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## Overcoming Roadblocks to Women's Political Participation

Fostering south-south cooperation and knowledge exchange is the priority of United Nation (UN) Women and the FGE. This cooperation will help identify gender equality strategies beyond country borders. In this spirit UN Women offices in Nigeria and Kenya with FGE facilitated a knowledge exchange between the FGE grantee organizations; Alliances for Africa of Nigeria and Uraia of Kenya in order to identify and overcome the roadblocks to women's political participation in the two countries and beyond. The learning exchange brought together Civil society organizations including Alliances for Africa with a wealth of experience in women's political participation and has worked with key stakeholders situated along the path from a women's intention to participate in political decision making to her election to office.

The learning exchange was a platform for identifying similarities, differences, and innovative approaches to overcoming barriers to women's political participation. The UN grantee, Uraia and Alliances for Africa exchanged their perspective, experiences and approaches towards overcoming the roadblocks that were identified. This knowledge exchange led to a common understanding of the various stages of election process, commonalities between and within countries were identified, pertinent roadblocks defined and possible strategies to overcoming them discussed. The knowledge exchange adopted the following stages of election;

Intention ► Party Membership ► Party Nomination ► Election day ► In Political Office

In each stage, it was discovered that cultural, structural and economic roadblocks may dissuade women from participating in politics. Such roadblocks include; internalized gender stereotypes, electoral violence, economic constraints. The knowledge exchange meeting adopted strategies to overcoming these identified roadblocks, which include; training and mentoring of successful candidates, engaging political parties, electoral bodies, male politicians and traditional leaders in



