**STOP-VAWIE PROJECT: A REPORT**

**Prepared for: NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTE**

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**Subject: FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS ON VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN ELECTIONS IN KOGI STATE, NIGERIA**

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# Key Words

Barter Sex The giving of sex in exchange for a favour (usually material) or commodity such as food, shelter, protection etc.

Culture All the material and nonmaterial products of human society including artefacts, technology and physical objects, and all abstract creations such as language, religious beliefs, customs, skills, family patterns and political systems

Psychological Violence Any act that causes or is likely to cause mental anguish, distress or pain or feelings of intimidation or low self-esteem. This includes humiliation, degradation, labeling, defamation, slander, hate language, false accusations and threats and coercion(e.g.death threats, threat of bodily harm, coercion to vote a particular candidate, threat to harm family, threat of divorce etc.)

Gender Roles ascribed to men and women by a given culture and the relations of power they generate

Harmful Traditional

Practices (HTPs) Demeaning customs and cultural taboos that discriminate against women and work to deny them access to socioeconomic and political resources, benefits and privileges

Physical Violence Any form of physical assault, with or without a weapon, including dragging a person from the polling station, forcibly taking a person’s voter card, assault, beating, murder, assassination, ritual killing, maiming etc

Sexual Violence Any act of a sexual nature that result, or is likely to result in, physical, psychological and emotional harm

Socioeconomic Violence Denial of opportunities and access to economic resources or political participation including exclusion from all such activity. Withholding of resources, destruction of property; gender role stereotyping

Violence A means of **control** and **oppression** that can include emotional, social or economic **force**, **coercion** or pressure, as well as physical harm. It can be **overt**, in the form of physical assault or threatening someone with a weapon; it can also be **covert**, in the form of **intimidation**, threats, **persecution**, **deception** or other forms of psychological or social pressure. (UN Declaration on Violence, 1993)

Violence against Women Any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life (UN Declaration on Violence, 1993)

# Executive Summary

This report presents and analyses data collected during focus group discussions held in Lokoja the capital of Kogi State on 12th October 2015. Two FGD sessions were conducted on behalf of the National Democratic Institute (NDI) as part of the objectives of the STOP-VAWIE project. FGDs provided a participatory approach to understanding the nature and context of violence against women during the 2015 and previous elections. Sixteen women participated in very lively and informative discussions – eight in each group to elicit maximum participation. FGD participants were critical stakeholders drawn from female voters, aspirants/candidates and election officials. The aim of the study was to foster an understanding of the contextual dynamics of violence against women in elections and assist policy makers, political actors and civil society activists to design well-targeted solutions.

**Key Findings**

The objectives served as a thematic framework for the study findings. The key findings are summarized below:

1. The women in Kogi State experience different types of election violence which can be identified as physical, sexual, psychological, socio-economic and harmful traditional practices.
2. Men are found to be at the leading edge of perpetrating VAWIE alongside the different societal structures at their beck and call which include security personnel, husbands and the youth.
3. Poor participation of women in election processes stems from the strong ideology of gender bias as heavily embedded in tradition.
4. Women withdraw from full participation in election processes due to VAWIE. This results in zero representation of women at all levels of decision making. This gender discrimination has led to lopsided development and poor leadership.
5. Awareness of existence of institutional mechanisms to curb VAWIE is at a low ebb among women in Kogi State and those who do know about them confirmed that they were not functional in the State.
6. Women in Kogi anticipate positive shift through short and long-term solutions to VAWIE.

# Introduction

## Background to the Study

In the last several years, there has been growing international attention to acts of violence and harassment against women in politics and an increasing recognition of the link between violence and the level at which women are active in public life, as well as how this impacts the validity of the democratic process. Violence against women is used as a targeted and destructive tool in various ways throughout the electoral cycle to dissuade women from participating as ***election administrators, voters, and candidates***. This has critical implications for the integrity of the electoral process because when women are prevented from voting for their preferred candidates, executing their campaigns, or fulfilling their mandate, democratic processes are effectively nullified. An election is not in compliance with international obligations and standards unless it includes the opportunity for full and equal participation by women as well as men to ­ act as *voters, candidates, election administrators and ob­servers*. However, when it comes to the fundamental right of men and women to participate in these processes, a variety of political, legal, social, economic and cultural barriers stand in the way of women being able to exercise such rights equally.

Within this context, NDI launched the Stop-VAWIE project. This initiative seeks to develop a new area of practice focused on gender based electoral violence. The project aims to produce targeted strategies and tools to document and mitigate violence that prevents women from participating throughout the electoral cycle. To achieve this Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were held as part of a data collection exercise being conducted in two selected States in North and South Nigeria respectively in relation to the 2015 gubernatorial elections, namely: Kogi and Bayelsa. Both states are on the threshold of run off gubernatorial elections to be held in November (Kogi) and December (Bayelsa) owing to past electoral disputes and judicial cancellations of election results. Findings from the FGDs are expected to contribute to evidence-based policy recommendations by NDI to relevant state and non-state actors and other stakeholders on how to prevent and mitigate electoral violence against women.

