

## The Candidates Emerge

Candidates have started emerging for the 2007 elections. While the process by which candidates in some political parties emerged was obscure, others held conventions to choose their candidates. The emergence of the presidential flag bearers was particularly interesting. Although all eyes were naturally on the ruling Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), which held its convention on December 16<sup>th</sup>, the first candidate to emerge was actually former secessionist leader Chief Emeka Ojukwu, who was nominated by the All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA). The series of conventions drew to a close with the convention of the Peoples Salvation Party (PSP), but all were held in time to beat the December 22 deadline fixed by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) for the submission of the list of candidates for national elections. As with past conventions, horse-trading took centre stage. NDI staffers were at some of the party conventions held in Abuja, and had a direct view of how they were conducted.

At the PDP convention held in Abuja, 12 governors who had initially indicated their interest in the presidential position

and had been in the forefront of campaigns to secure the party's ticket, withdrew their candidacy. Reports suggest that this was due to warnings from the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission that it had compiled damaging dossiers on most of the governors. Alhaji Umaru Musa Yar'Adua, Governor of Katsina State who had shown little interest at the time when most of the other aspirants were busy campaigning, surfaced on the eve of the convention as the clear choice of the outgoing administration which deployed all its resources to ensure that he secured the party's nomination. Yar'Adua delivered another surprise when he picked Bayelsa State Governor Goodluck Jonathan as his running mate in place of widely-touted Governor Peter Odili of Rivers State.

Although Yar'Adua was the only governor among those seeking the PDP's presidential ticket who was not indicted by the EFCC, observers interpreted his victory as a ploy by the party to break the influence wielded by Vice President Atiku Abubakar over the political machinery of late General Shehu Musa Yar'Adua', the

*(Continued on page 5)*

## NDI Facilitates Civil Society Pre-election Conference

November 22-23, 2006 will perhaps be remembered for a long time as a milestone in Nigeria's electoral process. That was when over 200 representatives from professional bodies, civil society organizations, religious leaders, the media, political parties, INEC, the National Assembly and the Nigeria Police Force met in Abuja to exchange ideas on the April 2007 elections.

The Pre-election Conference took place at time many were voicing fears that a huge section of the voting population might be disenfranchised due to the logistic and administrative failures that had characterised the voters' registration and revalidation exercise then being conducted by INEC. Concern had equally been expressed over issues such as the participa-



*A member of the Police Service Commission, Alhaji Rufai Mohammed; IGP Sunday Ehindero; Secretary General Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs, Dr. Lateef Adegbite at the Conference*

tion of women and of youths in the elections and the role of the security forces and the media.

*(Continued on page 3)*

“... on the whole, it was evident that many of the parties did not in the true sense comply with democratic tenets because of vested interests...”

### Election '07 Timetable

**Publication of list of nominated candidates/persons nominating them - S.35(1)**

Governorship/State Assembly Elections - Mar. 8, 2007

Presidential/National Assembly Elections - Mar. 15, 2007

**Publication of notice of polls - S.47**

Governorship/State Assembly Elections - Mar. 24, 2007

Presidential/National Assembly Elections - Mar. 31, 2007

**Last day for Campaigns - S.104(1)**

Governorship/State Assembly Elections - Apr. 13, 2007

Presidential/National Assembly Elections - Apr. 20, 2007

**Governorship/State Assembly Elections - Apr. 14, 2007**

**Presidential/National Assembly Elections - Apr. 21, 2007**

## NDI Unites Domestic Election Monitors

The credibility of Nigerian elections has been an issue of great concern to all. To encourage the major non-partisan civil society organizations engaged in election monitoring to harmonize their positions, to collaborate for more effective coverage and to speak with one voice, NDI brought the major domestic election monitoring groups and other key stakeholders together in January for a three-day consultation at Abraka in Delta State.