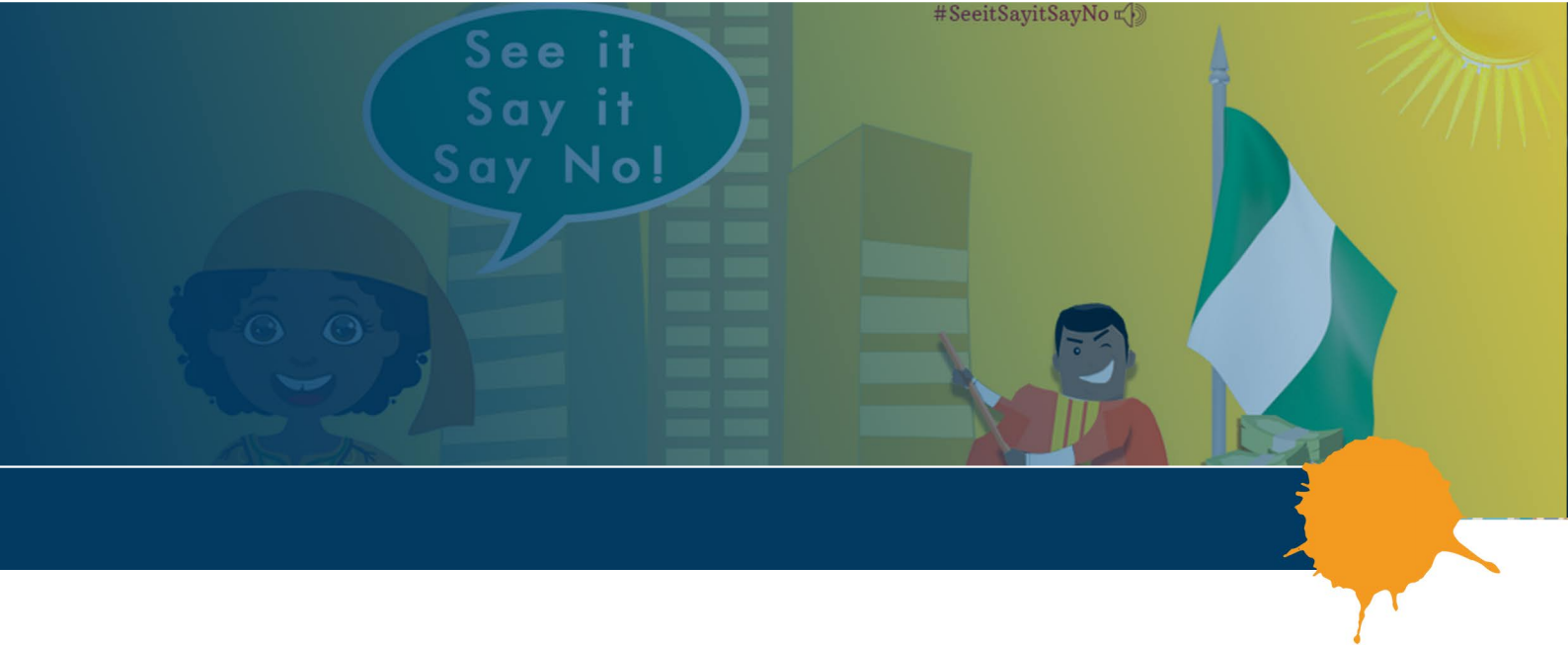




## Influencing Change to end violence against women and girls in Imo state

Baby factories continue to flourish in southeast Nigeria despite effort by civil society organizations and government agencies to tackle this endemic form of violence against women and girls. In imo state for example, recent research shows that baby factories now operate under the guise of motherless babies's homes and prayer homes. This entrenched abuse is a modern form of human trafficking that rips young women off their own their future. As an organization focused on advancing the rights of women and girls and changing the narratives of abuse and violence, Alliances for Africa with support from African Women Development Fund (AWDF) is currently working to end the practice of baby factories in Imo state. This project seeks to strengthen existing institutions to take actions to end violence against women and girls, and pass the baby factory bill into law in Imo state. The baby factory bill prohibits the monetary transactions on babies in Imo state, Nigeria. In November 2018, Alliances for Africa met with the international federation of female lawyers, (FIDA) and partners working on issues of violence against women and girls to review the Baby factory Bill. After the review of the bill, Strategic advocacies had been ongoing to advocate for the passage of the baby factory bill into law in Imo state. We realize that it is important to have legal frameworks to back up the work we do violence and abuse against women. The year 2019 will unfold into series of public hearing on the baby factory bill. We use this medium to call on the general public to support the passage of the Baby Factory bill into law in Imo state to protect our young women and girls from human trafficking and entrenched abuse.





## Taking actions to institutionalize anti-corruption transparency and accountability in south east Nigeria

Our intervention to tackle corruption and institutionalize good governance in Enugu and Ebonyi state in South East Nigeria kicked off in October 2018. MacArthur Foundation funds the project for a period of two years. The objective of the project is to reduce corruption, increase citizen's engagement in governance and institutionalize accountability and transparency for good governance in Enugu and Ebonyi state. A consultative meeting was organized as a platform to discuss strategies to tackle corruption and other issues that were identified in the two-project states. The meeting drew stakeholders from across the society to discuss and deliberate on the issue of corruption. The mapping of stakeholders for the consultative meeting was very strategic, we had the physically challenged, the market women, the Albinos, the youths, traditional leaders, Faith Based Organizations (FBO), politicians, aspirants, elected officials, political party leaders, women groups and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in attendance. The participants in worked to identify mechanism and produce tools to tackle corruption. Some of the highlight of the meeting include;

- Designing of score cards
- Designing citizen's report cards
- Identify sustainable tackling components
- Develop contents for drafting of the MOU for commitments by aspirants
- Establish citizen's watch dog and whistle blowers

Participants agreed on the following scoring matrix for developing a scorecard; Education, basic infrastructure, employment, security, accessibility, human resource development, health and economy. Health, transparency in budget process, access to information and citizens engagement were all included in the scoring matrix developed by participants. The participants designed citizen's report card rating from excellent, very good, good, fair and poor. The following variables were adopted for designing the citizen report card; Policy implementation, project distribution and completion, 35% affirmative action, project sustainability, constituency projects, youth participation, provision of industries, human capital development. Health care delivery, power supply, accessibility,



accountability, representation, constituency projects, commitment to constituency choice and designs, housing, security, transport system, tourism, agriculture, economic empowerment, open budget system, sustainable database for birth rate and death rate, and sports. In all, every program development by elected officials must absorb the needs of the marginalized in the society such as; disabled and women and girls and children.