## Violence against Women in Elections: A Critical Issue for Nigeria’s Democratic Consolidation

The inadequate representation of northern women in politics, as candidates or as elected officials, or in the civil service or security agencies, is often blamed on cultural factors, particularly a more socially conservative form of Islam. Starting from a low base, increased representation of women in positions of authority and influence, as well as pending improvements to the legislative base and political environment, appears both possible and imperative.

Oftentimes, the Security services offer the ‘first line of defence’ in maintaining peace and social order. At times, however, the approach by which they do this has been criticised as heavy-handed by human rights groups, and unlikely to endear those alienated from the State or local Government. Although UN Women has supported the Nigerian Federal Police Force to develop its gender policy, this is not fully implemented and its effects have yet to be felt at community level. In regard to the military, women and girls are often intimidated by the presence of Joint Task Force (JTF) members at checkpoints. As in much of the rest of Nigeria, women and girls in the north remain vulnerable to gender-based and sexual violence and do not have access to proper protection, redress mechanisms or victim support services.

The gender-specific needs of women facing violent conflict tend to be ignored and women are left to pick up the pieces of their lives, and that of their wards, all alone (Para-Mallam, 2004, 2011). Often, women’s access to formal remedial measures is not prioritised because abuses against women and girls are primarily seen as a private matter. If cases of GBV are reported to police, they tend to get settled informally as the victim or the victim’s family often withdraw the case. Or the case fails to get prosecuted owing to the lack of thorough investigation by the police or inadequate evidence collection. Social stigma is leading to likely widespread under-reporting of cases of GBV.

There is growing recognition that women in conflict situations must not be viewed only as victims, but as powerful agents for peace and security in their communities, since women bear a heavy burden in conflict and post conflict societies, and reconstruct destroyed communities. While there have been discussions at all policy levels on women, peace and security, there has been less policy recognition of women as agents of change at the national and community level. This is the main reason why it is important to analyze women’s participation through the lens of peace processes. Peacebuilding and reconstruction efforts can be enhanced and sustained by including women in peacemaking. On the other hand, Heyzer (2004) makes the point that women, in some instances, have been found to perpetrate violence directly or indirectly as wives, informants or couriers. In other words, women’s engagement with violent conflict is problematic and not to be read off automatically in terms of female victimhood.

# Brief Profile of Kogi State

The Federal Military Government carved Kogi State out of Benue and Kwara States on August 27, 1991. Kogi is a state in the north-central zone of Nigeria and the most centrally located of all the states of the federation.  It is popularly called the confluence state due to the fact that the merging of Rivers Niger and Benue. Its capital is Lokoja. It shares common boundaries with Niger, Kwara, Nassarawa and The Federal Capital Territory to the north. To the East, the state is bounded by Benue and Enugu states, to the south by Enugu and Anambra States, and to the west by Ondo, Ekiti and Edo states. Lokoja, the Niger/Benue confluence town is the state capital. There are three main ethnic groups in Kogi: Igala, Ebira, and Okun; with the Igalas being the largest ethnic group in the state. There are also many mineral resources in Kogi, including iron, petroleum and tin.

Kogi contains 21 local government areas: Adavi, Ajaokuta, Ankpa, Bassa, Dekina, Ibaji, Idah, Igalamela-Odolu, Ijumu, Kabba/Bunu, Koton Karfe, Lokoja, Mopa-Muro, Ofu, Ogori/Magongo, Okehi, Okene, Olamaboro, Omala, Yagba East, Yagba West. The women of Kogi state tend to engage in trading, farming and fishing. Like other Nigerian women they constitute the social glue that holds communities together and take primary responsibility for domestic affairs. It emerged from the focus group discussions that fairly recently some began to venture into politics, many by default of replacing their deceased husbands in appointive or elective positions.

# Aim and Objectives of the Research

The overall aim of holding Focus Group Discussions in Bayelsa and Kogi States was to gain an understanding of the contextual dynamics of violence against women in elections. Such an understanding will assist policy makers, political actors and civil society activists to design well-targeted interventions for combating gender-specific forms of electoral violence. This in turn will help to improve the nature and level of female participation in Nigeria’s process of democratic consolidation. The specific objectives of the Focus Group Discussions were to:

1. Discover what specific forms and levels of violence female aspirants/ candidates, party activists, supporters and voters encountered during the 2015 gubernatorial elections in comparison to men’s experiences
2. Investigate the identity of the perpetrators of the various forms of electoral violence
3. Investigate the immediate and remote causes of electoral violence against women
4. Understand the potential or actual impact of violence against women on their ability to participate in the electoral process (as aspirants, voters, candidates etc.) as well as on the democratic quality of the election
5. Assess the nature and effectiveness of state or non-state institutional mechanisms in providing redress for female victims of electoral violence
6. Gain an understanding of women’s perspectives on possible solutions to electoral violence

# Methodological Issues

The methodology for the Focus Group Discussions hinged on an action-research strategy to give voice to women as political actors to articulate, describe, interpret and envision change in their experiences of election-related violence.

