**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 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 the major threats to the participation of women in elections in your community/state were? (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).