In addition to NDI partners – Civil Liberties Organisation (CLO), Institute for Human Rights and Humanitarian Law (IHRHL), Justice Development and Peace Commission (JDPC), the Labour Election Monitoring Team (LEMT) as well as the Nigerian Bar Association (NBA), Federation of Moslem Women Associations of Nigeria (FOMWAN) and the Muslim



Participants in a working group session

League for Accountability (MULAC), the meeting was attended by the Transition Monitoring Group (TMG) and the Alliance for Credible Elections (ACE). All past and present chairs of the TMG Steering Committee were also in attendance.

The organizations present agreed to adopt a common checklist as developed by NDI, and to harmonize the deployment of monitors. They also agreed to work together on the collection and transmission of data, and worked out a basic



Participants during a brain-storming session

method of issuing a common interim statement on the conduct of the elections.

In all, the groups present hope to deploy up to 50,000 monitors, although ACE and TMG are also in discussion with other organizations such as the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), the Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN) and the Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (NSCIA), who also wish to be involved in election monitoring.

At the end of the meeting, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed by all the groups present, under which they agreed to establish a Steering Committee chaired by Professor J.A.A. Ayoade of The Institute for Social Studies and Administration (TISSA). An Information Technology Committee was also established to advise the group on the best ways of collecting, entering and transmitting the data generated by the work of the observers.

The stage is thus set for an authoritative verdict from non-partisan civil society on the conduct of the 2007 elections. The commitment of the various groups to work together can be gauged from the fact that both the IT and the Steering Committees have already swung into action ■

## NEWSPAPER HEADLINES

- April Polls: INEC Threatens Mass Disqualification: Appeal court forwards Atiku's case to Supreme Court - (*ThisDay, January 11, 2007*)
- 2007 election: EFCC threatens candidates with jail - (*Daily Sun, January 11, 2007*)
- Pro-Ladoja lawmakers protest to INEC HQ: Urge respect for court ruling - (*ThisDay, January 11, 2007*)
- 2007 Elections: A Do or Die affair for PDP - Obasanjo - (*The Punch, Sunday, January 11, 2007*)
- INEC Extends Voters' Registration Deadline, Senate Amends Act - (*ThisDay Newspaper, January 31, 2007*)
- April polls: NBA offers INEC 20,000 lawyers - (*Daily Champion, February 3, 2007*)
- Soyinka demands Adedibu's arrest - (*The Sun, February 6, 2007*)
- 95% of Electorate will be genuine - INEC (*ThisDay, February 13, 2007*)
- April poll in danger - Reps - (*The Punch, February 19, 2007*)
- Adedibu: Our hands are tied, says IG - (*ThisDay, February 20, 2007*)
- Atiku, Others stand disqualified - Iwu - (*Vanguard, February 22, 2007*)
- April poll: Switzerland to expose corrupt candidates - (*Daily Champion, March 1, 2007*)
- April polls: Its fire for fire - Tinubu - (*ThisDay, March 1, 2007*)
- Supreme Court fixes March 19th for Atiku's Case - (*The ThisDay, March 6, 2007*)
- Senate rejects PTDF report - sets up review committee - (*Daily Trust, March 7, 2007*)
- Yar' Adua ill, flown to Germany - (*The Guardian, March 7, 2007*)
- No cause for alarm on Yar' Adua, says Maduekwe - (*The Guardian, March 7, 2007*)

...historic pre-election conference (Continued from page 1)

To address these concerns the Nigerian Bar Association (NBA) and the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC), with assistance from the National Democratic Institute (NDI), hosted a two-day All Nigeria Civil Society Pre-Election Conference on the April 2007 Elections.

The participatory and interactive Conference devoted the bulk of its time to working group sessions, which reviewed the electoral framework and explored ways in which various sectors of the Nigerian society could contribute to the holding of credible elections. Lively sessions, which often ran over their already generous allotted time-span, threw up several important ideas, and demonstrated the keen awareness of civil society in general, and professional associations and trade unions in particular, of the crucial importance of the coming elections in Nigeria's history.