## The Research Method/Process

The Consultant, in consultation with NDI staff team, designed a Focus Group Discussion guide reflecting the six objectives of the study (see Annex 1). The FGD technique, being a participatory method, was conducted to elicit maximum participation from the discussants through an introductory ice-breaker (each person introduced somebody else), public consent to participate and interactive discussions. Two FGDs were held with eight (8) participants each – a total of 16 women consisting of voters, aspirants/candidates and election officials. A brief PowerPoint presentation on the nature and types of violence against women in electoral processes introduced discussions to ensure a shared understanding of the concept. Two (2) two-hour FGD sessions were held – one in the morning and another in the afternoon. The list of FGD participants is in Annex 2.

## Sampling

Non-probability criterion-based (i.e. purposive) sampling was used to select the FGD participants (the sample population) in order to achieve symbolic representation and diversity (see Sample Frame Matrix in Annex 4). The selection was based on specified characteristics to ensure the inclusion of diverse categories of female political actors (i.e. the sampling units): voters, aspirants, candidates, election administrators/observers and supporters.

## Data Analysis

FGD data was analysed by content analysis using NVIVO – a computer assisted qualitative data analysis (CAQDAS) package. The software facilitated the construction of a coding index for identifying key words, phrases, themes and patterns that emerged from the discussions.

# Data Presentation and Analysis of Findings

This section presents findings from the focus group discussions based on the six (6) study objectives outlined above. The data provides a situation analysis of women’s experience of election-related violence in Kogi state buttressed by anecdotes provided by FGD participants to contextualize research findings.

## Nature and Extent of Violence Against Women in Elections: A Situation Analysis of Kogi State

**Key Finding: The women in Kogi State experience different types of election violence which can be identified as physical, sexual, psychological, socio-economic and harmful traditional practices. These are borne out of the strong ideology of male gender dominance in the society.**

FGD participants were unanimous in their agreement on the fact that women in Kogi encounter all forms of electoral violence, which are rooted in the prevailing patriarchal culture of anti-female discriminatory norms and practices. According to some discussants, women function primarily as wives, mothers and family care-givers, and even breadwinners as they engage in different types of businesses ranging from farming, fishing and petty trading in clothing and other merchandise depending on what zone of the state the woman is from.

This traditional mind-set limits women from getting involved fully in public life or developing the skills and capacity to take advantage of societal resources and opportunities. FGD participants recounted numerous instances that exemplify structural female disadvantage and highlight the types and level of violence experienced by women during the 2015 elections, in Kogi State. For instance, female aspirants were sometimes ***physically*** stopped from either accessing venues for primary elections or even attending meetings of parties to which they belong.

The male folk also carry out violence against each other and women are affected in the process. A discussant said, men most times violently attack each other within the premises of the venues of party meetings or campaigns. ***Sexual*** violence is another form of control used intimidate and restrain female aspirants from standing for election. This form of violence is also sometimes meted out to party supporters by political thugs and miscreants. The following case was told by an FGD participant, which typifies the nature and extent of sexual assault vividly,

*‘During maybe a campaign, men threaten ladies that follows them to campaign. They use that advantage to take advantage of the ladies by raping them in the bush or in the cars. It happened to a lady I know in my area, Kogi L.G.A here. They went to a very typical village, at the end of the day the girl came back raped, in fact the father came and took the case to court. By the end of the day, the father said, ‘after all I born you, I didn’t born you for politics. I didn’t ask you to go and join politics, I didn’t ask you to go and campaign, I didn’t ask you to go and…’ do this and that. You know, that threaten will be inside the girl. Another lady will even be afraid. She went for a campaign as a party supporter. They now used the influence to rape her.’ (FGD: 12/10/2015)*

In Kogi State, it was discovered that sexual violence may also be perpetrated by ‘godfathers or party officials who expect female aspirants to provide sexual services in exchange for political favours. The fear and shame attached to sexual patronage in political life is a strong deterrent to many potential female aspirants and their families. Therefore, just as in Bayelsa, sexual patronage among the political class was cited as a reason husbands, families and society at large often dissuade their women from participating in politics. Those who insist on standing for office often end up getting divorced. An aspirant and women activist buttressed this point,

*Even though they know you are not doing what they think you are doing, the moment the family come together and say this is what they want, the men tend to follow that position. So it is very risky and dicey. It is either you marry the politics or you marry your husband. That’s why my … friend is divorced up till now.*

According to the aspirant, another female aspirant kept on saying that her husband had donated her to the party. It was later discovered that the husband had divorced her and ejected her out of the house with four children. Women who summon the courage to venture out also face ***psychological*** intimidation in the form of name-calling, hate speech, character assassination, and threats to coerce them to withdraw from the race. In addition to the threat of divorce or ostracism from husbands and other family members, there are various from of hate speech women get subjected to that breed fear and shame. FGD participants cited the following examples of name-calling, defamation and hate speech,

* *‘That woman! No, we will not vote for her’.*
* *‘She is a wayward woman. I will not vote for her, at the end of the day they will be sleeping with different types of men. They will be taking her from one hotel to the other’.*

One of the participants, an aspirant, gave an instance where other men called her husband names,

*‘Ol boy! Are you a fool? Is your wife not cheating on you? How would you allow your wife to go to Abuja alone? At times she comes back home 6pm. Are you the husband or you are her wife?*

Female aspirants may also receive open threats to step down from primary elections as highlighted by an aspirant,

