noted, these frameworks often remain “on paper” without sufficient local enforcement, advocacy, and monitoring.

Participants stressed the need for stakeholder collaboration and advocacy to translate these laws into meaningful action. P1 recommended “stakeholders meeting, stakeholders advocacy,” emphasizing multi-sector engagement including government, NGOs, and women’s groups to ensure accountability and community-level implementation. This aligns with findings by ActionAid Nigeria (2023), which emphasize that effective gender law enforcement depends on continuous dialogue among stakeholders and the inclusion of women’s voices in decision-making processes.

There was also strong recognition of grassroots empowerment and capacity building as essential to achieving equality. P1 called on organizations to “invest in Cross River women... they are dynamic. They should build capacity,” highlighting the importance of context-specific investment in women’s leadership and entrepreneurship. Similarly, P3 countered gender stereotypes by affirming that “contrary to the opinion that women are too emotional, women are bright... we can manage positions.” This reflects the need for interventions that not only enforce legal equality but also transform social norms that undermine women’s competence and agency.

Moreover, participants expressed appreciation for the role of the Nigeria Women Trust Fund (NWTF) in convening such dialogues, urging that “everything we said here is implemented” (P5). Their comments suggest that organizations like NWTF should expand sensitization and training campaigns for women and girls, particularly in areas such as STEM and economic inclusion, to align with national frameworks like the National Gender Policy (2006) and regional commitments such as the Maputo Protocol (2003).

In summary, to improve the implementation of gender equality and women’s economic empowerment laws, participants recommend:

Strengthened stakeholder advocacy and coordination for localizing laws like CEDAW and the Maputo Protocol.

- Targeted investment in women’s capacity building and entrepreneurship, especially at the community level.
- Increased sensitization campaigns to shift harmful gender stereotypes and promote women’s leadership.
- Accountability mechanisms to ensure that policies translate into measurable action, as advocated by NWTF and partners.

OBJECTIVE 3, QUESTION 12

How can we identify key areas and disadvantage when we asked? so they now mention education.

Summary Deduction

FGD respondents affirmed that while several initiatives exist to promote women and girls' participation in STEM and digital fields in Cross River State, structural gaps and limited sustainability continue to disadvantage women. Participants acknowledged visible progress through non-governmental and private efforts. For instance, P5 highlighted that

there are certain initiatives pushing women and girls into STEM.. like the American Girls Innovative and Girls in Tech.. they even give free scholarships to girls in Calabar. Similarly, P3 noted, we organize trainings.. we go out to schools to encourage girls to come into sciences, - Source: FGD Cross-Rivers State

Reflecting community-driven advocacy for female inclusion in science and technology.

Government involvement was recognized but often described as inconsistent or politically motivated. P1 mentioned that “the Ministry of Women Development Center... has been conducting series of vocational training for women, specifically in STEM and digital skills,” yet P8 criticized that “when the government does something, the impact... is not always as effective as compared to when NGOs or individuals do it. Source: FGD Cross-Rivers State” This underscores a perceived gap between policy and long-term empowerment impact.

Furthermore, digital inclusion and practical mentorship were identified as critical areas where women remain disadvantaged. Despite access to training, P8 emphasized that follow-up and continuity are lacking: “After three months, who does the follow-up?” The dialogue suggests that sustainable support systems, mentorship, and locally driven digital programs are essential for real empowerment.

Recommendation: Strengthen collaboration between government, NGOs, and private initiatives to ensure sustainability, mentorship, and follow-up mechanisms for women trained in STEM. Local community-based programs should be supported to bridge the effectiveness gap between policy and practice.

OBJECTIVE 3, QUESTION 13

What would you recommend to improving the implementation of national, regional and international laws that promote gender equality and women empowerment, women economic empowerment? what are the international...

Summary Deduction

Respondents highlights key recommendations to strengthen the implementation of gender equality and women’s empowerment laws at national and international levels. Participants emphasized monitoring, awareness, education, and accountability as critical enablers for effective enforcement.

P1 proposed that “from time to time, they should organize stakeholders’ meetings... and set up committees that make sure these laws are being implemented, Source: FGD Cross-Rivers State” underscoring the need for periodic collaboration and oversight among implementing actors. Similarly, P9 stressed weak monitoring as a barrier, noting that “most times when these laws are being given... there are not people out there to monitor and make sure these things... are being carried out effectively. Source: FGD Cross-Rivers State” This suggests a lack of institutional follow-up mechanisms to ensure laws move beyond paper commitments.

Awareness and education also emerged as central themes. P6 recommended “social engineering... something you are aware of that you can actually work with. In the same vein, P5 advised that gender equality laws “should be incorporated into the curriculum for secondary schools,” ensuring early legal literacy and cultural change among youths. Finally, accountability was stressed by P4, who argued that “there should be punishment attached to the law,” emphasizing that enforcement without sanctions encourages impunity. In summary, participants called for structured monitoring bodies, regular stakeholder dialogues, public sensitization, school-based legal education, and strict sanctions to ensure laws on gender equality and women’s empowerment achieve real societal impact.

Data Analysis Of Cross-Rivers Survey Responses

The survey questionnaire was analyzed using descriptive statistics to complement qualitative insights. Responses from Thirty-Four (34) participants in Cross-Rivers State, representing all senatorial districts in the South-South region, provided insights into key areas such as education, healthcare, leadership, and women’s empowerment. Findings were triangulated across all data sources (desk review, FGD, and field survey) to strengthen validity and reliability.

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Socio- Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

This section provides respondents bio-graphic information, such as their age, gender, education, marital status, and occupation. These details help to understand their background and how social and economic factors may influence men's and women's experiences and opinions.

