

THE INFLUENCE OF USAID PROGRAMS ON FEMALE POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT IN ABUJA, NIGERIA

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Abstract

Since Nigeria's independence, women's political participation has been limited, restricting their influence in decision-making processes. This study examines the impact of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) on women's political participation in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). Guided by Liberal Feminism theory, the research highlights gradual improvements through advocacy for equal rights and supportive legislation. Data were collected through questionnaires (318 valid responses out of 327 administered), interviews with purposively selected stakeholders—including USAID, UN Women Nigeria, Women Advocates Research and Documentation Centre (WARDC), USAID beneficiaries, and the Nigerian Women Trust Fund (NWTF)—and secondary sources. Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS 20 and presented via frequency and percentages, while qualitative data were examined through content analysis. Findings reveal that USAID significantly advances gender equality in Nigeria through campaigns, advocacy, capacity building, partnerships, and service delivery. However, challenges within institutional structures hinder the effectiveness of programs by UN Women and partners. The study concludes that creating an enabling environment for women's political participation and active engagement by civil society organizations are essential for improving gender inclusivity in Nigerian politics.

Keywords: Women, Political participation, USAID, Gender equality, Nigeria

Introduction

Over the years, the United Nations General Assembly has established conventions, resolutions and declarations on gender issues to reaffirm the centrality of gender equality to sustainable development worldwide. These conventions define commitments to undertake a series of measures to end discrimination against women in all forms. Countries that ratified these conventions become legally bound to put to practice the provisions and report on measures taken to comply with obligations. Despite many countries ratifying international conventions and protocols on gender equality and women political participation, the low level of women's representation in government and politics is a worrisome circumstance and thus raises the question of reasons behind it. As reported by Chalaby (2017) and Radu (2018), half of the world's populations are women, but today women only hold 23% of all seats in parliaments and senates globally. According to George (2019), United Nations (UN) data reveal that only 22.8% of all national parliamentarians were women in 2016 (up from

11.3% in 1995), and only eleven women served as head of state. The United Nations itself has their agencies headed predominantly by men. As of 2023, women's representation in parliaments across Europe and Central Asia stands at 26.1 percent, trailing behind the global average of 26.5 percent (UNDP, 2023).

The timing of gains differs across countries as well. Some countries made their gains in female representation in the 1980s (Iceland, Canada, Spain), while others made major gains in the 1990s (Australia, Austria, Germany). There are even countries that have yet to elect their first female representative, such as Micronesia (Tripp & Kang, 2019). Along with the worldwide growth in women's political representation there is substantial country variation in patterns of growth and change. Some countries, such as Sri Lanka and Turkey, have always had less than 5% female parliamentary representation. Others, like Denmark and Mozambique, show steady increases in female representation over time, ultimately resulting in greater than 30% female representation. Still others, after a long period of low female representation, made rapid gains over a short period of time (e.g., Rwanda and South Africa). More than any other region of the world, Africa's political transitions and particularly the West Africa region has been influenced by pressure for change formulated by external actors, most notably the international donor community and specifically the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). And while democracy promotion in both Eastern Europe and Latin America has been linked to the dual goals of political and economic liberalization, political liberalization has been the main emphasis of democracy assistance to sub-Saharan Africa. Linked to this, the main providers of democracy assistance to Africa have been bilateral donor agencies, and multilateral organizations have played a more marginal role (Bariledum, Godpower, & Tambari, 2016). Nigerian women have roughly the lowest participation in national legislature, with 5.9%, when compared to the bulk of other African countries, including Uganda (34.6%), South Africa (43.2%), Ethiopia (27.7%), Cameroon (20%), Niger (12.3%), and the Democratic Republic of Congo (8.0%). Nigerian women in particular have not attained that level of political participation. Women's participation in governance in Nigeria remains incredibly low, ranking last in the world at barely 7% (Onyegbula, 2013).

In Nigeria, statistics have shown unequal representation of women to men in political participation. In the 2019 general election, only Obiageli Ezekwesili (who later withdrew from the contest) represented the women fold as a contestant in the presidential election. In line with the above, the major political parties recorded no single woman as an aspirant for the party's candidature in the primary election and it shows the extent of the level of inequality in gender political participation. Nigeria returned to full-fledged democracy in 1999 after recording 16 years of military dictatorship in the country. The periodic election has become part and parcel of the features of the Nigerian democratic dispensation after every four years. There is no doubt that the constitution does not place any restriction on any candidate based on gender as Nigeria practices universal adult suffrage where adults from eighteen years of age can vote and be voted for irrespective of gender.