The Conference also provided a platform for exchange of ideas and information between participants and the leadership of INEC on the state of the voters' registration exercise, with useful suggestions on how to improve the process. In addition, participants brainstormed on ways – such as issue-based voter education activities – to make national issues the focus of political party campaigns.

At the end of the two-day meeting participants resolved:

- To continue to engage the electoral body INEC to ensure the conduct of free, fair and credible elections.



IGP Sunday Ehindero; NDI Country Director, Keith Jennings; and NBA 1st Vice President, Akuro George look on as NLC President, Adams Oshiomhole delivers an address

- That professional groups such as the Nigerian Bar Association would approach INEC on the possibility of providing its members to serve as election day *ad hoc* staff for the Commission.

- Civil society organizations and professional groups will collaborate for effective monitoring of the pre-election, election day and post-election processes.

- Civil society organizations, professional groups and labour unions should intensify voter education outreach efforts among their members, especially women and youths.

- To monitor political party primaries as to whether or not the process of choosing candidates is fair to both men and women.

- To include security agencies in civic and political education activities towards the 2007 elections.

- To engage religious leaders in an interfaith effort to mobilize and build citizens' confidence to participate in the processes leading to the elections.

Notable participants at the conference included INEC Chair Professor Maurice Iwu, Inspector-General of Police Mr. Sunday Ehindero, NLC President Comrade Adams Oshiomhole, NBA First National Vice President Chief Akuro George and Secretary-General of the Nigeria Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs, Dr. Lateef Adegbite, Dr. Keith Jennings of the NDI, members of the two host organizations, members of civil society groups in Nigeria, representatives of the international organizations, and representatives of other stakeholders in the electoral process■



Cross section of participants



A working group session



INEC Chairman; Professor Maurice Iwu addressing participants at the conference



Question and Answer session



## A Snapshot of Campaign Issues

Campaigns towards the 2007 elections have commenced in earnest. However, amidst the substitution and disqualification of candidates and court cases, it has been difficult to identify what the various parties actually stand for. Below is a snapshot of the campaign issues of some political parties.

### ADC: Individual re-orientation

Perhaps the party with the most issue based campaign; the Advanced Democrats Congress has attempted to throw the challenge of development back to Nigerians. The party has consistently championed the need for individual contribution to the development process. Though the chances of

the party remain slim, its focus has surely kept some of the other parties on course by tackling issues that affect citizens' lives.

### AC: Democracy forever

The most visible message of the Action Congress campaign is that a vote for AC is a vote against the PDP government. AC presidential rallies have been dominated by anti-PDP slogans and a "Vote for democracy": a change from the current "autocratic" government to a democracy led by democrats. The series of court battles which its presidential candidate, Vice President Atiku Abubakar, has continued to win has increased defiance of the PDP led government and one is sure to hear PDP mentioned almost as

many times as AC in any of the party's campaigns.

### ANPP: Security for all, increased regulation

The All Nigerian Peoples Party, led by its Presidential candidate, retired general Muhammadu Buhari, is campaigning on the need for increased security across the country. The party has also promised to restore most of the enterprises "wrongly" privatized by the current administration. This obviously has not gone down well in most business circles where Buhari is accused of socialist tendencies. Civil servants and others who have benefited from the sale of choice gov-

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## Town Hall Meetings Continue in Barkin Ladi

Barkin Ladi, a rural town in Plateau State, was the venue of the fifth town hall meeting in the series being facilitated by NDI in partnership with local non-governmental organizations. NDI's partner for the Barkin Ladi meeting, which was attended by almost 70 participants, was Community Action for Popular Participation (CAPP).



*Titus Mann, President, CLO; the INEC PRO, Osaretin Imahiyereobo and NDI Senior Program Manager, Elections, Ayo Obe at the event*

Those taking part included youths, women, members of community based organizations, traditional rulers and clerics. Also present was Mr. Osaretin Imahiyereobo, the Head of Public Affairs for INEC in Plateau State, who was representing the Resident Electoral Commissioner. The meeting benefited by having some of the participants translate between English and Hausa.