The following sustainable tracking components were identified; health, education and road network. Drafting of MOU for political leaders captured industrialization, designing programs that promote equality, provide life skill for persons living with disability, access to information, 35% affirmative action, establishment of committee to monitor and regulate aspirants, clear agreement on the number of terms in office, open budget system, payment of salary when due. Human right education, implementing the CCD( Community Charter of Demand) approach, establishment of state based debate group, discouraging voter inducement, state financial autonomy, periodic independent audit of public accounts and engagement with citizens at all level. These bodies were identified as watchdogs and whistle blowers; media, legislators, public complain commission, independent observers, town union presidents, traditional rulers, social institutions, religious bodies, town criers, schools and security agencies.







## The impact of tradition on women's participation in political leadership

In September 2018, Alliances for Africa (AfA) conducted a research study through a series of focus groups and key informant interviews, involving various groups of people including young people, men, women and religious institutions in Echara Autonomous Community, Ikwo LGA in Ebonyi State of Nigeria. Through the focus groups, and key informant interviews, AfA gathered information to help understand the Ili-Noyo tradition of the Ikwo people and appreciate their individual and collective perceptions about this tradition and its impact on women participation in leadership and governance. Very importantly to identify the stakeholders in the tradition who can make the practice a platform to support women to ascend leadership and governance.

The research study on Ili-Noyo in Ikwo LGA of Ebonyi State is one among many traditional and cultural practices in the South Eastern Nigeria, with heavy patriarchal inclination, greatly limiting women participation in governance. The research will show the possible points of intervention that can reduce the limitation and instead become platforms for supporting female active participation in leadership and elected governance.

The research study came with diverse perceptions and opinions. However, the people established that Ili-Noyo is the life of the people of Ikwo, a point from where they all originated which is the highly revered. Amazingly, the result of the discussions and engagements not only confirmed that this tradition excludes females but also blamed the women for being docile and not taking any action to improve their lot.

At the point of planning this study, the hypothesis was that the tradition limited the participation of women leading to the overall goal to establish the linkage between culture and tradition to low participation of women in leadership and governance, in order to develop a culture and tradition based strategy to ensure support for women in leadership and governance.





This study has established an extremely clear understanding of Ili-Noyo tradition of the Ikwo people. The people were willing and proud to discuss the tradition in details and their enthusiasm showed their various perceptions about this traditional practice and the possibility of utilizing the platform to support women for leadership and governance which becomes an ultimate progress towards achieving 35% Affirmative Action. The discussions and interview were designed to gather information from the community members in regard to the following outcomes:

1. To understand what is Ili-Noyo traditional practice
2. To understand how various persons and groups in Ikwo LGA perceive the Ili-Noyo tradition
3. To understand what impact the tradition of Ili-Noyo has on women participation in leadership and governance in Ikwo LGA
4. To identify the stakeholders and how they can utilize this Ili-Noyo tradition to support women in leadership and governance.

#### Participant Demographics

Forty participants divided into four groups of ten or twelve persons in each group took part in the focus group discussion including:

- 10 male youths aged between 18 years and 35 years with 6 among them involved in rice production, 2 in cassava business and 2 in sales of parts of machine and cooking gas respectively.
- 10 women among whom 6 are cassava farmers, 2 engaging in restaurant and beer parlour business, one seamstress and one nurse.
- 10 men basically involved in rice and cassava production
- 10 persons representing religious institutions in the positions of church leaders, youth and women group leaders in the religious institutions.
- About 10 among the 16 women who represented either the women group or religious institutions could neither read nor write and seemed almost afraid of speaking or responding to questions.



Here are some questions that we used for the survey;

- What is Ili-Noyo?
- Who are the beneficiaries of this tradition?
- What are your perceptions about Ili-Noyo?
- How have Ili-Noyo affected women/females in general

### **Conclusions:**

☒ Concerning anyone who is involved in politics irrespective of gender, if they care, they go to Ili-Noyo to seek approval and blessings. When Ili-Noyo pronounces that one as a choice of the people, it becomes binding on all Ikwo people to vote for this person and anyone who goes against this plan will enjoy the curses invoked by Ili-Noyo on anyone who does not support the candidate that is the choice of the people.