*At times they call them openly to tell them to step down for the male candidates. So my friend insisted that she will continue so they allowed them to continue. At the end of the day, she was the only one that voted for herself, nobody voted her.*

When asked about the main challenges to female participation in elections, particularly in contesting for political office FGD participants said the lack of funds was key, and it constitutes a major form of ***socioeconomic*** violence. The culture of money politics that pervades the Nigerian political space is particularly debilitating for women who find it difficult to get the financial backing of political ‘godfathers’ without resorting to ‘barter sex’ in exchange. One participant, a homemaker, stated,

*Finance is a threat because politics these days has to do with money and most of our women they are into petty business. They don’t have that kind of money.*

Two female aspirants who sought to contest in the previous election in the State also had these to say,

*For instance, you know when a woman is contesting, even if you are a business somebody, the money will not be enough for you now, because in Kogi State, if a woman wants to contest for election, you will have [to have] a lot of money not even one million sef, more than that.*

*So without money in Kogi State, woman cannot stand and compete with men. But if you have your money, go ahead is there. Without money you can’t do it because when you are talking of ‘I have 10 million in my room’, somebody will boast out that he has 20 million. Where are you going with 10 million? You don’t have anywhere to go.*

Men are much more adept and better positioned than their female counterparts in raising sufficient social and financial capital for effective politicking. For one, FGD participants claimed men were better connected and thus found it easier to mount effective fundraising campaigns. This is rooted in men’s structural advantage as land and property owners as well as the high stakes they place on politics (likely owing to its lucrative payback for those who win elections). One of the participants elucidated this point,

*Because what these male candidates will do, they will go and borrow money, they will even go and sell their land to give the delegates. And delegates, they go for highest bidder. So at the end of the day, you will see yourself going nowhere. That was what happened. So even in appointing offices, then we had only one woman in the Kogi State House of Assembly. But today, no woman. So we’re going from frying pan to fire.*

***Harmful Traditional Practices (HTPs)*** constitute both an underlying cause and manifestation of violence against women according to FGD participants. For example, owing to their socially ascribed role of housekeepers and homemakers, women are marginalized from public decision-making and other activities, especially political. Consequently, Kogi society tends to prioritize and reflect male interests and neglect the needs of women and children. A women activist said,

*The harmful practises […] are the harmful traditional practises that a woman’s place is in the kitchen or home. The fact is that the men are not representing the women right. Now that the women are trying to represent themselves, to put those myths right and then it becomes a threat to the men because we have the manpower really. It’s women that are the mobilizers. We’ve been used as cheerleaders for too long.*

The ‘myths’ of female domesticity and subordination to men sustain male power and privilege, which come under threat when women depart from their traditional roles to contest elections. In practical terms, women’s domestic roles often preclude them from routine party engagements. For instance, women party members reported being left out of major political meetings as these meetings are said to hold at critical hours of the night. One of the FGD participants, a party member, asserted that,

*Having meetings in the middle of the night**you don’t expect a house wife, a mother to leave her matrimonial home to go for a meeting what do we discuss at night that we cannot discuss in the day? Those are part of the harmful traditional practises. It’s not good for your home and it’s not good for you as a woman. Because traditionally, we are supposed to be homemakers. But when we start going out at 11 o’clock and coming back at 4 am in the morning, the myth and belief is that you are characterless.*

The foregoing is actually an indicator that men perpetrate VAWIE by manipulating party machinery to suit their political interests.

## Perpetrators of VAWIE: Identity and Types

Discussion on the identity and types of VAWIE perpetrators showed that they consist of individuals, groups and society at large. Most discussants agreed that men are the main perpetrators of violence against women and against each other. They behave violently towards women whether as voters, aspirants/candidates or election officials within an overall violent political culture, where violence is often the expected norm.

**Key Finding: Men are found to be at the leading edge of perpetrating VAWIE alongside the different societal structures at their beck and call which include security personnel, husbands and the youth. Howbeit, women are found to also exert violence on other women which has daunting impacts on them.**

Structurally, violence is mainly perpetrated by the political party machinery, most especially where a party controls state power. The party marshals instruments of the state, including the police, courts and even traditional institutions to perpetuate incumbency. A woman activist corroborated this by stating that, the incumbent leader(s)/government officials often use their privileged positions to perpetuate violence on female aspirants using different government machinery such as the police and other law enforcement agents. Political party leaders, male politicians and their political godfathers often employ thugs and cultists, who are normally youth, as well as state agents (normally police or vigilantes) to carry out acts of vandalism, intimidation and physical/sexual assault. A discussant asserted that,

*They use security agents. Local security agents they call them vigilantes. They use them to intimidate politicians. Most of them they came out and have already taken sides before they became a member. So when they become members, they (politicians) use their position as vigilante group members to set trap for aspirants. So when you set out to go for a meeting they will block you using different different excuses. They will ask you to open your boot, when you do they will ask you to remove your tyre, they want to check something. They want to use delay tactics, so at the end of the day, your aim will be defeated. So we have witnessed that one severally.*

Discussants also claimed that the parties do not have free and fair primaries, as men find a way to manoeuvre female candidates out. An aspirant shared a friend’s story,