The Consortium for Electoral and Political Processes (CEPPS) has been the major platform for USAID's democratic support in Nigeria and it consists of three United States NGOs; the National Democratic Institute (NDI), the International Republican Institute (IRI) and the International Federation for Electoral System (IFES). In 1999, the NDI initiated a programme for legislative support to a total sum of USD4.54 (N1, 634, 383, 928.10 billion). The training included training in the areas of budget analysis, rules and procedure, the role of committees, legislative drafting, constituency relations, civil society engagement and legislative IT resource centre. Another NDI budget of USD6.2 million (N22, 319, 396, 841.28) under the USAID/Nigeria country strategy for 2004 to 2009 was provided for supporting democracy, good governance and electoral process. Also, the USAID provided funds for IFES to provide technical assistance and the electoral support to INEC worth USD4.3 million (N15, 479, 698, 204.35 billion) till December 2003 (Adetula, Kew & Kwaja, 2010).

In the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja Nigeria, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) supports the participation of women in peace processes, political transitions, donor conferences, and other decision-making processes relevant to conflict prevention and resolution, democratic development, and human rights. They have moved beyond mere designing of policies to developing strategic grassroots' techniques in helping the nation's women fight discrimination, inequality and poverty. Yet, the journey towards gender equality is still far as there are prevailing factors that seem to work against the goal of gender equality, especially in Nigeria.

The women participation in politics remained problematic. Nigerian women are squeezed out of electoral competition despite the numerical size they occupy in Nigeria's population. This disposition is aided by religious, cultural, biological and even cognitive dynamics. This has over the years limited their participation in electoral competition in Nigeria especially during the current Fourth Republic. Nigeria has low rates of female representation in politics by global and regional standards. It is against this background that this study attempt to address the gap in literature which is the impact of USAID on women political participation in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja.

Statement of the Problem

Extant literature reviewed show that researchers have not directly investigated growth or decline in women's numbers in politics in Nigeria through the lens of the support from United States Agency for International Development (USAID). Instead, previous research has focused on comparisons across countries in the level of women's representation at recent time points and this constitutes a striking gap to be addressed.

Efforts from the UN and international development organizations such as USAID over the years have made some progress on the issues of gender equality globally. Yet, the journey towards gender equality is still far as there are prevailing factors that seem to work against the goal of gender equality, especially in Nigeria. The historically low representation of women in politics is frequently due to social marginalization rather than a lack of desire or motivation. In Nigeria, women make up to 50% of the population and

approximately 51% of the electorate, yet they are not afforded the same rights as men, who control the political landscape and occupy the great majority of the nation's decision-making positions. The National Assembly has been overwhelmingly dominated by men since 1999 when democracy was reinstated in Nigeria.

Gender Strategy Advancement International, in a June 2022 report, noted that women's political participation in Nigeria is below global and continental standards. They said that in 2015, the national average of women's political participation in Nigeria was 6.7% in elective and appointive positions, far below the Global Average of 22.5%, African Regional Average of 23.4% and West African Sub Regional Average of 15%. This negates the 30% affirmative action Beijing Declaration Nigeria is a signatory to and runs afoul of the Constitution which enshrines representation. Nigeria ranks 181 out of 193 countries on the Gender Equality Index (World Economic Forum, 2021). A Nigerian government statistical report shows that in the years 1999 - 2015, 6% of councilors (local government) were women, 24% of judges in the federal court were women, and an average of 7% of each type of high-level government officials and senior administrators were women. The posts surveyed were: head of service, permanent secretary, special adviser, special assistant, central bank governors, chief executive officer, director general and executive secretary. There were no female central bank governors (of four positions). The role with the highest percentage of women at 28% was special assistant (Nigerian National Bureau of Statistics, 2018).

Nigeria has accepted several international agreements that prohibit gender discrimination and advance equal access for men and women in governmental and other decision-making institutions. The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), which affirms that everyone has the right to vote and that men and women should enjoy equal rights, is one of them; the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which Nigeria's government ratified without reservation in 1985, as well as its 2000 Optional Protocol, which Nigeria ratified in 2004; and the 1995 UN Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, which urged member states to take action to enact laws prohibiting discrimination against women. The National Assembly still has a sizable gender disparity, nevertheless. The majority of these documents have not been domesticated, despite the 1999 Constitution of Nigeria (as amended in section 12) providing that an international treaty must be done so for it to apply. To make matters worse, a measure introduced by Senator Biodun Olujimi in 2016 that aimed to domesticate and include these instruments was voted down on second reading by both Chambers of the National Assembly (Okechukwu, 2022). Despite the efforts made by USAID to support women's political participation in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, the problem still persists which informs the need for this research.