☒ Regarding women in politics, they can receive the same candidacy approval like their male counterparts. The only difference is that they will go to the shrine with a male person from their family who will receive the blessings on her behalf and come out to pass it on her, because she cannot get beyond the point where everyone accesses with ease.

☒ The fact that Ili-Noyo gives approval as the opinion of the people concerning political candidates is avoided by some people because you must promise to represent the people and not your selfish interest. The fear of not keeping this promise made at the shrine with a possible repercussion of death, keeps people, especially women from going to get the approval or blessings from Ili-Noyo. It is not that women are prevented from requesting his approval or receiving his blessings.

☒ Women also handle some practices like the Ala-Obu which are the gods that bind husband and wife to prevent sexual infidelity. It is exclusively for the women.



☒ The women if they feel strongly about the exclusion from Ili-Noyo practice, then they should have taken the Opefi seriously so that it can be for the women, what the Ili-Noyo had been for the males, because the couple (Ikwo Noyo and his wife Opefi) were both buried in that forest. But, they abandoned Opefi and when men have revered their ancestor, the women feel excluded.

☒ Women have never been fore-bearers and seem happy at their background position, especially as they are more inclined towards Christianity. They are not bothered with the Ili-Noyo practices.

☒ The rules related to Ili-Noyo traditional practice can only be fully kept and maintained by men, it would be almost impossible for the women to do them.

☒ In Ikwo politics, because of how we perceive women, they cannot occupy key political positions like LGA Chairman, they can be the Vice because men are the head always. It was during the tenure of Ukamaka Egwu as the first lady of Ebonyi State that insisted that all LGA Secretary positions be occupied only by women.

☒ No matter how we much we fight for women participation in leadership and governance, they need to acquire education, in order to aspire and even achieve these aspirations. Today, still, in many families in Ebonyi and Ikwo particularly, female children are deliberately denied education because like the men would argue, she will soon get married and do what she had been created for: child bearing and home keeping. So she has no business with leadership and does not possess the capacity to lead or represent men.

☒ Ili-Noyo has nothing to do with politics. If as a politician, you want confirmation and blessing, you can go with gifts and sacrificial materials to the shrine and it is open for everyone, but the women must be represented inside by a man in her family.

☒ The truth is that women are not and have hardly been active in politics. No one is preventing them assuming they want to take the action to become active in politics.





Afterall, a woman called Nwankwo Umanyi was a great leader and still a woman. She was a great organizer and mobilizer and even led the women riot in 1954 in Abakaliki. Such women are rare now, yet, it was at a time when the traditional practices of Ili-Noyo were very strong, yet no man was against her. She was respected like a governor and did several things better than men ...Eze Albert Opefi, The Omaka Ejali 2nd. (Traditional Leader of Ekpelu Umueka)

☒ In the past, men used to speak on behalf of women, but things have changed so much and women now have their own opinion on issues and even express themselves in the public, and this also applies to politics.

☒ In Ebonyi State, Egwu Nwankwo, an Ikwo son who was a member of Ebonyi State House of Assembly observed that the population of women was more than the population of men. When he was contesting, he was the first person who started sharing food stuffs to women which mobilized votes for him. Today, as we work towards equality, sharing food stuff does not guarantee votes.

☒ The instability of politics that has led to high level of apathy among citizens

☒ I am one of the persons that believe that opportunity for leadership and governance should be given to the best candidate, irrespective of gender. For instance, in my cabinet, I have 3 women out of 18 members. This is not obtainable in other autonomous communities in Ikwo LGA.

☒ Ikwo has more women than men in population and this they can use during elections, and past experiences have shown that women do better than men in many areas including leadership.