*My friend is in PDP, she has contested under APC before, so she later decamped to PDP. Usually, anytime she’s coming out, she comes out strong; she even behaves as if she was going to get it. But all of them ended up dropped during primary. Nobody scaled through primary. At the end of the day, you will see all men scaled through, like magic.*

Husbands were also found to be direct or indirect perpetrators of VAWIE. The discussants explained that some husbands feel threatened by the prospect of their spouse' success in contesting for elective positions. Others capitulate to the desires of their extended families to restrain their wives from public life. This is likely due to the fact that it would be considered a gender role reversal to have the wife in a public leadership position as alluded to under the previous section. One active party member commented on this,

*When a woman wants to be a politician, your father-in-law is not interested, your mother-in-law is not interested but you want to be a politician. Your husband might say he’s interested because of he doesn’t want you to be offended. So in this case you find it difficult because at the end of the day you end up being divorced.*

Besides VAWIE perpetrated by men, discussants were in unanimous agreement that women also perpetrate violence against each other in ways that could be even more debilitating, disheartening and discouraging. In general, they felt strongly that, it was more difficult for female aspirants to mobilize political support from women because women tend to look down on each other and believe that their place is actually in the kitchen so contesting an election will be asking too much. Women-on-women violence is particularly debilitating because women actually have the numerical strength to sway elections in their favour but lack the gender solidarity to do it. As one participant correctly pointed out,

*One of the threats that we women face during election is, we women we are enemies to ourselves. Let’s say for instance, if a woman wants to go for, may be gubernatorial election, maybe she wants to contest, a woman like her will just come out and say, ‘this one, wetin she wan go do, de place wey man dey man never see go, na woman go com see go?’ That lack of cooperation affects women, they prefer going for the men than to support themselves [sic]. These are one of the threats that give the women fear during elections.*

Within the political space constrained by gender stratification and a social context of general female oppression women are prone to antagonize and discredit one another as the following quotes from FGD participants indicate,

* *‘I don’t want this person to be above me, so she should always be below me, I don’t want her to outshine me’.*
* *‘I don’t want you to become higher than me’*
* *‘You see men, just now they have exchanged words between them, they begin to shake themselves [hands] but women we carry it along, three days they will not forgive themselves [each other]. But men, they are simple; immediately they have misunderstanding, they settle themselves. Women don’t. Maybe you are carrying Hollandes (fabric) and others don’t have it. When you are going out they will say ‘she is going for prostitution’.*
* *They say that, ‘she doesn’t remember us’.*
* *‘If I’m talking who are you to want to rub shoulders with me?’ There is pride; there is arrogance.*

As noted in the previous section society at large through the instrumentality of gender-based discriminatory norms and practices is also a major, albeit unwitting, perpetrator of VAWIE.

## Remote and Immediate Causes of VAWIE

**Key Finding: Poor participation of women in election processes stems from the strong ideology of gender bias heavily embedded in tradition.**

**.**

All the discussants agreed that tradition was a fundamental contributory factor in other secondary causes of VAWIE and the practical constraints women face in the political space. An aspirant brought this strongly to the fore in identifying the root cause of VAWIE,

*I want to say cultural background where we believe that the woman’s place should be at home. You know there is a place where we expect that the man should be, where we expect the woman to function. Now, when a woman leaves where she ought to function and she’s trying to take the place of a man, there is a problem. Because we believe that leadership outside the home belongs to men. So we have not gotten to that point where we enlighten ourselves that irrespective of gender, anybody can aspire to be anything. So the cultural belief, so if you are a woman, that is outspoken and you want to come out for such thing; ‘you are a loose woman, a prostitute, your husband cannot bring you under control. So that means you are a loose woman. So that’s the idea behind the whole of politicking concerning the woman. The woman’s place is the home. So she should sit and stay put there, and not go out to compete with the men. So cultural belief where they don’t believe the woman should have certain position in the society. Hers is to get married, get pregnant, look after children, stay at home, cook the food.*

Secondary causes of VAWIE as revealed by discussants include:

* Lack of access to critical resources such as education and leadership.
* The over-riding political culture of money politics and ‘godfatherism’
* Domestic duties, especially child rearing, limit the amount of time women can make available for election

Apart from the aforementioned causes, another major contributory factor as identified by the discussants is religion. Majority of the discussants opined that, religious leaders use, or misuse, teachings of the Bible or the Qu’ran to dissuade women from active participation in politics. FGD participants felt that the problem as not with religion per se but the various ways male religious leaders misinterpret sacred texts to gratify their interests. Poverty was identified as another major cause of VAWIE. An aspirant put it this way,

*Poverty! Poverty of ideas, poverty of material [conditions] and poverty of understanding. There are so many families that cannot even make ends meet. Three square meals is a case. What they do mostly with their time is to whisper evil phrases into whatever they see that is good. They are so blind folded that they don’t even believe that a woman is supposed to put on a clean cloth. You always see such people in rag. And so these things used to magnify into witchcraft.*

All these constitute practical limitations and capacity gaps that undermine female political activity and achievement.