Objectives of the Study

- i. To examine the nature of USAID's support to women's political participation in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja.

ii. To ascertain the extent which the role played by USAID contributed to women political participation in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja.

Concept of Political Participation

Basically, participation is a process by which individuals, groups and organisations could become actively involved in a project or programme of activity. Political participation, therefore, is the active involvement of persons in political activities in a country. This is not the case of electoral participation which in the strict sense is possible when an individual has reached the age of 18 years and above. Agbaje (2019:193) has stated that “political participation is one of the fundamental ideas of a democratic society. It is a sine qua non for democracy because democracy involves a commitment to equal opportunity for men and women to develop their individual capacities.” This suggests that political participation is a democratic imperative where social inclusion rather than exclusion is the norm.

Within the context of gender, men and women should be proportionally included in a governance system. Odame (2010) advances this idea by explaining that political participation is the equal involvement in decision-making, whether in policy making, planning or administration. Within a political context, this could mean involvement in needs assessment, project formulation, implementation or evaluation. For Odame (2010), political participation is not an event but a process that traverses all facets of a system or even society. In the context of local governance, this should entail assuring equality of opportunity and outcomes for both men and women regarding staff recruitment and development, salary/pay and allowances equity, material resource access and distribution, promotion procedures and institutional climate. It also extends to equal voice, safety and security for women and men workers of the Assembly as well as projects and programmes of the Assembly in the communities.

From the above, political participation can be seen as one of the fundamental ideas of a democratic society. It is the sine qua non of democracy, because democracy involves a commitment to equal opportunity for men and women to develop their individual capacities. Although equal political opportunity for women is a goal shared by both men and women and despite increased support of women’s equality, for thousands of years, women records poor participation in politics and decision making positions. The fact that politics permeates every aspect of life owes to Aristotle’s submission that it is only within a political community that human beings can live the good life. It is imperative to grasp the truth that all social problems are in one way or the other linked to political decisions of the powers that be, a participation in this essential ingredient of a political system is therefore very much a necessity.

Concept of Woman

The concept of woman is a rich and complicated one which includes many more elements than the identification of the type “woman” with the type “female human” suggests. Although a person’s sex may be a paradigmatic element in the correct application of the concept, sex is not the only element, and in cases where a person’s sex is indeterminate, it is not an element at all.

For Spelman (2021), a particular definition of woman is relative to a context or way of life which includes other significant features such as race and class. She claims that if we can say that societies create women out of females (making gender out of sex) and that different societies do this differently, indeed in part define their differences by how they do this, we can say in an important sense that there is a variety of genders. Gender is constructed and defined in conjunction with elements of identity such as race, class, ethnicity and nationality rather than separable from them.

If Spelman is right, the term 'woman' refers to a range of different properties: For middle-class Asian-American women, it refers to womanness; for poor Euro-American women, it attributes womanness; for middle-class AfroAmerican women, it attributes womanness, etc. The question arises of whether and how the many individuals satisfying the different definitions of "woman" can be unified into a type. Spelman's view leaves us with a problem when discussing the sex-gender distinction. Her position is a strong version of the view that gender is a social category: Different genders are constituted by different social contexts. On this view, although women are typically associated with having a female sex, there is no necessary relation between sex and gender. Yet being a female human (or having a female body) is perhaps the most important crosscultural feature making the concept "woman" applicable and distinguishing it from the concept "man."

Many feminist theorists, especially the "essentialist critics," have resisted any such project for defining women because features that have been thought to be "essential" to women have also been central to their oppression. For example, historically women were thought to be intellectually inferior to men and thus were denied many educational opportunities. Another example might be a description of women as being "closer" to nature because they physically give birth to children. This characterization may be used to argue that, as a result of their being necessarily closer to nature than men, women ought to be the primary caregivers for children. The features identified with females, namely certain physiological features, are taken to signify that a person is a woman, although in some cases the features are perceived as being present when in fact they are not. While women do not seem necessarily to share any particular feature or experience, they will be candidates to be treated or molded into certain kinds of beings by patriarchal institutions. These patriarchal institutions put forth a normative view of what women should be creatures in the service of men and compel females (and some males in some instances) to conform to standards that place them in a subordinate role to men.