☒ Ikwo Noyo has a sacred tradition strongly tied to Ili-Noyo and that is the constitution of Ikwo. It is not everyone that talks with authority about Ili-Noyo

☒ The communities in Ikwo LGA are still in their natural state, with little or no development or infiltration from external environments. As a result, they still hold on tenaciously to extreme and somewhat negative beliefs and practices which have continued overtime to be an abuse of the rights of women





## Recommendations

☒ It is obvious from the study that in Ikwo community, like several South Eastern communities, there is still high level of gender inequality enshrined in traditions and culture, making women constantly feel inadequate and incapable, especially towards leadership and governance. The result is the withdrawn attitude of the women in this community. It is therefore very necessary to carry out a strong advocacy on gender, especially to the male youths who are preparing for leadership in these communities, since according to them women are inferior to men and are sometimes “impure”. They need to begin a change process of how they perceive women

☒ Majority of women have accepted that they should only bear children and mind the family. It is necessary to enlighten the women in this community what benefits accrue to the entire community if the women become proactive and very interested in leadership and governance.

☒ Majority of men in this community are of the opinion that Ili-Noyo does not affect women participation in governance, while the women (when they could talk) insist that Ili-Noyo excludes women and they are no longer interested. It becomes necessary to encourage the women to become active members of their communities, and they would see if truly Ili-Noyo does not limit them.

☒ It is men through tradition and culture like Ili-Noyo, that made women docile, it is recommended therefore that men through culture and tradition should encourage women for instance through 35% appointment of females into the traditional rulers council. Overtime, this will build the confidence of women enough to launch out beyond their community

☒ The population of females without any formal education is high in Ikwo LGA, formal education is necessary, without which a woman cannot even aspire to governance. The community must deliberately make efforts to educate their girl child which will contribute to community development.



## A Media Report of Our Outreach Events

We organized outreach events in two communities in Ikwo Local Government Area (LGA) in Ebonyi state. We visited Enyibichiri community and Ndufu-Echara community in November 2018, to discuss utilizing tradition to advance women's participation in community/political leadership. At the end of the outreach event,

- Male community leaders and family heads at the communities endorsed women's leadership in the community
- Prioritization of girl child education in both communities
- Adult female without formal education agreed to enroll in adult education center
- Male community leaders agreed to support the review of discriminatory cultural practices that limit women and girls





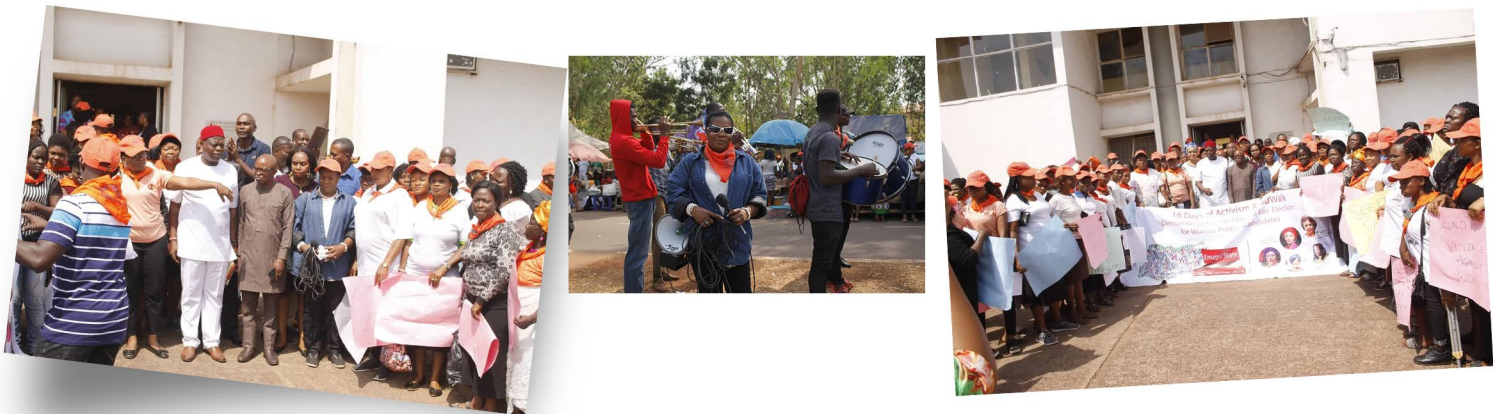




16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM; A MEDIA REPORT



INEC REP Assuring women of a Credible, Free, and Fair Election







## Commemorating the International Day of the Girl Child

The 2018 theme for the International day of the Girl child focused “Empower girls, before, during and after conflict.”