## Short and Long-term Impacts of VAWIE

**Key Finding: Women withdraw from full participation in election processes due to VAWIE. This results in zero representation of women at all levels of decision making. This gender discrimination has led to lopsided development and poor leadership.**

The most obvious impact of VAWIE as highlighted by FGD participants is that it stops women from participating actively and fully in all political processes on an equal footing with men. Poor participation of women in election processes stems from the strong ideology of gender bias as embedded in tradition. In this regard, the fear factor is prominent as most women are fearful of losing the love and support of loved ones, being ostracised from society or being physically/sexually attacked. A faith-based activist explained it this way,

*It [VAWIE] makes them to withdraw and stay at home which is exactly where they want them to be. So if you don’t want trouble, like for all that have been stated here; you don’t want to be divorced, you don’t want discrimination, you don’t want your neighbours to hate you or call you names. So what do you do? As a respectable woman, a submissive woman, you stay in. SO where a woman is supposed to speak out, you find out that she will just keep quiet. So nothing is being done because she is afraid to come out. SO it kind of makes them to be timid and withdraw.*

In relation to the long-term impacts of low female participation and representation on democracy, according to discussants, the dividends of good governance are not delivered to the people. This is captured in the comments below:

* An obvious neglect of the welfare of women, youth and children. For instance, a discussant claimed, *‘The society**is, just like women are known to be more passionate and more disposed to the welfare of youth and children than the men. I’m sorry to say this but it’s a natural thing and so the fewer they are in government, the worse for the youth and the children. Because the men only know how to take it up, they don’t know how to take it down. So the more they include women in decision making, the better for the society’.*
* Leadership positions are recycled among the rich, well-connected and powerful leading to a lack of accountability to the electorate because people are afraid to challenge the status quo*.*
* Lack of development.

From the discussants in Kogi, an implication of VAWIE is that it undermines good governance in the state.

## Nature and Effectiveness of Institutional Mechanisms to stop VAWIE

**Key Finding: Awareness of existence of institutional mechanisms to curb VAWIE is at a low ebb among women in Kogi State and those who do know about them confirmed that they were not functional in the State.**

All but six of the FGD participants said they were not aware of any government mechanisms to curb VAWIE. The others were not aware of the existence of any of these mechanisms.This means that there is a low level of awareness about such mechanisms and/or their non-functionality within the State. Furthermore, not only are existent laws and the agencies established to enforce them not functional, they do not safeguard women from reprisal attacks by opponents. This greatly undercuts their effectiveness.

## Women’s Solutions to VAWIE

**Key Finding: Women in Kogi anticipate positive shift through short, medium and long-term solutions to VAWIE.**

FGD participants mentioned short, medium and long-term solutions to VAWIE,

### Long-term Solutions

* Improve girls’ access to quality education so as to create fair competition with their male counterparts.
* Break the culture of tradition-induced gender inequality.

### Medium-term Solutions

* Women should build gender solidarity by forming coalitions to take what rightfully belongs to them.
* Women should develop their political acumen through leadership training, campaigns and gaining leverage via social media.
* Strengthen security agencies to effectively handle VAWIE cases. The security agencies should go all out to protect everyone either male or female. Their job descriptions and limits should also be given to them as they are recruited into various security agencies.
* Formulation of anti-VAWIE policies backed by strong political will.
* Enlightenment should be carried out to help men know that elective positions do not belong to a particular gender but anybody can function based on ability.

### Short-term Solutions

* Women should be in support of one another.
* Voter education will go a long way in creating the right civic awareness in the citizenry especially the women.
* Provision of basic amenities at public places where male and female use. For instance, an election administrator in the recently concluded 2015 elections observed that there were no toilets/bathrooms in the place that was used as a RAC center. Hence, men and women used the same place outside.
* The government should urgently look into delegate issues. Create opportunity for delegate structures to be brought to the roundtable for discussion on desirable reforms to make them more inclusive.

## Summary of Key Findings based on UN Women Targets and Outputs

Key findings that emerged from the Focus Group Discussions are:

1. The women in Kogi State experience different types of election violence which can be identified as physical, sexual, psychological, socio-economic and harmful traditional practices.
2. Men are found to be at the leading edge of perpetrating VAWIE alongside the different societal structures at their beck and call which include security personnel, husbands and the youth.
3. Poor participation of women in election processes stems from the strong ideology of gender bias as heavily embedded in tradition.
4. Women withdraw from full participation in election processes due to VAWIE. This results in zero representation of women at all levels of decision making. This gender discrimination has led to lopsided development and poor leadership.
5. Awareness of existence of institutional mechanisms to curb VAWIE is at a low ebb among women in Kogi State and those who do know about them confirmed that they were not functional in the State.
6. Women in Kogi anticipate positive shift through short, medium and long-term solutions to VAWIE.

**ANNEX 1**

**NDI STOP-VAWIE PROJECT**

***Focus Group Discussion (FGD) Guide***

Introduction

In the last several years, there has been growing international attention to acts of violence and harassment against women in politics and an increasing recognition of the link between violence and the level at which women are active in public life, as well as how this impacts the validity of the democratic process. Violence against women is used as a targeted and destructive tool in various ways throughout the electoral cycle to dissuade women from participating as ***election administrators, voters, and candidates***. This has critical implications for the integrity of the electoral process because when women are prevented from voting for their preferred candidates, executing their campaigns, or fulfilling their mandate, democratic processes are effectively nullified. An election is not in compliance with international obligations and standards unless it includes the opportunity for full and equal participation by women as well as men to ­act as *voters, candidates, election administrators and ob­servers*. However, when it comes to the fundamental right of men and women to participate in these processes, a variety of political, legal, social, economic and cultural barriers stand in the way of women being able to exercise such rights equally.