There are four general elements in the concept woman. First, womanness is attributed on the basis of female sex. Female sex includes having the characteristics of a human female (XX chromosome, sex characteristics, and general morphology) and having other bodily characteristics such as gait or voice quality. Secondly, a range of phenomenological features, or aspects of what it feels like to be a woman, are typically associated with women: for example, physical feelings, like having menstrual cramps and female sexual experience, and lived experience of childbirth, breast-feeding, or at least the potential to have such lived experience. The phenomenology also includes feelings which are the product of social factors, like

fear of walking on the streets at night or fear of rape. Thirdly, there are roles such as wearing typical female dress, or being oppressed on the basis of one's sex, or typically undertaking private responsibilities like childrearing rather than public responsibilities in the wider community.

Empirical Literature Review

Dibbie & Okere (2019) investigated the performance of the Government of Nigeria and NGOs in the empowerment of women in the country. The study uses both qualitative and quantitative research methods to examine the role of government and NGOs in the empowerment of women in Nigeria. On one hand, results point toward a negative relationship between government and women empowerment policies. Further cultural, religious, social and economic factors as well as the lack of effective implementation of gender policies continue to militate against the integration of women in the country. The research included a survey of some 2,250 women that have benefited from NGOs empowerment programme. One striking discovery is that Nigerian women have benefited more from NGOs empowerment programme than those provided by the government. Women who benefited from NGOs empowerment programmes have progressed from being victims of domestic abuse unemployment to entry-level jobs and subsequently to middle management. About 15 percent of them have move from middle management to senior management. The results of the study have implications for NGOs management in the context of women projects management and governments' political willingness to collaborate with NGOs in addressing women's empowerment and capacity-building issues in Nigeria. The study tried in identifying the performance of the Government of Nigeria and NGOs in the empowerment of women in the country, but did not provide explanation for the nature of USAID's support and the extent of its contribution to women political participation in the FCT which is a gap to knowledge.

Chukwurah, Nduba & Izunwanne (2020) focused on the examination of women political participation and representation in Nigeria visà-vis ascertaining the extent of their involvement as well as unearthing factors that influence the degree of their engagement in politics. Adopting liberal feminism as its framework of analysis, the study employed content analysis in analyzing data sourced mainly from secondary sources of data generation. The paper shows that the extent of women participation and representation in Nigeria is very low and calls for urgent action. Furthermore, the study espoused inter-alia that factors such as culture, media portrayal, religion, finance and nature of politics in Nigeria play a critical role in the extent to which women participate in politics in Nigeria. Against this backdrop, the paper concludes that since culture is not static, the government through various agencies such as National Orientation Agency (NOA) and the mass media should adopt strategies towards reorientation of the public. Also, appropriate laws should be enacted and rigorously enforced to drastically reduce the negative nature of elections in the country to enable level playing ground for all devoid of all forms of harassment and intimidations. The study made bold attempt to describe the extent of women political participation in Nigeria, however, the finding was not linked to the extent which the role played by USAID contributed to women political participation in Nigeria which serve as the major weakness of the study.

Ikeh (2021) made a comparative study of women political participation under the administrations of President Goodluck Jonathan and President Muhammadu Buhari. The study was anchored on the equity theory of leadership which holds the assumption that an individual is motivated by the desire to be equitably treated in his or her work relationship based on fairness. The study adopted a mixed method of content/document analysis and interview. The content/document analysis examined manifest content of appointments and interview provided a face-to-face interaction with selected political stakeholders. Amongst other findings, the study revealed that both administrations of President Jonathan and President Buhari encouraged women political participations at various levels. This is equally supported by the results of interview sessions with political stakeholders. Based on the findings, it is recommended that although women participated under the two administrations, there is need to review upwards, the number of women that are assigned ministerial portfolios and other political appointments. The extent which the role played by USAID contributed to women political participation in Nigeria was not captured in the analysis, this serve as a weakness of the study that calls for investigation.