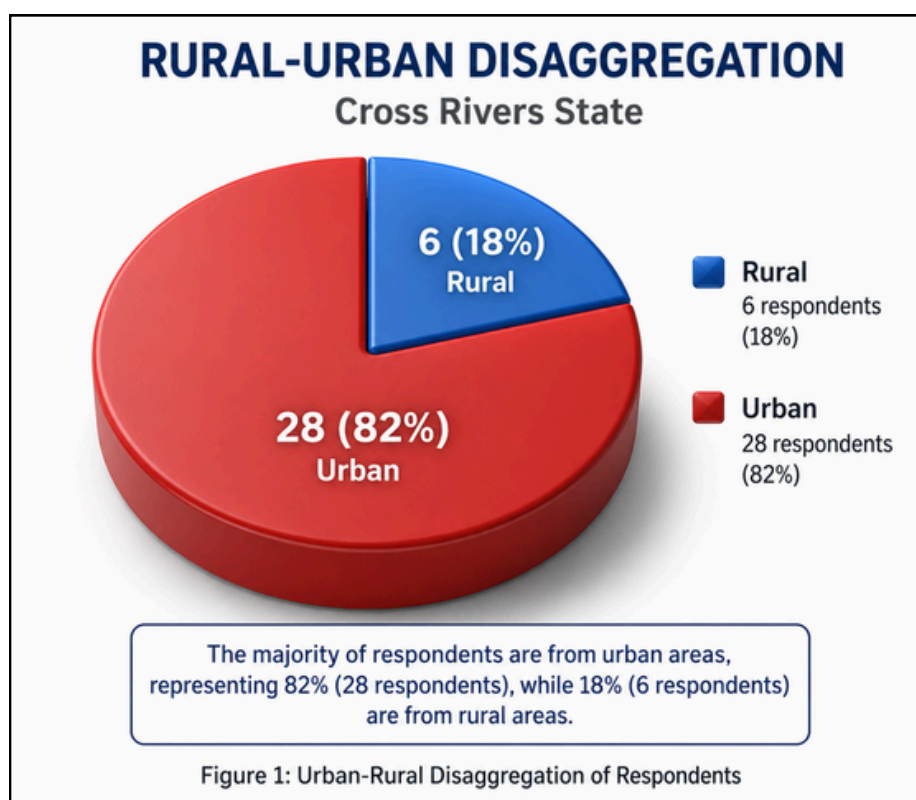


Figure 1 above shows that urban respondents make up 82%, depicting more participants living in urban/semi-urban centres in lieu of rural areas. Despite 18% of respondents being domiciled in rural areas, which shows limited participation of respondents from rural communities, participants mobilized for the Focused Group Discussion represent the voices of women and men in hard-to-reach rural communities.

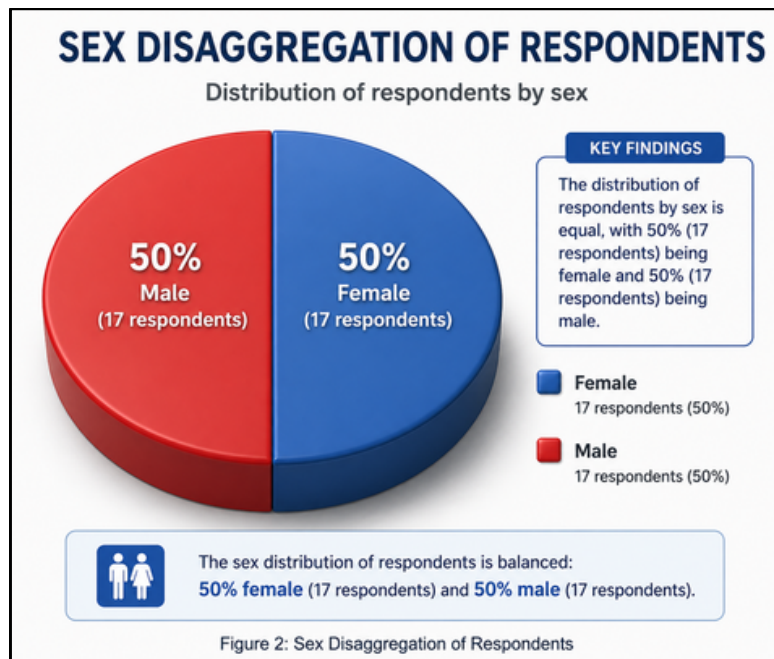


Figure 2 indicates an equal gender distribution across survey respondents, with males making up 50% and females 50%. This balance ensures equity to ensure more nuanced and inclusive data is obtained from the survey.

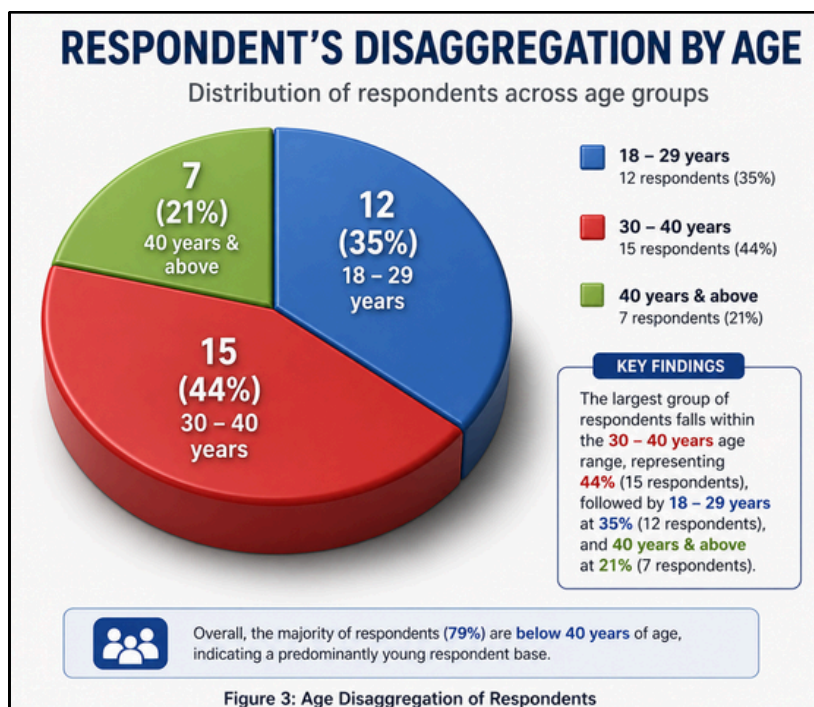


Figure 3 indicates that 79% of respondents are young adults/youths below 40 years from the voting age of 18, while 21% represents respondents above 40 years. This shows that young people may have more access, tech-savvy and can use digital platforms than the older generation. At this time of this research however, it is not certain the senatorial positioning of the respondent, albeit, it is established that respondents are primarily domiciled in urban or semi-urban areas.

