**STOP-VAWIE PROJECT: A REPORT**

**Prepared for: NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTE**

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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 Yenagoa the capital of Bayelsa State on 6th 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. Women in Bayelsa State experience all the five types of election violence identified, which are rooted in patriarchal African tradition.
2. Men and the political institutions they dominate are the main perpetrators of violence against women and each other. However, women-on-women VAWIE can be even more debilitating, disheartening and discouraging.
3. Gender-biased socialization to gender-coded identity and behaviour create critical deficits in the art of politicking for women.
4. VAWIE produces a selection-based political system, low accountability and underdevelopment.
5. Low awareness and uptake of the services of institutional mechanisms to curb VAWIE undermine their effectiveness.
6. Women in Bayelsa envision change 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 (Kogi) 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’s 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 Bayelsa State

Created on 1st October 1996 Bayelsa State is one of the newest states of Nigeria. The State is located between latitude 04°15'N, 05°23'S and longitude 5°22'W and 6°45'E in Nigeria’s South South geo-political zone in the Niger Delta of the country. It covers an area of 21,110 km2, much of which is riverine water and marsh. Bayelsa has one of Nigeria’s largest crude oil and gas deposits and contributes over 30% of its petroleum revenue. Yet, environmental pollution, poverty, and general neglect have plagued the state owing to decades of bad governance. The State has a population of about 2 million people (according to the 2006 census) with four main language groups: Izon, Nembe, Epie-Atissa and Ogbia and a voter population of 610,373 (2015). Most of the population engage in subsistence or commercial fishing, farming, palm oil processing and palm wine tapping. There is also a large number of artisans and civil servants. Industrial activity and infrastructural development have been on the rise in recent years. Owing to the watery/marshy terrain coupled with poor transportation networks, voter mobility to and fro registration/polling centres is often difficult. Since the return to civilian rule in 1999, the political climate of the state has been riddled by various forms of violence including militancy over resource control, thuggery and bitterly contested court cases within and between the two major political parties – the Peoples’ Democratic Party (PDP) and the Action Peoples’ Congress (APC). The 2015 elections witnessed high female voter turnout amid allegations of rigging; the run up to the polls saw instances of politically motivated killings and assault. The number of female elected members into the State House of Assembly increased to four, the highest it has ever been, from the usual lone woman of previous years.

**Fig.1: Map of Bayelsa State**

# 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 Bayelsa 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 Bayelsa State

**Key Finding: Women in Bayelsa State experience all the five types of election violence identified: physical, sexual, psychological, socio-economic and harmful traditional practices. Gender-based violence is rooted in a patriarchal African tradition that prefers and privileges males over females.**

FGD participants were unanimous in their agreement on the fact that women in Bayelsa encounter all forms of electoral violence, which are rooted in the prevailing patriarchal culture of anti-female discriminatory norms and practices. One FGD participant explained that harmful traditional rules relegate women to the background of political, economic and social life limiting them to domestic roles like child rearing and house work. According to some discussants, women function primarily as wives, mothers and family care-givers, and even breadwinners as they tend to engage in petty trades, fishing and farming towards family sustenance. Society expects their entire existence (identity, productive and reproductive capacities) to serve family, kinship and community needs and interests. A number of FGD participants spoke of being told, *‘you are to be in the kitchen’*, and one of them observed,

*You are relegated to the background you are not to take up elective positions. They don’t remember that women have other roles of nation building, homebuilding and society building. (FGD participant, 10/10/2015)*

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 Bayelsa State. For instance, female voters from riverine communities were sometimes ***physically*** restrained from exercising their right to vote. One market women leader cited the following case,

*When we are going to vote, at the waterfront, they (male voters) hinder us from entering because they feel we are women and they said ‘you wait’ when the men enter the boat, if there is still space they can allow you. They will say ‘men first’. When the boat is filled, they say we should wait for the next boat. The male voters stop us from entering the boat at the waterfront. (FGD participant, 10/10/2015)*

Men also perpetrate violence against each other and women get caught up in the fray. The market women leader went on to recount how men often fight in the boats transporting people to polling units. Another discussant said, men sometmes violently hijack election materials depriving voters of their right to vote. ***Sexual*** violence is another form of restraint used in particular to intimidate and restrain female aspirants from standing for election. Candidates who are ‘stubborn’ enough to contest sometimes face diverse forms of sexual harassment and assault. Female politicians may get groped and/or be on the receiving end of sexist jokes or remarks. The following cases told by FGD participants exemplify the nature and extent of sexual assault vividly,