Oyuru (2023) examined the extent that Nigerian women contributed to political participation in the country and also the factors that hinder them from participating fully. The study adopted Liberal feminism theory to explain gradual improvements through advocating for equal rights for all, and legislation and policies that promote equality. The study adopted content analysis and the study relied on secondary sources of data. The study revealed that several impediments have been identified that limit the participation of women in politics. These barriers are cultural, economic, and legal amongst others that have affected the participation of women in politics. The study concluded that even though women may function at the greatest levels in both the public and private realms, a vicious loop of barriers frequently hinders their ability to lead. The success of these individuals as leaders has been significantly hampered by both internal and external obstacles, including societal and cultural prejudices, patriarchy, the challenge of juggling parental and professional commitments, and a lack of networking. The study recommended that to gain the necessary leadership qualities, women should choose to pursue positions of leadership in both the public and private sectors and should educate themselves to the highest levels. To reduce illiteracy and prepare female students for future leadership duties, parents, especially those in rural areas, should be urged to enroll their female children in school. The study also recommended that the current women empowerment policy be reviewed to reflect the actual situation and that government should also establish a network of women leaders so that women can share their leadership successes and challenges to inspire other women who aspire to be leaders. However, what makes the study different from this current research is the failure in making reference to the extent which the role played by USAID contributed to women political participation in Nigeria was not discussed.

Theoretical Framework

Theories such as social justice and feminist political theories would have been suited for this study. However, the study is anchored on the theoretical baseline of Liberal Feminism. The social justice theory

was propounded by Rawls (1971). The theory is concerned about promoting a just society by confronting injustice and fostering ethical values and diversity. Social justice can be claimed to exist when all the people in a society or country share common humanity and therefore have a right to equitable treatment, support for their human rights, and a fair allocation of community resources. The theory can be considered pluralistic or circumstantial because different parts of this conception of social justice are more or less relevant depending on the circumstances. This means social justice depends on the context of a given situations.

Feminist political theory is perceived from the angle of its advocacy for political inclusivity beyond gender neutrality, but for the redistribution of power and elimination of the traditional reinforcements that have entrenched men in positions of power for generations. Marxists feminists unequivocally condemn what they call the economic dependence of women which they argue has tied women to the apron strings of men. Marxist feminists therefore advocate that the activities of women either in the public service or domestic domains should be rated and remunerated and that women should be empowered economically (Vogel, 2013). Although myths do not have any specific or logical worth or value, but over time, they have been employed to rationalize the denigration of women in Nigeria. Since society is dynamic, Marxist feminist advocates a 'reconstructing of society by transforming the gender myths. It is by so doing that the much talked about women empowerment and stable society for the realization of humanity's potentials (including women) can be achieved.

Liberal feminist theory on the other hand is grounded in classic liberal thinking that individuals should be free to develop their own talents and pursue their own interests. Liberal feminists accept the basic organisation of society, but seek to expand the rights and opportunities of women. They support the Equal Rights Amendment and oppose prejudice and discrimination against the aspirations of women. With their strong belief in the rights of individuals, liberal feminists agree that both men and women working individually, would be able to improve their lives if society simply ends legal and cultural barriers rooted in gender (Anderson, 2017).

The theory rests on the following beliefs; all human beings have certain essential features capacities for reasoning, moral agency and selfactualisation. The exercise of these capacities can be secured through legal recognition of universal rights. The inequalities between men and women assigned by sex are social constructions having no basis in nature. Finally, social change for equality can be produced by an organised appeal to a reasonable public and the use of the state. Liberal feminisms' agenda for change is consistent with their analyses of the basis for claiming equality. They wish to eliminate gender as an organising principle in the distribution of social "goods", and they are willing to invoke universal principles in their pursuit of equality. The ideal gender arrangement in liberal feminist theory would be one where individuals acting as a free and responsible moral agent chooses the lifestyle most suitable to her or him and has the choice to be accepted and respected. In liberal feminist theory, gender equality is equated with "equality of opportunity". The roots of women oppression lie in women's lack of equal civil rights and

educational opportunities. Only when these constraints on women's participation are removed, will women have the same chance for success as men (Ogundipe, 2018).

The reason for adopting this theory is because its underlying point is that without either gender, human society is incomplete. Therefore, women should not be seen as appendages to men; rather, they should be seen as the complementary ultimate factor in societal equilibrium. Women therefore like men need to be empowered in order to find meaning and fulfilment in life. Liberal Feminism exists in Nigeria, but it needs to be given more attention for women to achieve their equal right in Nigeria.

With regards to the weakness of the theory, liberal feminist theory poses less of the challenge to the existing values of the society thus, enjoy greater support to liberal feminist theorist, nobody benefits from the existing gender inequality. They believed both the men and women are harmed because the potential of both is suppressed. This is according to the liberal feminist lies in the culture and attitude of individuals. They also believed that socialization into gender roles has the consequences of producing rigid, inflexible expectation of men and women and discriminations prevents women from having equal opportunities in education and work. Liberal feminist tries to eradicate sexism and stereotypical view of women and men. They wanted reforms within social structure, not revolutionary change. Therefore, it is not an overstatement to say that the theory emerged out of frustration of masculine structure of the society.