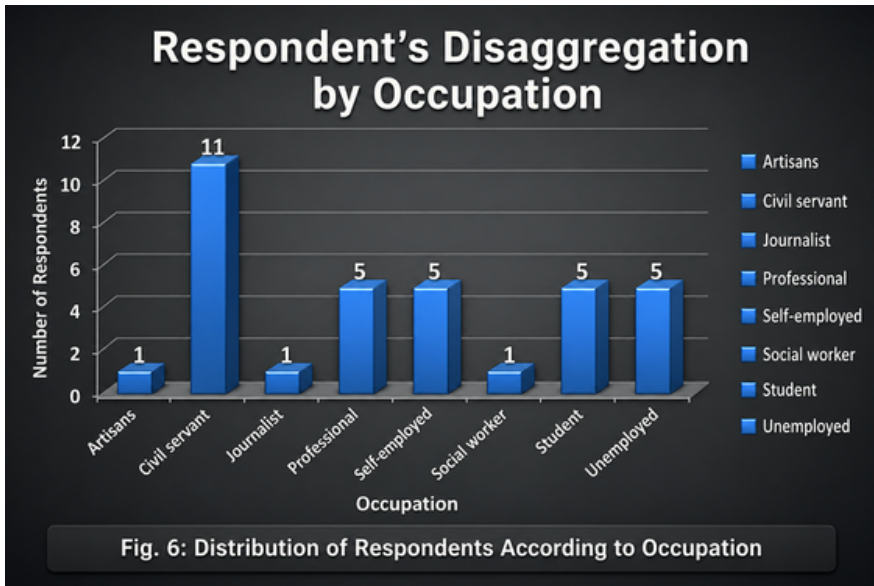


Figure 6 indicates that a majority of the respondents are either civil servants, students, professionals, self-employed and or unemployed which reflect the broader challenges of the economy where the citizens strive to make ends meet with women and persons with disabilities as the most impacted. This also restrains the capacity of women to participate actively in the politics and in decision making spaces.

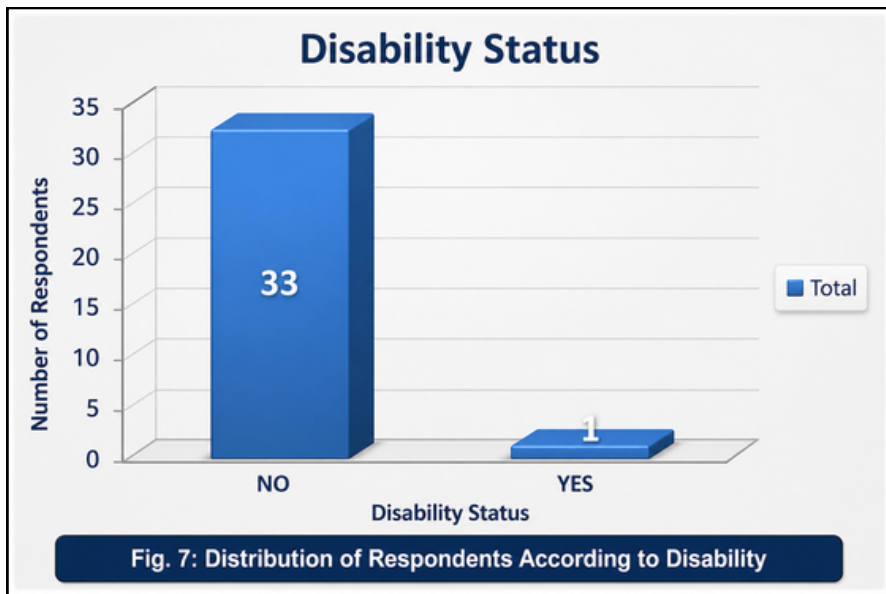


Figure 7 indicates that 97% of respondents have no disability, only 3% representing one respondent affirmed to having a form of disability. This is a reflection of how persons with disabilities still grapple with issues around access and social inclusion, hence, inhibiting their capacity to maximize their potentials in social and public life.

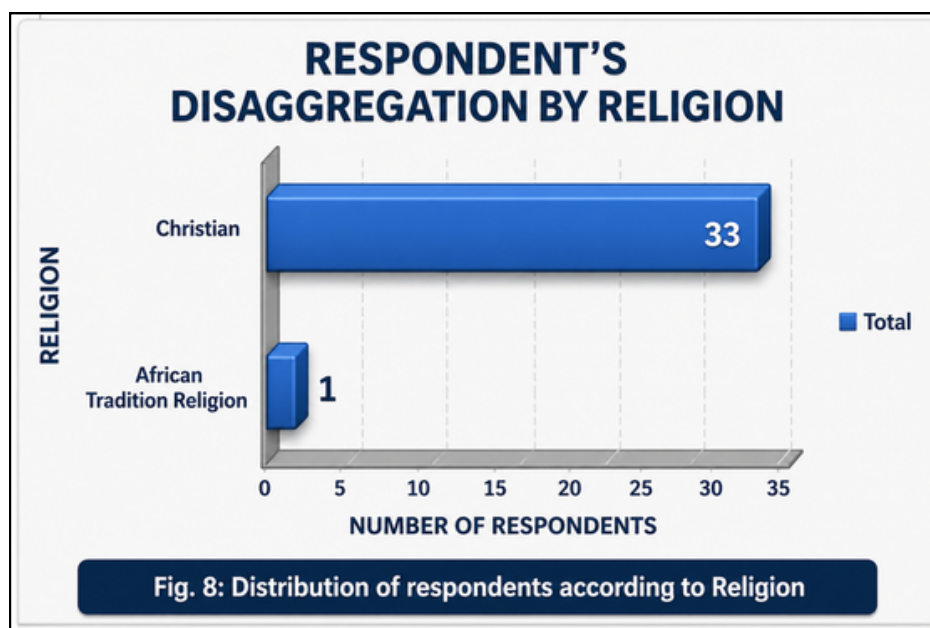


Figure 8 indicates that at 97% respondents are predominantly Christians reflecting the region’s dominant faith profile, while ATR make up 3%. Religion remains a factor in determining representation and participation of women in leadership and decision-making spaces in the South-South region.