**Within this context, NDI has launched the Stop-VAWIE project. This initiative seeks to develop a new area of practice focused on gender based electoral violence. The project will produce targeted strategies and tools to document and mitigate violence that prevents women from participating throughout the electoral cycle.**

This Focus Group Discussion is part of a data collection exercise being conducted in two selected States in North and South Nigeria in relation to the 2015 gubernatorial elections, namely: Kogi and Bayelsa. The specific objectives of the study are to:

1. Discover what specific forms and levels of violence female aspirants/ candidates, party activists, supporters and voters encountered during the 2015 gubernatorial elections in comparison to men’s experiences
2. Investigate the identity of the perpetrators of the various forms of electoral violence
3. Investigate the immediate and remote causes of electoral violence against women
4. Understand the potential or actual impact of violence against women on their ability to participate in the electoral process (as aspirants, voters, candidates etc.) as well as on the democratic quality of the election
5. Assess the nature and effectiveness of state or non-state institutional mechanisms in providing redress for female victims of electoral violence
6. Gain an understanding of women’s perspectives on possible solutions to electoral violence

The outcome of this research project will enable the NDI to make evidence-based policy recommendations to relevant state and non-state actors and other stakeholders on how to prevent and mitigate electoral violence against women.

FGD GUIDE QUESTIONS

**OBJECTIVE 1**: **Discover what specific forms and levels of violence female candidates, party activists, supporters and voters encountered during the 2015 gubernatorial elections in comparison to men’s experiences**

1. What do you understand by the term ‘Violence Against Women In Elections”? (Probe for different dimensions of VAWIE – psychological, physical, social, economic, institutional/procedural and election-related Harmful Traditional Practices (HTPs). Summarize by providing a prepared working definition of the concept.
2. What kinds of roles did women play during the 2015 gubernatorial elections in this community/state? (Probe for examples of women’s roles, how effective women are in such roles and where the impacts of women’s participation are felt most).
3. Can you please identify what were the major threats to the participation of women in elections in your community/state? (Probe to know which threats are peculiar to candidates, supporters and voters. Probe to know how often women experience them and whether they differ from threats to men)
4. How friendly was the electoral process during the 2015 gubernatorial elections to female voters, aspirants/candidates, party activists, election administrators/observers etc? (Probe for ease/accessibility of voter registration, identification location, materials, timing etc.).
5. What were the challenges and risks that women faced when they engaged in politics and participate as aspirants/candidates, party activists, supporters and voters elections in this community/state? (Probe more to find out the specific circumstances where challenges were encountered).
6. Have there been uses of derogatory language or hate speech against women in the newspapers, or on radio and television? (Probe for examples of such incidents and community responses to them).

**OBJECTIVE 2**: **Investigate the identity of the perpetrators of the various forms of electoral violence**

1. Who carried out the incidents of electoral violence against women during the 2015 Gubernatorial elections in your state? (Probe for identity of perpetrators in relation to their roles/relationships (e.g. party members, security forces, family members) in public and private spaces).
2. In what contexts are women most likely to be perpetrators of violence (Probe also for who they carry out acts of violence against and why)?
3. In what contexts are men most likely to be perpetrators of violence (Probe also for who they carry out acts of violence against and why)?

**OBJECTIVE 3**: **Investigate the immediate and remote causes of electoral violence against women**

1. What caused the incidents of electoral violence against women? (Probe for social, economic, political, ideological (cultural and religious) and psychological).
2. What factors promote violence against women in this state? (Probe for social (e.g. gender roles and relations such as childcare, domestic chores, social expectations and aspirations), economic (access to/control over resources), political (distribution of power between men and women), ideological (cultural and religious) and psychological or organizational (e.g. party, INEC, police) factors).
3. How do the various factors impact on women candidates, supporters and voters?

**OBJECTIVE 4**: **Understand the potential or actual impact of violence against women on their ability to participate in the electoral process (as aspirants, voters, candidates etc.) as well as on the democratic quality of the election**

1. To what extent does election-related violence against women impact on their participation in electoral processes? (Probe for whether and how violence may stop them from registering as voters, voting, voting for or supporting their preferred candidate, entering the race, serving as election administrators/observers).
2. What is the impact of election-related violence against women on the overall democratic quality of elections?