Methodology

The study used mixed research design. The target population for this study is 2,236 which include: United States Agency for International Development (USAID), UN Women Nigeria Country Office, Women Advocates Research and Documentation Centre (WARDC), USAID Beneficiaries in the FCT and the Nigerian Women Trust Fund (NWTF). The justification for the selection of these institutions is that they work to help women into politics through funding, networking opportunities, mentoring, training for leadership, and advocacy. The study adopted the sample size determination formula propounded by Krejcie & Morgan (1970) to arrive at 327.

The study used both primary and secondary methods as sources of explanation to acquire data because the methods allow for prudent comparison of the research findings. Simple random sampling and purposive sampling techniques were used to select participants respectively. Quantitative data were analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS 20) and qualitative data on the other hand was analyzed using content analysis. Quotations from interviews were paraphrased along thematic lines. Codes were also employed to designate the respondents in order to protect their identity.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Table 1: the nature of USAID’s support to women’s political participation in Federal Capital territory of Nigeria

Responses	SA	A	D	SD	U	Total Programmes to empower women	
through training or mentoring		138	124	13	26	17	318

	(43%)	(39%)	(4%)	(8%)	(6%)	(100%)	
Campaigns and advocacy	129	159	14	11	5	318	
	(41%)	(50%)	(4%)	(3%)	(2%)	(100%)	
Changing cultural norms through media campaigns and education	147					142	11
	10	318					8

Three hundred and twenty-seven (327) copies of questionnaire were administered while three hundred and eighteen (318) copies of questionnaire were duly completed and retrieved. Nine (09) copies of questionnaire were not retrieved and all efforts to retrieve them proved abortive as some respondents could not be found on sit as a result of official assignment and leave. Therefore, the presentation and analysis was done based on the 318 retrieved copies of questionnaire. The pattern of presentation was based on the objectives of the study using frequency table (frequency, count and percentage). The discussion of findings then followed. Interviews were equally held with purposively selected members from above mentioned institutions and the participants were coded using P1 to mean participant 1 to the others. This is done to shield the respondents from any form of identification. The interview results were supplemented with information from the extant literature, reports, and official documents.

On the nature of USAID’s support to women’s political participation in FCT Nigeria, 138 (43%) and 124 (39%) strongly agree and agree that programmes to empower women through training or mentoring is the nature of USAID’s support to women’s political participation in Federal Capital territory of Nigeria, 13 (4%) and 26 (8%) disagree and strongly disagree with the position, while 17 (6%) was undecided. On the second row, respondents were asked whether campaigns and advocacy is the nature of USAID’s support to women’s political participation in Federal Capital territory of Nigeria, 129 (21%) and 159 (50%) strongly agree and agree, 14 (4%) and 11 (3%) disagree and strongly disagree respectively while 5 (2%) were undecided.

On the third row, 147 (46%) and 142 (45%) were of the opinion that changing cultural norms through media campaigns and education is the nature of USAID’s support to women’s political participation in Federal Capital territory of Nigeria, 8 (3%) and 11 respondents (3%) strongly disagree and disagree while 10 respondents accounting for 3% were undecided.

Finally, 104 (33%) and 127 (40%) strongly agree and agree that monitoring the fairness and conduct of elections, 33 (9%) and 30 (10%) disagree and strongly disagree respectively while 24 (8%) were undecided.

On the nature of support given to women in Nigeria by the USAID in the Fourth Republic, all the participants from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Abuja lamented that USAID has primarily supported the installation of the Euro American version of liberal democracy, expressed overtly as support for rule of law, individual freedom and civil liberty, and free and fair elections. Regardless, USAID has made some contributions to women political participation, especially interventions that were targeted at civil society. USAID has shown tremendous commitment to its aim of promoting gender equality

in Nigeria in the four thematic areas of engagement through campaigns and advocacy, capacity building, partnerships and strategic alliances; service delivery and improving access to services. These interventions have produced some desired results as well as unanticipated outcomes (May, 2024).