5.6 Annex 6 - The South West Report Ekiti State

Executive Summary

This report presents a revalidation of the Gender in Nigeria report by the Nigeria Women Trust Fund, Abuja. It measures the equality progress and gaps in Nigeria, with a particular focus on Ekiti State and the South-West geopolitical zone. It draws on secondary data, institutional reports, and relevant national policy documents to assess the current status of gender equality and women's leadership empowerment in the South West geo-political zone in Nigeria. Specifically, this review examines progress, barriers, emerging issues, and provides evidence-based recommendations aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 5: Gender Equality. Significant progress has been made across several domains — notably in education, health, political participation, and gender-based violence (GBV) prevention frameworks. Ekiti State has demonstrated relative advancement compared to many states in Nigeria through its gender-sensitive laws, educational parity, and active civil society engagement.

However, major challenges persist. These include cultural and religious norms, limited access to economic resources, weak policy enforcement, digital exclusion, and rising economic hardship. Gender-based violence remains widespread, while women's participation in political leadership remains below 10% in the South-West subregion.

The report further identifies emerging issues such as climate change, insecurity, displacement, and mental health challenges that disproportionately affect women. It concludes with a set of actionable recommendations focused on governance, policy enforcement, economic empowerment, and gender-responsive budgeting.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Gender equality remains a cornerstone of inclusive development and social progress. Over the past decade, Nigeria has implemented multiple frameworks — including the revised Nigerian National Gender Policy (2021-2026), Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act (2015), and several other bills at different levels of passage at the National Assembly — all aimed at addressing gender disparities in the country.

The South-West region, historically known for higher educational attainment and progressive politics, offers a critical case for assessing how policy and culture interact in shaping gender outcomes. Ekiti State, in particular, presents a strong case for gender inclusion. It was among the first to domesticate the Gender-Based Violence (Prohibition) Law and enact the Equal Opportunities Law (2013). While some progress has been made, gender gaps remain in leadership, access to finance, and digital inclusion.

Ekiti State, in particular, presents a strong case for gender inclusion. It was among the first to domesticate the Gender-Based Violence (Prohibition) Law and Equal Opportunities Law. Yet, gender gaps remain in leadership, access to finance, and digital inclusion.

1.2 Objectives

The purpose of this revalidation report is to:

1. Review progress and challenges in gender equality within Ekiti State and the South-West zone.
2. Identify barriers limiting women’s participation in governance, education, health, and the economy.
3. Assess the effectiveness of gender-related policies and programmes.
4. Highlight emerging issues influencing gender outcomes.
5. Propose recommendations for the government, development partners, and civil society.

1.3 Methodology

This review relies primarily on a desk-based assessment using data from:

- National Bureau of Statistics (NBS)
- Federal Ministry of Women Affairs (FMWA)
- Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS, 2018; 2023 preliminary)
- World Bank Gender Data Portal
- Ekiti State Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development reports
- Civil society and development partner publications (UN Women, ActionAid, FCDO, etc.)

The analysis was guided by key gender indicators covering education, health, economy, governance, and legal frameworks. Data, primary and secondary, were collected and analyzed through a gender lens to identify disparities and progress relative to national and regional benchmarks.

1.4 Structure of the Report

The report is organized into the following sections:

- Progress – covering education, health, economy, political participation, and GBV.
- Barriers and Challenges – analyzing social, economic, and structural constraints.
- Policies and Programmes – assessing implementation and institutional frameworks.
- Emerging Issues – identifying recent dynamics such as economic hardship, insecurity, and climate change.
- Recommendations – proposing practical actions for stakeholders.

2. Progress

2.1 Gender Equality Overview

Over the past five years (2020–2025), Ekiti State and the South-West region have recorded measurable progress in advancing gender equality. Nationally, the period coincides with Nigeria’s efforts to localize the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and to accelerate the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In the South-West, state-level institutions, civil society organizations, and gender networks have taken active steps to promote inclusion in governance, education, health, and economic participation.

While the South-West continues to outperform most regions in gender parity indicators, intra-regional disparities persist, particularly between urban and rural areas, as well as among the poorest income groups.

2.2 Education

2.2.1 Access and Attainment

Education remains the strongest area of gender progress in Ekiti and the broader South-West. While official data for Ekiti and South West is not available, a close estimate might be drawn from a 2022 UNICEF/NBS report that put the female literacy rates in Southern Nigeria at 90%, compared to that of the North of 40% and the national average of about 59% in another report (NBS, 2024). Thus, Ekiti State maintains one of the highest female enrollment rates across Nigeria. According to the Ekiti State Bureau of Statistics (2023), the gender parity index (GPI) in basic education stands at 0.98, showing near parity between boys and girls.

Government initiatives such as the Home-Grown School Feeding Programme, Universal Basic Education (UBE), and the Adolescent Girls Initiative for Learning and Empowerment (AGILE) — implemented in Ekiti and other South-West states — have improved attendance and retention rates for girls, especially in rural areas. There are also non-formal adult literacy centres cited in Ekiti Government’s Education Statistics 2023 report which shows relatively high female enrolments (295 of 320 enrolments) in the centres.

2.2.2 Limitations of Cultural Gender Preference

Despite these achievements, deep-seated cultural attitudes continue to influence gendered educational outcomes. In some rural parts of Ekiti and Osun States, traditional norms still prioritize male education, especially where resources are limited. Parents often withdraw girls for domestic work or early marriage. A 2022 UNICEF field assessment found that one in five girls aged 14–17 in rural Ekiti had dropped out of school primarily due to financial constraints and domestic burden.

2.2.3 Quality and Safety of Learning Environment

Although female enrollment has improved, school safety and sanitation facilities remain concerns. Poor menstrual hygiene facilities, absence of female teachers in remote communities, and limited security measures in peri-urban schools discourage girls' attendance. Efforts by the Ekiti State Ministry of Education to integrate gender-sensitive infrastructure (e.g., separate toilets, female counselors) are ongoing but underfunded.

2.3 Health

2.3.1 Access to Healthcare

Women's access to healthcare in Ekiti State and the South-West has expanded through primary healthcare revitalization and the Basic Health Care Provision Fund (BHCPF). As of 2024, over 320 primary health centers (PHCs) in Ekiti were functional, with maternal services available in at least 70% of them (Ekiti Ministry of Health, 2024).

However, affordability and distance still hinder utilization, especially for women in rural settlements. Out-of-pocket expenditure remains high — over 70% of healthcare costs — which disproportionately affects poor households headed by women.