**OBJECTIVE 5:** **Assess the nature and effectiveness of state or non-state institutional mechanisms in providing redress for female victims of electoral violence**

1. What laws, government announcements, policies or programmes exist to stop or punish electoral violence against women in this State? (Probe for such frameworks at federal, state, LGA or community/state level (including traditional or religious ones).
2. Can you mention the names of any agencies, organizations or individuals that monitor electoral violence against women in the State? (Probe for whether they have offices and have they been receiving any complaints of electoral violence against women).
3. What initiatives are in place to address violence at community/state level, LGA, and State level generally? Do any of these mechanisms specifically address violence against women as well? (Please probe further to know more about these initiatives in terms of what services they offer and by which agency or CSO specifically). If none, are there plans for the future?
4. How accessible, relevant and useful are these initiatives/services to the target beneficiaries and community/state at large? (Probe to know what improvements could be made to these initiatives to make them have more relevance and impact. Specifically ask for the three top priorities that should be included make the service functional and relevant to the needs of women in the community/state, and what should definitely be excluded in light of taboos or norms about women in politics that need to be taken into account).
5. Is there any current public information or campaign to address electoral VAW in this State? If so, how is this campaign carried out and what has been its impact?

**OBJECTIVE 6:** **Gain an understanding of women’s perspectives on possible solutions to electoral violence**

1. How can the challenges and threats to women’s participation in electoral and political processes be overcome? (Probe for the roles of state and non-state actors, including women’s groups, in overcoming violence)
2. What traditional systems and practices, including penalties and punishments could be used to prevent electoral violence against? (Probe for what lessons these systems teach, and how effective they could be in today’s society).
3. What would you like the Nigerian political space to look like in relation to women? (Probe for specific changes desired in relation to female participation and representation).

**WRAP UP**

1. Appreciate discussants for their participation
2. Explore if there are any untouched issues that people feel they need to mention
3. Thanks and good bye

**ATTENDANCE FOR DISCUSSANTS AT THE FGD FOR STOP VAWIE HELD IN YENOGOA, KOGI STATE**

**FGD 1**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| S/N | NAME | ORGANIZATION/PARTY | POSITION | STATE OF ORIGIN | L.G.A/TOWN | PHONE NO | EMAIL |
| 1. | EBUNLOMO ALIYU | STUDENT | - | KOGI | LOKOJA KOGI | 08061695069 | [ebunaliyu@gmail.com](mailto:ebunaliyu@gmail.com) |
| 2. | FATIMA MUSA | A.P.C | MEMBER | KOGI | AJAOKUTA | 07083336090 | - |
| 3. | MOHAMMED FATIMA | STUDENT | - | KOGI | KOGI | 08163861686 | - |
| 4. | UMAR MEMUNAT | LOCAL COUNCIL | CLERK | KOGI | KOGI | 07054890979 | [Umar@yahoo.com](mailto:Umar@yahoo.com) |
| 5. | DEBORAH A. AKOBE | FAITH BASED | CSO | KOGI | KABBA/BUNU | 08163040267 | [deborahabiodunakobe@yahoo.com](mailto:deborahabiodunakobe@yahoo.com) |
| 6. | TEMA MATTHEW | A.P.C | MEMBER | KOGI | OLAMABORO | 08062265622 | - |
| 7. | PRINCESS LOLO CHIAMAKA ENWERE | IGBO WOMEN ASSOCISTION, LOKOJA | PRESIDENT | ABIA | UMUNNEOCHI | 08035897355 | [Rosemaryamaka492@gmail.com](mailto:Rosemaryamaka492@gmail.com) |
| 8. | HABIBATULAH ABDULLAHI | LABOUR PARTY | SUPPORTER | KOGI | LOKOJA | 08035887509 | [Habibat4real@yahoo.com](mailto:Habibat4real@yahoo.com) |

**ATTENDANCE FOR DISCUSSANTS AT THE FGD FOR STOP VAWIE HELD IN YENOGOA, KOGI STATE**

**FGD 2**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| S/N | NAME | ORGANIZATION/PARTY | POSITION | STATE OF ORIGIN | L.G.A/TOWN | PHONE NO | EMAIL |
| 1. | CHARITY ANAJA | KOGGI | PROGRAMMES DIRECTOR | KOGI | DEKINA | 08038113770 | [sisiglow@yahoo.com](mailto:sisiglow@yahoo.com) |
| 2. | ZAINAB MOHAMMED | KOGGI | PRESIDENT | KOGI | ANKPA | 08182569762 | - |
| 3. | ALI FLORENCE | - | - | BENUE | OTUKPO | 08060028400 | [Aliflorence77@gmail.com](mailto:Aliflorence77@gmail.com) |
| 4. | ADEWOLE GLORIA | PDP | SSA TO GOVERNOR | KOGI | OGORI MAGOGO | 08035931032 | [Olusegun4953@yahoo.com](mailto:Olusegun4953@yahoo.com) |
| 5. | ADAMU FATIMA | - | ADHOC STAFF | KOGI | LOKOJA | 08038403692 | [Fatimaadamu1989@gmail.com](mailto:Fatimaadamu1989@gmail.com) |
| 6. | REKIYA ADEMU | FIDA | PRINCIPAL LEGAL OFFICER | KOGI | LOKOJA | 08036789599 | [Rekiya.ademu@gmail.com](mailto:Rekiya.ademu@gmail.com) |
| 7. | LAWAL LAMMY SARATU | FOMWAN | AMIRAH | KOGI | LOKOJA | 08032911790 | - |
| 8. | ONUMINYA S. DORCAS | KSSH, LOKOJA | CONSULTANT | KOGI | LOKOJA | 08038224168 | [uwahdorcas@gmail.com](mailto:uwahdorcas@gmail.com) |