The participants added that USAID strengthening women's rights and addressing barriers to political participation are critical to achieving gender equality and female empowerment. That's why we're supporting women around the world by: Providing training for female members of political parties and parliaments and supporting the development of women's caucuses. Providing skill building and leadership training for women civil society members, women's organizations, and female journalists, Supporting women's participation in political and post-conflict transitions. Improving women's access to justice and increasing women's participation and representation in the justice sector. Supporting local efforts to advocate for legal rights that enable women to participate fully in the political and economic life of their societies. Building capacity for civil society organizations to advocate for women's participation in political transitions and governance processes. To help USAID better achieve these goals, in 2012 the US Agency for International Developments, launched the Center of Excellence on Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance (DRG Center), a global resource for evidence-based research. Since its launch, the DRG Center has provided technical expertise, urgent funding, and critical information to the U.S. Government and international development community (May, 2024).

transitions & donor conferences as the kind of supports rendered by USAID in improving women political participation in the FCT, 32% indicated democratic development and human rights while 19% ticked support in other decision-making processes relevant to conflict prevention and resolution. This confirms that the nature of USAID support for women participation in Nigeria is multifaceted.

Participants collectively agreed that USAID, through IFES, the United Nations Electoral Assistance Project and DFID, provided technical assistance towards building the capacity of INEC. This included expert advice and training in logistics management. However, the United States for International

Development (USAID) is the largest bilateral democratic donor in Nigeria. In 2009, USAID estimated that it will provide USD17.552 million (N6, 318, 684, 724.84 billion) for various forms of democratic assistance in Nigeria. In 2008, USAID spent USD13.448 million (N4, 841, 265, 630.64 billion) which is lesser than the total budget of 2007 USD18.790 million (N6, 764, 304, 622.04 billion) (Adetula et al., 2010).

The USAID in collaboration with the UN Women has been working to promote gender equality in Nigeria in line with its mandate. Through campaigns and advocacy, capacity buildings, partnerships and strategic alliances, service delivery and improving access to services, the UN agency has been able to show commitment to its aim of promoting gender equality in Nigeria in the four key thematic areas of focus. Subsequent paragraphs assess the efforts of the UN Women in promoting gender equality in Nigeria. Capacity Building One dimension of women's empowerment is the removal of obstacles militating against complete women's participation and involvement in sustainable development, while the other dimension is to focus on women directly to enable them get more involved. The tools that can be deployed to meet the

needs of women towards appropriate capacity building are training programmes that guarantee access to relevant knowledge and information.

The UN Women and USAID have implemented some capacity building workshops on gender related issues. Some examples of these capacity building initiatives done by the UN Women includes the four-day capacity building workshop in November 2016, for female journalists on gender-sensitive reporting in Nigeria. It was conducted in Plateau and Adamawa States to train female journalists from Abuja, Plateau, Bauchi, Gombe, Adamawa, Yobe and Borno States on the UNSCR 1325. It covered the Nigeria Action Plan, gender sensitive reporting, safety during Source: Field Data, May (2024).

The need for improved women political participation in Nigeria cannot be over emphasized. Statistics investigated show that 54% indicated that the extent the role of USAID contribution to women political participation in Nigeria is low, 16% indicated large extent, 13% indicated very large extent, 17% ticked normal. The implication is that the nature of USAID’s support has not improved women’s political participation in Nigeria. This equally confirms research proposition two that the extent of women participation and representation in Nigeria is very low despite USAID support.

P2 opined that Nigerian woman in civil society groups have been the primary beneficiaries of international democracy assistance. Through donor assistance, some were empowered to actively participate in the election process, to mitigate conflicts and also to participate in election observation and monitoring activities. In the days of military rule some human rights groups benefited from donor assistance, and since the return to civilian rule new civil society organizations working on such issues as corruption, transparency, HIV/AIDS and the environment have joined the older associations such as labour unions, business associations, academic and professional associations and women’s and human rights organizations. This assistance has helped Nigerian CSOs increase their capacity to influence government policies (Interviewed May, 2024).

Table 2: Responses on the kind of supports rendered by USAID in improving women political participation in the FCT

Responses	Frequency	%
1. International Development (USAID) supports the participation of women in peace processes	61	19
2. Political transitions & donor conferences.	94	30
3. Democratic development and human rights.	103	32
4. Support in other decision-making processes relevant to	60	19

conflict prevention and resolution.		
Total	318	100

Source: Field Data, May (2024).

The need for improved women political 19% indicated that International Development participation in Nigeria cannot be over (USAID) supports the participation of women emphasized. Statistics investigated show that in peace processes, 30% indicated political reporting, and other gender related issues (UN European Union to advocate for the inclusion of Women, 2016). The UN Women and USAID more women in politics ahead of 2019 launched campaigns and advocacy strategies to elections. The aim was to strategize on how to create awareness and drive conversations about enhance support for women in politics, prior to gender equality. In 2018, the USAID the political party primaries and General collaborated with the UN Women and Elections in 2019.