*A very important female politician that wanted to come out, came and was ready, before they knew what happened some men came to her and told her to step down. That if she does not step down, she will see what her eyes have never seen before. She said, “What can they do”; she bragged. That night, they came to her house, asked her grown up son to sleep with her which the son could not, they wanted to shoot the son, the son now slept with the mother. After the son did that, they now went away. The son now ran and left the home, till today, they have not seen that young boy and the woman could not come out again and with that kind of disgrace, she could not tell anybody. (FGD participant, 10/10/2015)*

A CSO coordinator witnessed an incident of combined physical and sexual brutality; she recounted,

*There was a woman that was standing elections and she was living by my house there. Some political thugs came to her and stripped her naked. Yes I saw it. [They] removed all her clothes: ‘you are a woman, look at your breast…’ and the woman ran into her house. (FGD participant, 10/10/2015)*

Sexual violence may also be institutionalized through an unwritten code of behaviour for female aspirants who are expected by ‘king makers’ to provide sexual services in exchange for political favours. However, one participant who contested in the last elections pointed out that this usually does not help women move up substantially within political hierarchy, only on the fringes of the party machinery. Nevertheless, 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. Women who express interest in standing for office sometimes get threatened with divorce. A girl-child activist and government official stated,

*And if you say you want to come out for any position, believe you me, your husband will be the first to oppose you to say ‘madam, you better choose between your family and political career.’ (FGD participant, 10/10/2015)*

According to a grassroots activist, a male politician whose wife decided to go into politics divorced her and threw her things out of the house. Women who are bold enough to venture out frequently 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 and hate speech,

* *‘You that does not have respect for your husband’, ‘You are a prostitute’.*
* *‘Don’t mind her, she is just a woman. What can she do?’ She’s for the kitchen*
* *‘Prostitute – ashawo (harlot), that dog’*
* *‘Your husband is not a man, he is a weakling, impotent’*
* *‘Look at her, na juju (black magic) she dey use, after sleeping with them it didn’t work.*
* *‘Abeg you be woman pass for back make I vote finish before you go come vote’*.
* *‘You people are supposed to be in the kitchen, you are not to come out’*.
* *‘Your eyes are too up up, come down, don’t you know you are a woman’.*
* *‘Why are you coming to contest when men are there? Please my friend, will you get out of there’. (FGD participants, 10/10/2015)*

Men who let their wives go into politics also get called names such as ‘woman wrapper’ and ‘weakling.’ Female aspirants may also receive ominous threats through various media channels as highlighted by a religious leader,

*To highlight the issues of threat like phone calls, text messages like, ‘We know who you are’; ‘We know where you are’. They go straight to the brain to traumatize one. (FGD participant, 10/10/2015)*

One woman who stood for office in the 2015 elections told of a personal experience of intimidation,

*I want to say that I have a personal experience when I went in for an election. It was really terrible but I stood firm. That is to say that the major violence that I experienced personally was in the form of threats, like threatening my supporters not to put on my outfit. It was just visible and then threatening me: face-to-face threats and Police threats - that the Police should detain me before the primaries so that I do not have access to the primaries. Because I’m a lawyer I had to battle it. (FGD participant, 10/10/2015)*

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 especially harsh on women who find it difficult to get the financial backing of political ‘godfathers’ without resorting to ‘barter sex’ in exchange. One aspirant claimed that if she had had enough money she would have gone to court to contest the illegality of being barred from elections. Structurally, society erects numerous barriers against female economic empowerment, which prevent women acquiring sufficient social and financial capital for effective politicking, including financing campaigns. Such structural barriers include son preference in access to education, especially for low-income families, restricting women to or overburdening them with domestic duties, and forbidding female land and property inheritance.