The INEC representative said that the

electoral body was fully prepared to conduct hitch free elections in April, but stressed that it was important for local communities to partner with INEC if the elections were to be credible. For example, he enjoined them to nominate trustworthy people to serve as ad-hoc staff and where necessary, point out corrupt volunteers. Parents were urged not to allow their children to operate as political thugs since, according to him, while the beneficiary of their actions would be enjoying all the trappings of office, they might be injured or languishing in prison! He said that the efforts of traditional rulers were crucial to achieving full participation by communities in the elections, and advised that the electorate could protect their votes by reporting any irregularities on Election Day to INEC. Other areas that he identified where the co-operation of communities would be needed were in the maintenance of law and order, prevention of violence and ensuring that voters showed up to vote punctually.

After a panel discussion during which representatives of women, youths, INEC and religious leaders discussed various election-related issues and voiced several of their concerns, the INEC spokesperson responded to questions from participants. He undertook to look further into allegations that some voters had been registered in absentia by having photographs of their

photograph taken, but assured participants that such frauds, as well as attempts to beat the thumbprint identification system by using different fingers, would be detected during the reconciliation of the voters' register which INEC was currently undertaking. He advised those who might have registered away from where they would be able to vote on Election Day to make early application to the REC to change their registration

Participants were told that a group called the Campaign for the Defence of the Mandate on the Plateau had been formed by the Civil Liberties Organisation (an NDI partner) and other CBOs and NGOs in Plateau State, to enable communities to protect their votes. By channeling election-related complaints from the communities to INEC or the police, CDMP would serve as an intermediary between the people and those responsible for the administration of the election ■



*INEC PRO, Osaretin Imahiyereobo, speaking at the*

...Candidates Emerge ... (Continued from page 1)

governor's senior brother. Although party Chairman Ahmadu Ali declared that the party was looking for an aspirant who 'would continue to listen to the party and be committed to the reform agenda of the present administration', it was evident that the leadership did not intend to allow party members to conclude that search democratically. An aggrieved delegate from Benue State complained they had been given specific instructions to vote for Yar'Adua on pain of losing their party positions if they failed to comply.

At the All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP) convention also held in Abuja, there were signs just before the convention that pressure was being mounted on candidates to step down for General Muhammadu Buhari, the party's 2003 flagbearer. And true to expectation, after a long delay, all the party's presidential aspirants, except Chief Pere Ajunwa, came forward to announce their withdrawal and support for General Buhari. Chief Ajunwa held out due to the commitment he said that he had made to his supporters not to step down

this time, because he had done so in 2003. But after a series of consultations, he accepted to step down, thereby paving the way for Buhari to pick the party's ticket.

Vice President Atiku Abubakar, who had been embroiled in bitter altercations with President Obasanjo and the PDP, secured the presidential ticket of the Action Congress (AC) at its convention in Lagos which was broadcast live on television. Although Atiku Abubakar was the only candidate, the party adopted a 'yes' or 'no' voting pattern in what it claimed was a bid to ensure that everything was done democratically.

Other parties that organized conventions monitored by NDI were the Democratic Peoples Party (DPP), Progressive Peoples Alliance (PPA) and the National Democratic Party (NDP). Their conventions did not attract the kind of attention that the PDP, ANPP and AC attracted, but there were indications that some of the parties were already moving towards alliance with other parties. For example, ANPP presidential candidate, General Buhari, was a Special

Guest at the PPA's convention which however, nominated Governor Orji Kalu of Abia State as its presidential candidate. As for the NDP, the convention was a mere formality because the party's flag bearer, Alhaji Abu Fari, openly declared that he was only holding fort for ex-dictator General Ibrahim Babangida, for whom the party had reserved the position even without his declaring interest in it. A similar situation appeared to surround the emergence of Governor Atahiru Bafarawa of Sokoto State as the DPP's flagbearer.