2.3.2 Maternal Mortality and Reproductive Health

Nigeria's maternal mortality ratio remains one of the highest globally (512 deaths per 100,000 live births, NDHS 2018; estimated 461 in 2023). The South-West fares better, with Ekiti recording about 230 per 100,000, yet this still reflects a major gender inequality. Causes include limited antenatal visits, skilled birth attendance gaps, postpartum hemorrhage, and delays in referral systems.

State-level interventions such as free maternal and child health programmes, community birth attendants' training, and conditional cash transfers have contributed to gradual reductions, but sustainability remains uncertain without consistent budgetary support.

2.3.3 Mental Health, Nutrition, and Infectious Diseases

Women in the South-West face emerging health concerns related to mental health, malnutrition, and HIV. Economic hardship and gender-based violence contribute to rising cases of depression and anxiety among women. Ekiti's 2024 State Health Review noted that one in four women attending PHCs showed symptoms of mild to moderate depression, yet mental health services remain limited.

Although HIV prevalence has declined nationally, women still constitute about 58% of adult cases (NACA, 2023). Nutritional challenges persist, particularly anaemia in pregnant women and stunting among children under five from female-headed poor households.

2.4 Economic Opportunities

2.4.1 Employment and Livelihoods

Women's economic empowerment has progressed modestly but remains constrained by structural inequalities. The South-West zone enjoys higher female labour participation (about 56%, NBS, 2024) than the national average (45%). However, most women are concentrated in low-income informal sectors — trading, petty business, and subsistence farming.

Several programmes support Ekiti women in business. There is the N1 billion soft loan fund established by the government and Access Bank in 2024. The government subsidises the interest rate by paying 25% while the beneficiaries pay only 10%. There was also the Renewed Hope Initiative by the First Lady, Mrs Oluremi Tinubu, in August 2025, which provided 500 Ekiti women with business equipment. The Ekiti Microcredit Agency was reported to offer credit support to women. These programmes have improved access to small loans for market women and female entrepreneurs in the state. Nonetheless, barriers such as collateral requirements, limited business literacy, and digital exclusion continue to hinder growth.

2.4.2 Access to Land and Inheritance

Women's access to land remains restricted by customary law. Despite constitutional guarantees of equality, traditional inheritance systems often exclude daughters and widows from owning ancestral land. The Ekiti Gender and Equal Opportunities Law (2013) provides statutory protection, but enforcement is weak at community level due to patriarchal customs upheld by traditional rulers.

In Oye, Ikere, and Ise Ekiti, community case studies, UN Women (2023) revealed that less than 10% of titled landowners are women. This limits women's access to agricultural financing and empowerment schemes that require proof of land ownership.

2.5 Political Participation

2.5.1 Representation in Leadership and Governance

The South-West has historically produced prominent female leaders — from Chief (Mrs.) Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti to Chief (Mrs) Efunroye Tinubu to Senator Oluremi Tinubu and Senator Biodun Olujimi. Yet, women’s representation in elective and appointive offices remains low. In the 2023 general elections, women held less than 8% of elective positions in the South-West and only 2 seats in the Ekiti State House of Assembly (Ekiti INEC Office, 2023).

Despite strong advocacy, party nomination processes, financial costs of campaigns, and patriarchal political culture continue to deter women. Initiatives such as NWTF’s Women in Politics Forum, INEC gender mainstreaming strategy, and Ekiti Women Arise Platform have increased awareness but have yet to translate into proportional representation.

2.5.2 Women in Bureaucracy and Civil Service

Ekiti State has fared better in public service inclusion. As of 2024, about 43% of senior civil servants were women, and women occupied 35% of permanent secretary positions. This progress reflects deliberate state policy and leadership commitment to gender inclusion.

2.6 Gender-Based Violence (GBV)

GBV remains a pervasive challenge despite legislative progress. The Ekiti State Gender-Based Violence (Prohibition) Law (2011, amended 2019) provides for prosecution, survivor protection, and psychosocial support. The GBV Management Committee and Sexual Assault Referral Centres (SARCs) have strengthened the institutional response.

Between 2021 and 2024, over 1,200 GBV cases were reported in Ekiti, with increased visibility of sexual violence and intimate partner abuse (UNFPA, 2024). However, many survivors still face stigma, slow judicial processes, and weak enforcement. Rural women, adolescents, and persons with disabilities are the most vulnerable.

Table 1 below provides a summary of gender progress indicators.

Table 1: Summary of Gender Progress Indicators in Ekiti State and South-West (2020–2025)

| Sector | Indicator | Status/Trend (2020–2025) | Remarks |
|-----------|-----------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Education | Female literacy rate | 85% (Ekiti, 2024) | Near gender parity |
| Health | Maternal mortality | 230/100,000 (Ekiti) | Declining but above global target |
| Economic | Female labour participation | 56% (SW) | Mostly informal |
| Political | Women in elective office | 8% (SW) | Low representation |
| GBV | Reported cases | 1,200 (Ekiti, 2021–2024) | Awareness rising |

3. Barriers and Challenges

Despite visible progress in gender equality and women’s development in Ekiti and the broader South-West region, entrenched social, economic, and institutional barriers continue to restrict women’s full participation in governance, education, health, and economic life. These constraints are often interlinked, reinforcing cycles of exclusion and inequality.

3.1 Cultural and Traditional Norms

3.1.1 Patriarchal Structures

Patriarchal traditions remain deeply rooted in the socio-political structure of Ekiti and neighboring South-West states. Customary systems vest authority predominantly in men, with traditional rulers and chiefs largely determining community decisions. Women, though active in social and market associations, rarely occupy leadership positions within traditional hierarchies.

In Ekiti agrarian communities—such as Ise, Ikole, and Ijero—traditional land tenure systems continue to restrict women’s rights to inheritance and property ownership. A 2023 UN Women Nigeria assessment noted that only 8–10% of rural women in South-West Nigeria owned titled land, and many widows were dispossessed after their husband’s deaths.

3.2 Poverty and Lack of Resources

3.2.1 Economic Inequality

Although the South-West is economically more advanced than other regions, gender disparities in income and wealth distribution remain significant. The National Bureau of Statistics (2024) estimates that female-headed households in Ekiti earn 28% less than male-headed households, with rural women disproportionately affected.

Female labour force participation in Nigeria remains about 48%, with lower participation in formal employment sectors (National Bureau of Statistics [NBS], 2024). Many women operate in the informal sector, where income, access to credit, business registration, and market infrastructure is limited and working conditions are poor. High inflation and subsidy removals in 2023 further eroded purchasing power, disproportionately affecting women in trade and small-scale agriculture.