In commemorating the annual event, AfA carried out two major activities; A Talk Show (The Conference Room) and a 30 Minutes phone-in Radio programme at My Radio Station; 100.9; to extensively discuss and generate conversation on the limiting effect Male child preference bears on the the relevance of the girl child.

The concept of theme, ““Abolishing male child preference; promoting the relevance of the girl child,” by AfA was hinged on the realization that despite the intensity of advocating, Promoting and demanding for the rights of the Girl Child, the Nigerian society, especially South Eastern Nigeria, is biased against the relevance of the Girl Child and continues to downplay her relevance.

Five discussants from the SheGoverns Mentorship Initiative of AfA; Ms. Blessing Abani- Elem, Ms. Ijeoma Uneze, Ms. Chizurum Oluwatofunmi, Ms. Princess Ibeh and IhuomaChidire Anuonye discussed the theme extensively and unanimously opined that to accurately empower and sustain the empowerment of the Girl Child, the society must understand the psychological limitations male child preference has on all parties; the Girl child, her male counterpart and the society. The discussants agreed that Male child preference is hugely responsible for the unfairness and hostility women and girls suffer in Nigeria as the man is first preferred as a boy before growing into a man seen as superior to women, by the same society.

The phone-in Radio program had callers calling in to opine their thoughts on the relevance of the girl child and the need to project this relevance. AfA was represented by Princess Ibeh and IhuomaChidire Anuonye under the SheGoverns Campaign Initiative of AfA.

### Outcome

These activities generated conversation on the issue of male child preference which is contemporarily underplayed but persists in even the most elite groups in Nigeria, especially South Eastern Nigeria. The Video of the Talk Show released has reached about 212 audience and still growing. Some commentators on the released video appreciated realization of the injustice male child preference perpetuates on the girl child and the limitations it has on the empowerment of the girl child.



The Conference Room Discussion on Patriarchy



## THE AUGUST MEETING

The Aba Women's Riot was a story I heard while growing up but did not pay much attention to. I was oblivious of the impact it made in the lives of women in the eastern part of Nigeria until I relived history in the play titled "The August Meeting". The play which was Directed by Kenneth Uphopho, produced by Chioma Onyenwe and written by Paul Ugbede, is a history class everyone needs to attend as it recreates and shows the resilience and determination women have when they work together to achieve progress and development in the society.

The play, the August meeting is set in the period just after the recent riot in Aba, at a time when, the women of Oloko meet to savour their victory against the white man's taxation bullet. However, unknown to them, the real battle in front of them was not against the white man but against their culture, their husbands and the laws they had created to keep the women restricted and in constant check.

Some of the women who were major players in the revolt met at the home of Nwakaego a widow who inherited a mansion from her late husband and offered to allow the women use it for their meetings. The women arrived and found the house under lock and key. Sadly the elders of the land had decided that Nwakaego cannot inherit her late husband's house because she failed to bear him a child.

The women leader, Nwanyeruwa, had just been released from prison where she was held as a result of her active participation in the Aba Women's revolt. She is mad at the recent development in Nwakaego's life and decides that the women must revolt against the cultures and the laws that keep them relegated to the background, treating them like second-class citizens.

It was later revealed that contrary to the rumour making rounds that Nwakaego was the reason for the childlessness in her home, the infertility problem was her husband's fault (or was from her husband). It was this revelation in Nwakaego's marriage that eventually led to the other women sharing their own less palatable experiences. Some of the issues that the women shared surround cases of female genital mutilation, emotional abuse and sexual suppression. The stories/experiences shared came from a very deep and sensitive place in each woman's past that brought tears not only to the narrators but to the audience as well.

At this point the women take a firm decision; enough is enough! They must have thought to themselves, our human rights, feelings and needs must be recognized and acknowledged. This new realization motivated the women to demand for their rightful place in society.