Of course, this is only a small snapshot of the way in which the many candidates emerged at all levels. Even at the presidential level, as many as 26 parties have indicated an intention to contest. Reports indicate that the contest for the governorships and the national and state legislatures was particularly keen in the PDP, and as matters stand at present, up to 70% of the current crop of legislators at the National Assembly will not be returning, either because

they failed to secure their party's ticket, or because they did not seek to return to the legislatures of which they were members. On the

**“...as matters stand at present, up to 70% of the current crop of legislators at the National Assembly will not be returning...”**

whole, it was evident that many of the parties did not in the true sense comply with democratic tenets because of vested interests. While in some parties, candidates and delegates were coerced into voting or stepping down for specific candidates, in others candidates were simply imposed even when they did not seek office.

The failure of many parties to respect the rights and wishes of party members to vote for candidates of their choice, as well as the acquiescence of party members in the undemocratic practices of their parties are signs of the kind of tactics the parties may deploy to secure victory on Election Day■

.... Campaign issues (Continued from page 4)

ernment property may also take a skeptical view as they may be reluctant have such property taken away from them.

#### **DPP: Free Education**

The Democratic Peoples Party presidential candidate, currently Governor of Sokoto state, has promised free compulsory education for all if elected President. Given that Sokoto has one of the highest illiteracy levels in the country, and a close look at the Sokoto State budget allocations from 1999 shows dismal allocations to the education sector, the voters might

take some convincing.

#### **PDP- Vision 20:2020**

Does Nigeria really want to be one of the top twenty greatest economies by the year 2020? The Peoples Democratic Party thinks so. Watching the PDP rallies across the country, apart from the constant harping on why the party's candidates are the best, the PDP also promises to make Nigeria one of the 20 greatest economies by the year 2020. But is that what the electorate really wants?

It is not clear that the PDP's definition of how it has grown the econ-

omy in the past eight years has much to do with the people. While the government prides itself on the amount of foreign reserve, the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and other indices, it seems unable to understand that these indicators have nothing to do with the wellbeing of the people. The inaccuracy of the GDP as a measure of pro-poor development has remained an interesting issue in development economics. Nigerians might prefer a 0:2010. Zero poverty, zero power outage, zero armed robbery by the year 2010, rather than the biggest economy that still harbors some of the world's poorest people■

## News From Our NGO Partners

### Zamfara & Katsina States

The League of Democratic Women (LEADS) organized several drama presentations in the three senatorial zones of Zamfara and Katsina States. Large crowds turned out at the market place each Tuesday to watch the drama which was done in the



Women were present during the play

local language—Hausa. The dramas centered on issues such as electoral violence vote buying and gender dis-

crimination. LEADS encouraged women to take active part in the voter registration exercise and the elections. The plays



A scene from the drama



Crowds turned out to watch the drama display

attracted large crowds who asked question at the end of the presentation. ■

### Lagos State

With eighty-seven women in attendance representing twenty Local Government Areas in Lagos State the Women Law Development Centre of Nigeria (WLDCN) organized a training of trainers workshop. The voter education workshop was aimed at training grassroots and professional women to mobilize other women



Participants at the workshop organized by WLDCN

to take an active part in the electoral process. Participants were trained on the essential elements of democracy, good governance, leadership, the electoral

system, electoral processes, the role of INEC, voter registration, the actual voting processes

**“WOMEN, GO OUT AND VOTE. IT IS YOUR RIGHT AND RESPONSIBILITY”**

and the place of women as voters and aspirants.

The role of women as leaders and change agents was highlighted and women were encouraged to help in curb electoral violence by not allowing their children or wards to be used by politicians as thugs.

The communiqué released at the end of the workshop enjoined women to go out and vote as it was both their right and responsibility. ■

### Get Out The Vote

...Wise up and Vote!



#### Register to Vote

Register to vote and encourage your friends, family and anyone you know to do so.

#### Check the list

Make sure you check the list of eligible voters to make sure your name is there.

#### Arrive with five

Be at the polling station to vote and do encourage your friends and family to do so to!