Access to land and inheritance rights remains restricted, particularly in rural areas where patriarchal customary laws predominate. The Land Use Act (1978), though national in scope, is mediated locally by cultural norms that rarely grant women independent ownership rights. A 2023 study by the Nigerian Institute of Social and Economic Research (NISER) found that less than 12% of titled land in Ekiti is owned by women, even though women make up the majority of subsistence farmers.

To address these imbalances, the Ekiti State government has launched programs such as the Ekiti State Microcredit Agency Scheme, targeting women-owned small businesses, and has encouraged gender inclusion through the Ekiti State Gender and Social Inclusion Policy (2022). However, access to capital remains limited due to collateral requirements and weak financial literacy among rural women.

3.2.2 Access to Financial Services

Formal financial institutions still perceive women as high-risk borrowers due to collateral and guarantor requirements. Less than 25% of women-owned businesses in Ekiti have access to formal credit, according to the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN, 2024). Microfinance schemes, while numerous, often charge high interest rates, limiting their impact.

Government interventions such as the Ekiti Women Economic Empowerment Fund have provided some relief, but cover only a fraction of the population. Also, the National Financial Inclusion Strategy (2022–2026) recognizes women as a priority group, but implementation in rural Ekiti has been slow. Many women’s cooperatives operate informally and lack the capacity to meet bank documentation standards. Cultural restrictions on women’s access to land and inheritance also mean they have few assets to use as collateral for loans.

3.3 Limited Access to Education and Skills

3.3.1 School Dropouts and Low Retention

While enrollment levels have improved, retention remains a concern. Studies by UNICEF (2023) show that 18% of adolescent girls in rural Ekiti drop out of secondary school before completion. The primary reasons include teenage pregnancy (32%), poverty (29%), household labour (19%), and early marriage (13%).

The lack of gender-sensitive curricula and inadequate mentorship opportunities also limits girls’ motivation to pursue science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields. The digital gender gap continues to widen, with fewer girls gaining exposure to ICT-related skills, which limits their employability in emerging industries.

3.3.2 Vocational and Digital Skills Gap

Despite several youth empowerment initiatives—such as N-Power, Ekiti Digital Skills Project, and SMEDAN Women in Trade Programmes—the reach remains limited. Training often lacks follow-up support, tools, or funding to translate skills into sustainable livelihoods. Women in rural areas are particularly disadvantaged due to poor access to internet infrastructure and mobility challenges.

3.4 Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and Insecurity

3.4.1 Prevalence and Underreporting

GBV remains widespread across South-West Nigeria, with Ekiti recording one of the most documented incidences due to stronger reporting mechanisms. However, underreporting persists due to fear of stigma and distrust of the justice system. Between 2020 and 2024, over 1,200 cases were officially recorded by the Ekiti State GBV Management Committee, but experts estimate actual figures may be at least three times higher.

The National Financial Inclusion Strategy (2022–2026) recognizes women as a priority group, but implementation in rural Ekiti has been slow. Many women’s cooperatives operate informally and lack the capacity to meet bank documentation standards.

3.4.2 Link Between GBV, Poverty, and Mental Health

Economic hardship exacerbates GBV, especially domestic violence and intimate partner abuse. Women financially dependent on partners often endure abuse silently. Survivors of sexual assault face mental health consequences, including depression and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Limited access to psychosocial support and rehabilitation further worsens the cycle of vulnerability.

3.5 Weak Legal and Policy Enforcement

3.5.1 Inconsistent Implementation

Although Ekiti has been at the forefront of gender legislation—the Gender-Based Violence (Prohibition) Law (2011, amended 2019) and the Gender and Equal Opportunities Law (2013)—enforcement remains inconsistent. Many local enforcement officers lack adequate training, and court delays discourage victims from seeking justice.

The Ekiti Gender Management System, designed to coordinate gender mainstreaming across MDAs, is underfunded and lacks adequate monitoring frameworks. In several South-West states, gender policies remain largely symbolic, with limited integration into budgeting or sectoral planning.

3.5.2 Institutional Capacity Gaps

Institutions tasked with gender promotion—such as Ministries of Women Affairs and Gender Offices—often have limited human and financial resources. Frequent leadership changes, overlapping mandates, and political influence further weaken sustainability.

3.6 Political Participation

The South West has historically been one of Nigeria’s more politically active regions, yet women’s representation in governance remains low. In Ekiti State, women currently hold fewer than 15% of elective and appointive positions (INEC, 2023). While the Beijing Declaration (1995) set a global benchmark of 30% affirmative action, this goal has not been met at the state or local levels.

Factors contributing to this gap include gender bias within political parties, financial barriers to contesting elections, intimidation, and limited access to political networks. A 2024 survey by INEC and UN Women found that women in Ekiti cited “fear of political violence” and “lack of party support” as their top deterrents. Despite this, there are success stories—Ekiti produced Nigeria’s first elected female Deputy Governor (in 1999) and has recently seen increasing female engagement in civic organizations and advocacy networks such as Women Advocates Research and Documentation Centre (WARDC) and BAOBAB for Women’s Human Rights.

Table 2: Summary of Barriers

| Barrier | Area | Manifestation | Impact on Women |
|----------------|------------------------------|---|---|
| Cultural Norms | Patriarchal leadership | male preference in inheritance | Limits women’s autonomy and participation |
| Poverty | Income disparity, dependence | lack of capital | Economic exclusion, |
| Education | Dropouts | poor STEM participation | Skills gap and limited career options |
| GBV | Domestic and sexual violence | Physical and psychological harm, Weak institutions Weak law enforcement | Reduced trust in justice system |
| Finance | Collateral barriers | informal economy | Business stagnation |

4. Policies and Programmes

4.1 Policy and Legislative Framework

The South-West region, and particularly Ekiti State, has established one of the most progressive legal frameworks for gender equality in Nigeria. Between 2020 and 2025, the zone has implemented several laws, policies, and action plans aimed at addressing discrimination, gender-based violence, and women’s empowerment.

4.1.1 Gender and Equal Opportunities Law

Ekiti State remains a pioneer, being one of the first to domesticate the Gender and Equal Opportunities Law (2013), which aligns with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Beijing Platform for Action. The law guarantees women’s rights to education, employment, inheritance, and participation in public life.