Harmful Traditional Practices (HTPs) constitute both an underlying cause and manifestation of violence against women according to FGD participants. For example, because men are ascribed the position of head of families this often translates to women being constrained to give up their personal ambitions, especially political. Bayelsan society tends to perceive political office as a male role and right, being a natural extension of his leadership of the family. One FGD participant asserted that in political meetings female politicians sometimes are warned to cooperate or face being reported to their husbands. A party member cited an example of a female electoral official who witnessed certain illegalities but was told she would be reported to her husband if she said anything. Furthermore, owing to the ascribed role of domesticity female party supporters often end up playing such roles during party functions where they prepare and serve food and drinks to their male counterparts. This is also reflected in the kind of positions women hold within the party leadership structure – usually as Women Leader or other minor offices. One CSO activist aptly summed up the role of tradition as an underlying cause thus,

*Our traditions don’t regard women. In fact, when a woman delivers, the husband and family will ask if the child is a boy or girl, if a boy, they rejoice. If not, they frown. That is the beginning. As if women are not important. They will relegate the woman to the background from that infant age. And when the children are growing up, they treat them that way. Boys don’t work; they are the king in the house. The girls are to do all the domestic chores. And so the tradition is against the women in the society. (FGD participant, 10/10/2015)*

## Perpetrators of VAWIE: Identity and Types

Discussion on the identity and types of VAWIE perpetrators showed that they are quite diverse and vary according to different contexts. Most discussants agreed that men are the main perpetrators of violence against women and against each other. They behave violence towards women whether as voters, aspirants/candidates or election officials within an overall violent political culture, where violence is often the expected norm. 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 market women gave a personal example of government manipulating the market women’s elections,

**Key Finding 1: Men and the political institutions they dominate are the main perpetrators of direct and targeted violence against women and each other. Society at large also unwittingly uses tradition to perpetrate VAWIE. However, women-on-women VAWIE can be even more debilitating, disheartening and discouraging.**

*I stood an election in the market, I won the election but do you know what, the government refused to use me. They picked another lady whom I defeated and the government decided to use her. I won the election and they preferred another person. It was a woman that picked the other woman who was preferred by me. It is the women’s election not the general side in the market. But the market stood still and said they are working with me. (FGD participant, 10/10/2015)*

FGD participants described various examples of deliberate and systematic economic disempowerment by the state government by barring women from accessing statutory government funds. The market women leader alleged,

*They have been doing it, not only this present government, but even the ones before this. When they say they bring N1 billion, they will pieces it; by the time it gets to women its only peanuts that they will use to feed. (FGD participant, 10/10/2015)*

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) to carry out acts of vandalism, intimidation and physical/sexual assault. Discussants also claimed that the parties do not have free and fair primaries, which they also conduct in a climate of violence and intimidation. According to a grassroots activist, “Parties have thugs and they shoot; how many women can stand that?” Another female aspirant claimed the party machinery deprived her of standing as a contestant even though she had fulfilled all necessary requirements. She tells her story,

*Before the day of primaries, there was a list of venues for the primaries and a picked my venue and went to the supposed venue and the place was filled with bushes and then one of my followers said ordinarily the election is supposed to have held in my constituency Headquarters. We went there, nobody. No sign of INEC, no sign of anybody. I was told the elections was [sic] holding at Ogba town. We were going to and fro and then finally, on reaching the venue, they converged all the three constituencies. I was told I could not go in. There were armed heavily armed security men who told me I cannot go in. I said ‘I don’t understand. I’m an aspirant’, they said ‘and so’. I said ‘I don’t understand, I bought form so I have every right to get in and contest. If I fail, I fail galantly’. And they said orders from above said they shouldn’t let me in. In no time about 5-15 minutes, they were out with the winner of that election. I was violated, I was angry. But what would you do? You have heavily armed people there. (FGD participant, 10/10/2015)*

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 it was more difficult for female aspirants to mobilize political support from women because women tend to look down on each other. 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,

*The one (violence) that comes from inside too (from women), let’s talk about it. When women are jealous of each other and are the ones perpetrating violence against themselves. Because we are more in number, without money we can get somebody into position. (FGD participant, 10/10/2015)*

Women expect other women to conform to the subordinated status ascribed by the society and baulk at any sign of non-conformity. Within the constrained political space and in a context of general female oppression women are prone to antagonize and discredit one another as the following quotes from FGD participants indicate,

* *Most of the time women see each other as enemies. ‘If she gets there, she will dress better than I am dressing’, I will not have that privilege of talking down on her just because she is up there’.*
* *By telling lies against a woman- when they go up, they try to deform your character-character assassination.*
* *Like what I have seen, as they are up there, they do not want other women to climb. They really want you down so that they can be dishing out maybe N500, N1000 like that, ‘carry my bag’. If you are coming up, they try to tell their godfathers ‘please do not let that woman to come up’, ‘instead of that woman to come up, use a man’. (FGD participants, 10/10/2015)*