### Check the List Campaign

NDI urged voters to *Check The List* of registered voters that INEC said it would display from the 5<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> February, to make sure that their names and details were properly recorded through handbills and radio jingles in English, Pidgin, Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba. The jingles were aired on Raypower, a radio station that has nationwide coverage. ■



## News From Our NGO Partners

### Enugu State

The Women's Aid Collective (WACOL) visited three communities; Umezi Owa, Abor and Abia all in Enugu State. The visit was to mobilize the participants for



Participants praying at the start of the outreach

voter education training. Preceding the voter education training were advocacy visits to key stakeholders and traditional leaders in these com-

### Plateau State

Community Action for Popular Participation organized town hall meetings in Pankshin and Riyom Local Government Areas of Plateau State. Participants were drawn from within the LGAs and other neighbouring communities such as Bokkos, Shendam, Mangu, Kanke and Wase. Local artistes were also present at the meeting. Mr. Clement Wasah, the Executive Director of CAPP presided over the meeting with him were the Chairman of the Plateau State Chapter of CAPP, Mr. Ezekiel Gying. Speaking about credible elections, Mr. Wasah enjoined participants to participate in the electoral process as the success of de-

munities to solicit their support in reaching members of their communities.

Traditional ruler expressed their and promised to facilitate the participation of members of their community.

A total of 250 people were present at the Voter education training which was over the eighty participants expected. The topics discussed were the democratic electoral process, basic principles and laws guiding elections in Nigeria, effective participation in poli-



Participants from the community

mocracy depends on people.

Other issues discussed include



Mr. Tom Adanbara and a panelist at the Town Hall Meeting

voters apathy, money politics and electoral violence. Mr. Wasah called on participants to brainstorm and chart a new course of action towards free and fair elections in 2007■

tics: Voting and Being Voted For, election malpractice: Implication of the 2007 Election on the Nation, Youths and Electoral Violence: Implications on Democracy.

The need for participants to shun electoral violence was strongly emphasized especially among youths.

During the open discussion session participants expressed their fears regarding the absence of INEC officials at the designated registration centres. WACOL advised participants to report any inconsistencies they noticed to the nearest INEC office■

### FCT, Abuja

The Yakubu Gowon Centre observed the voter registration exercise in Abuja. The organization deployed observers to registration centers in Asokoro and Mpape. It observed challenges such as flat batteries and blurred photographs. Despite these setbacks, people living in the area turned out in large numbers to be registered■

### Kaduna State

Human Rights Monitor held a poster rally at Kawo park. The HRM team distributed posters on voters' registration to traders and explained where registration points were situated.

Majority of the people encountered during the poster distribution exercise were not adequately informed of the ongoing voter registration exercise. The HRM team fielded questions and provided information■

**Voter Registration: the Final Figures?**

The announcement by INEC Chair, Professor Maurice Iwu, that the Commission had registered 61 million voters at the close of the voter registration exercise took many Nigerians by surprise. Observers questioned whether the leap in registration figures announced by the Commission at various stages of the process could be adequately accounted for by a mere increase in the number of Direct Data Capture machines and greater expertise on the part of the DDC operators. As at November 24<sup>th</sup>, the Commission had announced a total registration of 3.5 million: by December 10<sup>th</sup>, it was 10 million. December 14<sup>th</sup>, was he day when many had expected registration to close in accordance with the provisions of the Electoral Act, but registration continued under the guise of 'voter revalidation'. By mid January, the Commission said that it had registered 32 million, and announced 54 million voters as having been registered on February 2<sup>nd</sup>, after the close of the exercise.

But the figure of 61 million announced at INEC's 2<sup>nd</sup> National Forum may not be final, as the electronic data will be used to screen the list and remove double, under-age or other wrongful registrations. Sources say that the number is already back down below 60 million and falling.