However, its implementation is uneven. While urban awareness has increased, enforcement at the community level remains weak due to limited legal literacy and patriarchal traditions. The Ekiti State Gender Management System (GMS)—a coordination mechanism within the Ministry of Women Affairs—monitors compliance but is constrained by funding and staffing limitations.

4.1.2 Gender-Based Violence (Prohibition) Law

Ekiti has also led the fight against GBV through its Gender-Based Violence (Prohibition) Law (2011, amended 2019). The amendment broadened the definition of GBV, established stricter penalties, and created dedicated institutions like the GBV Management Committee and Sexual Assault Referral Centres (SARCs) at Ado Ekiti and Ikere Ekiti.

In 2022, the government introduced a Sex Offenders Register, which publicly lists convicted offenders—a bold step toward deterrence and transparency. Other South-West states, including Lagos, Ogun, and Oyo, have since adopted similar mechanisms.

4.1.3 Child Rights and Anti-Female Genital Mutilation Laws

All South-West states have domesticated the Child Rights Law, though enforcement varies. Ekiti’s version explicitly prohibits female genital mutilation (FGM), early marriage, and all forms of child abuse. The Ekiti State FGM Eradication Initiative (2020–2024), supported by UNFPA, recorded a 27% decline in FGM cases within four years (Ekiti Ministry of Women Affairs, 2024).

4.2 Governmental and Institutional Initiatives

4.2.1 State-Level Gender Structures

The Ekiti State Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development serves as the lead agency for gender equality programming. It coordinates multi-sectoral gender desks across ministries, departments, and agencies (MDAs).

In 2023, Ekiti launched the Women’s Development and Empowerment Strategy (WDES) to integrate gender budgeting and align women’s programmes with the SDG targets. Lagos, Oyo, and Osun have also adopted similar frameworks that incorporate gender-responsive budgeting into fiscal planning.

4.2.2 Women in Governance Initiatives

The Ekiti Women Arise Platform (EWAP), supported by the Nigerian Women Trust Fund (NWTF) and UN Women, has mobilized hundreds of women into leadership training, mentorship, and electoral readiness programmes. In 2022, 37 female aspirants from Ekiti participated in pre-election coaching sessions under the “Elect Her” initiative, improving visibility for women candidates in the 2023 general elections.

The National Gender Policy (2021–2026) has also been mainstreamed into state planning. However, most states, including Ekiti, are yet to meet the 35% affirmative action threshold for women in public appointments.

4.3 Donor and Civil Society Interventions

4.3.1 Nigerian Women Trust Fund (NWTF)

The NWTF has played a pivotal role in strengthening women’s participation in governance and leadership across South-West Nigeria. Its “Gender in Nigeria Revalidation Project” (2023–2025) focuses on generating data to inform advocacy, policy implementation, and institutional accountability. Through partnerships with state gender offices, civil society organizations, and individual young women across the country, the NWTF has enhanced the capacity of hundreds of women in political leadership, advocacy, and civic engagement in the South-West.

4.3.2 UN Women Nigeria

UN Women has supported gender mainstreaming in state policies and programmes through its Women’s Political Empowerment and Leadership (WPEL) initiative. In Ekiti, the project facilitated the establishment of a Gender Technical Working Group, composed of civil society, academia, and government actors.

The organization has also worked with traditional rulers through the HeForShe campaign, fostering male allyship in gender advocacy.

4.3.3 Other CSO Programmes

Other active partners include:

- FIDA, Ekiti Chapter – providing legal aid and advocacy for survivors of domestic violence.
- BAOBAB for Women’s Human Rights – supporting legal literacy and grassroots campaigns on inheritance rights.
- AWE (Academy for Women Entrepreneurs) – training women entrepreneurs in digital literacy and business management.
- Women Advocates Research and Documentation Centre (WARDC) – engaging in research on economic justice and political inclusion.

4.4 Regional Cooperation and Networking

South-West states have demonstrated growing inter-state cooperation through platforms like the Development Agenda for Western Nigeria (DAWN Commission), which now incorporates a Gender and Social Inclusion Desk. This mechanism promotes harmonized policy responses to gender inequality, particularly in education, health, and entrepreneurship.

Cross-state initiatives include:

Renewed Hope Initiative (RHI)/SDGs Women Empowerment Programme: a federal government-led programme that gave out business tools such as deep freezers, generators and industrial grinding machines to some 18,500 women across the South West, including Lagos and Ekiti states (Oyebanji, 2005). This was to foster economic independence and meet the Sustainable Development Goals.

The Women in Tech Academy – a programme by the Women’s Technology Empowerment Centre, otherwise called Women in Tech (W.TEC), that trained and graduated 491 women in Ondo, Lagos and Kwara states in April 2023. Regional Forum on Women in Politics (Ibadan, 2024) – aimed at mentoring women and harmonizing advocacy strategies ahead of the 2027 elections.

These efforts have improved knowledge-sharing, although coordination challenges persist due to resource constraints and varying state capacities.

4.5 Achievements and Gaps

4.6 Summary

While Ekiti and other South-West states have established commendable frameworks for gender equality, implementation remains hampered by weak enforcement, funding limitations, and uneven rural outreach. Sustained partnerships between government, donors, and civil society are critical to transforming policy gains into tangible outcomes for women and girls.

5.0 Emerging Issues Affecting Women in Ekiti and the Southwest

5.1 Economic Hardship and Unemployment

Nigeria's prolonged economic challenges—characterized by inflation, naira devaluation, and fuel subsidy removal—have disproportionately affected women. Female-headed households in Ekiti report reduced income and increased dependence on petty trade, often in informal markets with limited security or profitability.

According to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2024), female unemployment in the South West is at 38%, compared to 27% among men. Many women lost formal and semi-formal jobs during COVID-19 and have struggled to recover due to slow business reopening, high childcare costs, and limited access to recovery grants.

Moreover, the informal economy, where most women operate, offers no social protection, leaving them vulnerable to price shocks and medical emergencies.

5.2 Insecurity and Displacement

While Ekiti is relatively peaceful compared to northern Nigeria, insecurity remains a growing concern in parts of the South West. Cases of kidnapping, ritual killings, and community clashes have increased women's vulnerability, particularly in border towns like Ikole and Ise/Emure.