Nwanyeruwa, the main player in the Aba women's riot decides that it is a good time to pass over the baton of leadership to a younger and more energetic woman. Ikonnia was the woman who got the much revered position.

The play ends with the women marching happily towards Nwakaego's mansion holding in their hands the keys to the house, bringing to conclusion that the victory was theirs and together they are a formidable force able to break free from the bondage of socio-cultural expectations of a woman. Which no doubt is that of subservient and subordination.

In the history of our country, Nigerian women stood their ground in the face of adversity and possible stigmatization to fight for their right and for equality.

Despite this effort from decades ago, the representation of women in both elective and appointive positions is very low as women are usually marginalized in terms of participating in the process of political leadership and decision making. National issues are women's issues too especially as women constitute more than half of the country's population. How then can women not be part of the process of national decision making on issues that affect them directly.

In June 2018, we engaged in a focused group discussion in five states in southeast Nigeria to understand the root causes of women underrepresentation in political decision making. Feedback from participants listed the following challenges as the root cause of women's underrepresentation in political leadership/decision-making; cultural/traditional barriers, patriarchy, stigmatization, financial burden, political violence, sexual harassment, political party discrimination, poor mentorship, gender discrimination and family commitment.

However, all hope is not lost as we can take a cue from Nwanyeruwa, who was resilient and provided leadership and mentorship to the younger women. As stated, she eventually passed the baton to the younger ones while she guides them on their new journey of leadership.

This is to encourage mentorship in the Nigerian political system especially among women. Nigerian women August Meetings brings igbo women together both home and abroad annually. Our Nigerian women can build on this platform to promote mentorship among women in politics and build synergy in solidarity as we advocate to achieve the minimum 35% representation of women in political leadership.

The media is strategic to women's participation in political leadership. Let us mobilise our partners in the media to portray Nigerian women in politics positively and increase reporting and coverage of Nigerian female candidates especially now that we approach the 2019 general elections.





To the political parties that perpetrate discrimination against women, do not forget it is one party, equal rights. “Election no be war” make it safe for women and end political violence.

Our men, family heads and custodians of culture we ask that you use your influence to review culture, our mothers and sisters are capable of leadership. To the big Godfathers who decides whom the mantle of leadership goes to, please make those decisions with some godmothers too, I am sure they will recommend their daughters to lead alongside your sons.

To every Nigerian woman out there, understand that the mantle of leadership will not be handed to you on a platter of gold; I charge you to be ambitious and intentional about your pursuit of leadership. Be willing to reinvent yourself and strive to overcome obstacles that may fall in your path to political leadership

Nigerians, the participation of women in governance and politics is of strategic importance not only for women empowerment, but because it has wider benefits and impact for development and inclusive democracy in general. Come 2019 general election, exercise your franchise without discrimination, vote for a credible leader, vote for a woman.

Chinwendu Anozie and Obu Nwaka ©2018  
Alliances for Africa



## About Alliances for Africa

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AfA is an international African led non-governmental human right, peace and sustainable development organization. AfA works with partners in, around and beyond the continent of Africa. AfA was created to enhance and reconstruct the interface human right and development, with a vision to contributing innovatively to the task of tackling causes of endemic poverty and exclusion in Africa. AfA works with partners in, around and beyond the continent of Africa to advocate for the protection of human rights; promote women's participation in leadership and governance; build institutional capacity, advocate for gender justice, equality and non-discrimination, as well as promoting peace, security and conflict resolution interventions.

### Vision

AfA works to interface local, national, sub-regional and international initiatives on human rights, peace, and sustainable development, acting as a facilitator for the generation, and dissemination of information within the field pertinent to Africa.

### Mission

AfA's mission is to enhance and strengthen on a sustainable basis, local, national, sub-regional and international institutions in Africa, by being active in the monitoring, advancing, promoting and protection of human rights, peace, and sustainable development initiatives.

## Connect With Us

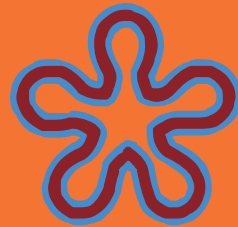
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