Despite evident shortcomings in the way that the exercise was conducted, none of the political parties has raised any serious complaint or challenge to the figures. Whether this signifies confidence in the electoral body or confidence in plans to beat the credible voters' register that INEC hopes to produce however, remains to be seen■

State	Total Voters	State	Total Voters
Abia	1,365,641	Kano	4,072,597
Adamawa	1,315,950	Katsina	2,589,047
Anambra	1,844,819	Kebbi	1,345,436
Akwa Ibom	1,408,197	Kogi	1,479,834
Bauchi	2,211,463	Kwara	1,216,478
Bayelsa	955,279	Lagos	4,204,000
Benue	2,150,515	Nassarawa	1,001,423
Borno	2,159,515	Niger	1,551,903
Cross River	1,139,736	Ogun	1,466,308
Delta	1,626,930	Ondo	1,356,779
Ebonyi	929,375	Osun	1,297,297
Edo	1,345,410	Oyo	1,793,476
Ekiti	771,228	Plateau	1,602,550
Enugu	1,201,697	Rivers	2,583,317
Gombe	1,410,234	Sokoto	1,109,337
Imo	1,372,975	Taraba	1,173,514
Jigawa	1,722,352	Yobe	994,380
Kaduna	3,374,245	Zamfara	1,330,572
		FCT	765,472



For comments and contributions please write to Nigerian Election Watch at [NEW@ndi.org](mailto:NEW@ndi.org) or Nigerian Election Watch, NDI, No. 18 Buchanan Crescent, Off Aminu Kano, Wuse 2, Abuja  
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**Where are the Democrats? Where are the Women?**

FROM NDI

The process by which candidates for the April elections emerged raises disturbing questions about whether Nigeria is attempting to build its democracy without democrats. Parties are not obliged to select their candidates through a poll of registered party members. But where parties declare that this is their intention, surely it makes sense for them to stick to their own rules.

Yet the just-concluded candidate selection exercise showed a disturbing inability of many political parties to do so. While much attention has centred on the ruling PDP, it is a fact that some other parties avoided open wrangling only because candidates emerged through an imposed 'consensus'.

The struggle for the gubernatorial ticket produced some particularly egregious examples of lack of transparency and disregard of party guidelines. In Lagos State, Hilda Williams, widow of slain aspirant Funso Williams, clearly trounced Senator Musiliu Obanikoro in the primaries, yet the PDP handed the ticket to Obanikoro. Imo State witnessed a similar substitution when Charles Ugwu replaced Senator Ifeanyi Ararume despite the latter's primaries win.

But not only the PDP was guilty. The more sure a party was of winning, the less the transparency. So outraged were aspirants for the AC's Lagos gubernatorial ticket at how candidate selection was directed that eleven decamped to other parties, while Governor Tinubu's own deputy, Femi Pedro, did not bother to wait for what he saw as pre-determined AC primaries before joining the Labour Party and securing its ticket.

Although the Electoral Act 2006 prohibits last-minute substitution of candidates before, during or after the elections themselves, it is silent on post-primary election substitutions as this is an internal party matter. But it is discouraging that so many parties took advantage of this to make arbitrary changes.

Women candidates were badly affected by these shenanigans – Hilda Williams being only the most glaring example. Women's NGOs had to mobilize speedily to save some female aspirants who had secured their party's ticket, only to learn of their last minute substitution. The nominations of some affected candidates were saved, but the overall picture suggests that despite window-

dressing such as fee-free nomination for women aspirants, many parties have failed woefully in not just failing to support women candidates, but in actively undermining them. As a result, the number of women in this year's contest is significantly lower than in 2003. Many women who made it into the legislatures in 2003 will not be returning, while in the north, a subterranean campaign is being conducted against some who remain in the race on the grounds of religion.

Although some unfairly excluded candidates found a safe haven in other parties, for others, the fact of their replacement coincided with the final deadline for change of candidates.

Of course, the voters should have the final say. But the fact that so many parties failed to uphold basic democratic principles or exhibit transparency in selecting their candidates says a great deal about their understanding of democracy. It suggests that if at all Nigeria has a democracy, questions may legitimately be asked as to whether all of those who will be representing its teeming millions deserve to be called democrats■