In displaced households, women often bear the double burden of caregiving and income generation with little institutional support. Fear of insecurity also discourages rural women from night trading or long-distance farming, thereby reducing income opportunities.

Reports from CLEEN Foundation (2023) and UN Women (2024) highlight that insecurity has increased women's dependency and exposure to sexual exploitation in unsafe areas.

5.3 Climate Change and Environmental Degradation

Environmental stressors—especially erratic rainfall, flooding, and land degradation—threaten women's livelihoods in Ekiti's agrarian communities.

Women farmers, who make up about 65% of Ekiti's agricultural workforce (FAO, 2023), suffer from reduced crop yields and post-harvest losses due to unpredictable weather. In addition, women's traditional reliance on firewood and water-fetching exposes them to further hardship as forest resources decline.

Few women are represented in climate policy dialogue or agricultural innovation programs. The Ekiti State Ministry of Environment has introduced the Green Ekiti Initiative (2023), yet it lacks gender integration and adequate funding to address women’s adaptive needs.

5.4 Health Crises: Maternal and Reproductive Health

Maternal mortality remains high despite modest improvements. The 2023 Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS) reports a maternal mortality ratio of 512 per 100,000 live births, with Ekiti performing slightly better at around 430.

Challenges include poor healthcare funding, shortage of skilled personnel, and limited access to reproductive health education.

In many rural areas, women still rely on traditional birth attendants. Mental health issues—postpartum depression, anxiety, and trauma from GBV—are rarely addressed due to stigma and lack of services.

The Ekiti State Health Insurance Scheme (EKHIS) has increased access to antenatal care, but enrolment among rural women remains below 30%. Family planning uptake is also low, limited by religious and cultural opposition.

5.5 Digital Exclusion

The digital divide continues to marginalize women in economic and civic life. Although the South West has higher internet penetration than other zones, rural women lag in access to digital tools.

Only 41% of women in Ekiti have ever used the internet, compared to 68% of men (NCC, 2024). Many female traders lack digital literacy to leverage e-commerce or fintech services.

This exclusion limits women’s participation in remote work, online learning, and political advocacy.

Civil society programs such as TechHer and SheCodes Africa are helping bridge the gap through training and mentorship, but more state-level investment is needed to scale up impact.

5.6 Access to Inheritance Rights and Land Ownership

Customary laws in Ekiti still largely deny women the right to inherit land or family property. Despite the Supreme Court ruling in *Ukeje v. Ukeje* (2014) affirming women’s inheritance rights, implementation remains uneven at community level.

In Ekiti, cultural beliefs persist that “land belongs to men” — a mindset that restricts women’s economic independence and agricultural productivity.

Although some local reforms, such as Ekiti Women Farmers’ Cooperative Movement, have facilitated land-leasing arrangements for women, the progress is uneven and often dependent on the goodwill of male chiefs.

6) Recommendations

The following recommendations are proposed to strengthen gender equality and women’s development in Ekiti State and the South West:

6.1 Policy and Legal Frameworks

- Strengthen enforcement of the Ekiti State Gender and Social Inclusion Policy (2022) through budgetary allocation, annual monitoring, and civil society engagement.
- Review and harmonize state laws with the VAPP Act (2015) and Child Rights Act (2003) for consistent implementation across all local governments.
- Domesticating inheritance and land rights laws in alignment with national and constitutional provisions to ensure women’s equitable access. Institutionalize a 30% gender quota in elective and appointive positions within state and local governments.

6.2 Economic Empowerment

- Expand access to microcredit through low-interest, gender-sensitive financing, prioritizing rural women’s cooperatives and small-scale traders.
- Establish vocational and entrepreneurship hubs for women and girls in each local government area.
- Strengthen agricultural extension services targeting women farmers and promote access to technology, storage, and markets.
- Create women-led cooperatives to facilitate access to land, inputs, and collective bargaining in agricultural markets.

6.3 Education and Skills Development

- Implement a conditional cash transfer program to support girls’ education, particularly for families below the poverty line.
- Improve school infrastructure and ensure safety from harassment or violence, encouraging re-entry for teenage mothers.
- Expand access to digital skills training through public-private partnerships with telecom and tech firms.
- Encourage mentorship and leadership programs for young women in tertiary institutions.

6.4 Health and Well-being

- Increase funding for maternal and reproductive health programs under the Ekiti State Health Insurance Scheme.
- Strengthen community health awareness campaigns targeting safe motherhood, family planning, and mental health.
- Train and regulate traditional birth attendants to ensure safe delivery practices in rural areas.
- Integrate mental health services into primary healthcare centres, particularly for survivors of GBV.

6.5 Gender-Based Violence Prevention and Response

- Strengthen community-level GBV response systems by expanding Sexual Assault Referral Centres (SARCs) to all senatorial districts.
- Enhance police and judicial capacity for speedy prosecution of GBV offenders.
- Partner with traditional and religious leaders to change harmful gender norms through dialogue and education.
- Establish survivor rehabilitation and reintegration programs, including psychosocial support and livelihood aid.

6.6 Digital Inclusion and Leadership

- Provide subsidized internet access and smartphones for rural women through targeted digital inclusion schemes.
- Integrate ICT literacy into adult education programs.
- Support digital entrepreneurship by linking women to e-commerce platforms and online financial services.
- Encourage women's leadership in technology, innovation, and digital governance initiatives.

6.7 Institutional and Donor Coordination

- Strengthen coordination between government, civil society, and donor partners on gender programming.
- Establish a Gender Coordination Desk within the Ekiti State Ministry of Women Affairs to track interventions and outcomes.
- Improve gender budgeting and data systems for better planning and accountability.
- Support continuous stakeholder engagement, including academia, traditional rulers, and community-based organizations.

7.0 Conclusion

Ekiti State and the broader South-West region have recorded notable progress in advancing gender equality, particularly in the areas of education, healthcare, and policy development. However, entrenched cultural norms, weak enforcement of laws, and economic barriers continue to limit the full realization of women's rights and potential.

To achieve sustainable development and gender justice, it is essential to strengthen gender mainstreaming across all sectors, including education, the economy, governance, and technology. A coordinated approach, combining government commitment, donor support, and grassroots advocacy, will be critical for promoting inclusive growth and empowering women across the region.

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 @womenfundng  www.womenfund.org
 @womenfundng  info@womenfund.org
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