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: Gender-biased socialization to gender-coded identity and behaviour leads to deficits in critical resources and skills women require for effective participation in elections.**

Everyone agreed that tradition was a fundamental contributory factor in other secondary causes of VAWIE and the practical constraints women face in the political space. Secondary causes revealed by discussants include:

* Fear, intimidation and inferiority complex which tradition breeds in women as a result of gender-biased socialization to gender-coded identity and behaviour.
* Lack of access to critical resources such as education, leadership and social mobilization skills and lucrative employment.
* 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

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

## Short and Long-term Impacts of VAWIE

**Key Finding: VAWIE prevents women from full participation in election processes thereby producing a selection-based political system, low accountability and underdevelopment.**

As is to be expected the most obvious impact of VAWIE highlighted by FGD participants is that it dissuades women from participating actively and fully in all political process on an equal footing with men. In this regard, the fear factor is prominent as most women are fearful of loosing the love and support of love ones, being ostracised from society or being physically/sexually attacked. According to discussants the female political representation distorts democracy in a number of ways. These include:

* Leaders being selected instead of elected causing lack of accountability to the electorate. For instance, the market women leader claimed that, “the local government chairpersons, they were all planted by the government of the day. They don’t have anything to give or say.”
* Poor quality of work, which leads to underdevelopment and anarchy.

One implication of VAWIE is that genuine democracy is yet to be practiced in Nigeria. Instead, the political system could be described as a ‘selectocracy.’

## Nature and Effectiveness of Institutional Mechanisms to stop VAWIE

**Key Finding 1: Awareness of the existence of institutional mechanisms to curb VAWIE is low among women and those who do know about them do not resort to them out of fear of reprisals.**

All but three of the FGD participants said they were not aware of any government mechanisms to curb VAWIE. The three others referred to the courts, FIDA and Operation Rescue as state and non-state mechanisms that promote women’s rights. With regard to the courts, a CSO coordinator stated that,

*FIDA can help pursue (cases of electoral violation) but women don’t take advantage of this opportunity because they are afraid that the men/political thugs may attack them. (FGD participant, 10/10/2015)*

This means that there is a low level of awareness about such mechanisms and/or an unwillingness to resort to them. Furthermore, not only are existent laws and the agencies established to enforce them not accessible, they do not safeguard women from reprisal attacks by opponents. This greatly undercuts their effectiveness.

## Women’s Solutions to VAWIE

**Key Finding: Women in Bayelsa envision change through short and long-term solutions to VAWIE.**

The women had their own vision of what a democratic Bayelsa State should look like. They would like to see a female governor or deputy governor in office, and concerted efforts to tackle teenage pregnancy and laws emplaced to protect women from violence. In addition, FGD participants listed short and long-term solutions to VAWIE,

### Long-term Solutions

* Improve girls’ access to quality education
* Break the culture of tradition-induced gender inequality.
* Replace obnoxious traditions with positive, gender-friendly models.
* Reform statutory laws to enhance protection of women

### Short-term Solutions

* Address teenage pregnancy
* Use modified traditional mechanisms to induce change. For example one FGD participant gave the example of such in Iguaye community. In her words, “There is this tradition of doing wake keep in the night. So women started a group and we spoke to the king and later they changed it. We are the only community in Bayelsa that now does wake keeping in the daytime. If you do it beyond 7pm you will pay a fine.” She was of the opinion that if women could mobilize for change in the social sphere they could also do it in the political sphere.
* Create spaces for women to air out their minds on social and political issues, which would also enable them summon up courage to stand for elections.

## Summary of Key Findings

Key findings that emerged from the Focus Group Discussions are:

1. Women in Bayelsa State experience all the five types of election violence identified: physical, sexual, psychological, socio-economic and harmful traditional practices. Gender-based violence is rooted in a patriarchal African tradition that prefers and privileges males over females.
2. Men and the political institutions they dominate are the main perpetrators of direct and targeted violence against women and each other. Society at large also unwittingly uses tradition to perpetrate VAWIE. However, women-on-women VAWIE can be even more debilitating, disheartening and discouraging.
3. Gender-biased socialization to gender-coded identity and behaviour leads to deficits in critical resources and skills women require for effective participation in elections, in particular and political processes, in general.
4. VAWIE prevents women from full participation in election processes thereby producing a selection-based political system, low accountability and underdevelopment.
5. Awareness of the existence of institutional mechanisms to curb VAWIE is low among women and those who do know about them do not resort to them out of fear of reprisals.
6. Women in Bayelsa envision change through short and long-term solutions to VAWIE.

**ANNEX 2**

**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

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**ANNEX 2: ATTENDANCE FOR DISCUSSANTS AT THE FGD FOR STOP-VAWIE HELD IN YENOGOA, BAYELSA STATE**

**FGD 1**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| S/N | NAME | ORGANIZATION/PARTY | POSITION | STATE OF ORIGIN | L.G.A/TOWN | PHONE NO | EMAIL |
| 1. | OPIA BEAUTY BENITA EZUZU | BENNYIS DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE | E.D | BAYELSA | OGBIA | 08067690341 | bennyinitiative@ymail.com |
| 2. | NELLY E. BUSENI | KEBETKACHE WOMEN DEVELOPMENT AND RESOURCE CENTER | PROGRAM | BAYELSA | (YENAGOA)  OKUTUKUTU | 08138275730 | [Ebitokoni65@gmail.com](mailto:Ebitokoni65@gmail.com) |
| 3. | ALAYE JAPHET | SWELI MARKET | LEADER | BAYELSA | YENAGOA | 08064116139 | - |
| 4. | BULUEBIERE KARAMOR | PDP | VOTER | BAYELSA | EKEREMOR | 08105452355 | [skaramor@yahoo.com](mailto:skaramor@yahoo.com) |
| 5. | AYAOGE BRALADOR | GRASSROOT WOMEN ADVOCACY FOR DEVELOPMENT | SECRETARY | BAYELSA | YENAGOA | 07032115273 | [Renne4real@gmail.com](mailto:Renne4real@gmail.com) |
| 6. | PRINCESS ELIZABETH EGBE | OPERATION RESCUE (OPER) | COORDINATOR | BAYELSA | YENAGOA | 07031626507 | [lizmariam@yahoo.com](mailto:lizmariam@yahoo.com) |
| 7. | SYLVER ANGILA | FIDA BAYELSA | - | BAYELSA | SILGA | 08134777957 | - |
| 8. | DR (MRS) TIMI-JOHNSON | AFRICAN-BRITISH RETURNESS INTERNATIONAL | CO-ORDINATOR | BAYELSA | KOLGA | 08033384352 | [Ttimijohnson@gmail.com](mailto:Ttimijohnson@gmail.com) |

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

**BAYELSA STATE**

**FGD 2**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| S/N | NAME | ORGANIZATION/PARTY | POSITION | STATE OF ORIGIN | L.G.A/TOWN | PHONE NO | EMAIL |
| 1. | AMANGI EDOMO AUDABI | FEDERAL UNIVERSITY OTUOKE | PRINCIPAL | BAYELSA | OGBIA | 08037753344 | - |
| 2. | CHRISTIANA FAKEKE | BUSINESS WOMAN | FOUNDER | BAYELSA | - | 07063640407 | - |
| 3. | OMUSUKU BARBARA | HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY | MEMBER | BAYELSA | EKEREMOR | 08036752157 | sukubapen@yahoo.com |
| 4. | WINIFRED GAGARIGA | GOD’S GREAT ARMY OF WOMEN OUTREACH | VISIONEER | BAYELSA | KOLGA | 08132345409 | [Ggreatarmy@yahoo.com](mailto:Ggreatarmy@yahoo.com) |
| 5. | BEKE EKE AGBEDIA | ENTREPRENEUR | FOUNDER | BAYELSA | EKEREMOR | 08062090192 | bbolokirir@yahoo.com |
| 6. | BILKISU ODOKO WOYENGIDADIYE ALI | SA GIRL CHILD | SPECIAL ASSISTANT | BAYELSA | KOLGA | 08035620103 | [sagirlchild@gmail.com](mailto:sagirlchild@gmail.com) |
| 7. | BARR. (MRS) DEME PENAWEI PAMOSOO | S.A LEGAL MATTERS TO S.A POLITICAL TO GOVERNMENT OFFICE /PDP | S.A LEGAL MATTERS | BAYELSA | EKEREMOR | 08037092402 | penaweideme@yahoo.com |
| 8. | UNITY E. OTOTO | MAN & WATER SURVIVAL FOUNDATION | FOUNDER | BAYELSA | OGBIA | 08036682030 | Mwsf\_org@yahoo.com |