Table 3: To what extent has the role played by USAID contributed to women political participation in Nigeria

Responses	Frequency	%
Low extent.	172	54
Large extent.	51	16
Very large extent.	41	13
Normal.		
	55	17
Total		
	318	
	100	

The foreign democratic assistance that is specifically meant for elections conduct alone is managed by USAID and its consortium as mentioned above. Other support can include non-electoral activities and humanitarian services. In this perspective, the electoral donor support amounted to millions of dollars and billions of naira in the Fourth Republic. The democratic assistance and electoral support in this category consist of technical assistance to electoral bodies to improve the administration of elections, support for voters' education and election monitoring by international observers. The US has been assisting Nigerian elections since 1999 with the commencement of the Fourth Republic up to 2023 General Elections. For instance, USAID in partnership with DFID provided \$868.8 million (N312, 761, 470, 412.58 billion) assistance to improve election management and performance of electoral institution (US Fact Sheet, 2023).

Table 4: the nature of USAID supports for improvement of women participation in Nigeria is not adequate

Option	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	101	32%

Agree	124	39%
Disagree	44	14%
Strongly Disagree	49	15%
Undecided	0	0%
Total	318	100%

Source: Field Data, May (2024).

Table 4 shows that 32% of the respondents for improvement of women participation in strongly agreed that the nature of USAID Nigeria is not adequate. On the other hand, 14% supports for improvement of women of the respondents strongly disagree that the participation in Nigeria is not adequate and nature of USAID supports for improvement of 39% agreed that the nature of USAID supports women participation in Nigeria is not adequate and strategic alliances while 15% disagreed. This by implication means that the nature of USAID supports for improvement of women participation in Nigeria is not adequate.

The US government through the US Agency for international Development (USAID) assisted Nigeria’s electoral process since 1999 when she returned to democratic rule to 2023 general election. USIAD in partnership with DFID provided 868.8 million of assistance to improve performance of election management institution. Other key areas of assistance include: Diplomatic Engagement major western donors have always engaged the highest levels with Nigerian candidates, political party leadership, civil society, business leaders and prominent individuals with the hope so promoting peaceful and credible elections US, EU, UK and China employed diplomatic engagement strategy in the 2003, 2007, 2011 and 2015 general elections in Nigeria (US Factsheet, 2023).

According to Afolabi & Arogundade (2023), there are four ways to look at the challenges of women’s political representation and engagement in politics and government. Access, participation, representation and change. The eventual consequence will be a social and political transformation in the polity as a result of access to political institutions, participation (which includes control of power within such institutions), and quantitative and qualitative representation. These four requirements must be met to increase the political empowerment of women. Three things support the idea that women in politics are important: First of all, politics is a crucial setting for decision-making. The distribution of limited resources, such as tax money, is left to the discretion of those who occupy official positions in the government. Politicians make choices that may benefit some individuals at the expense of others. Politicians frequently take positions that encourage some behaviors while discouraging others, affecting the personal choices that people make. Second, political clout is a valuable asset. The family is one example of a social institution that is impacted by politics. Third, authority is necessary to engage in politic

Discussion of Findings

- i. Statistics investigated on table 2 show that 19% indicated that International Development (USAID) supports the participation of women in peace processes, 30% indicated political transitions & donor conferences as the kind of supports rendered by USAID in improving women political participation

in the FCT, 32% indicated democratic development the respondents strongly disagree and human rights while 19% ticked that the nature of USAID supports support in other decision-making for improvement of women processes relevant to conflict participation in Nigeria is not prevention and resolution. This adequate and strategic alliances confirms that the nature of USAID while 15% disagreed. This by support for women participation in implication means that the nature of Nigeria is multifaceted. The USAID supports for improvement findings from interview reveal that of women participation in Nigeria is USAID has shown tremendous not adequate. According to Afolabi commitment to its aim of promoting & Arogundade (2023), there are gender equality in Nigeria in the four ways to look at the challenges four thematic areas of engagement of women's political representation through campaigns and advocacy, and engagement in politics and capacity building, partnerships and government. Access, participation, strategic alliances; service delivery representation and change. The improving access to services. Eventual consequence will be a However, despite its efforts the UN social and political transformation Women has faced challenges which in the polity as a result of access to undermines the effectiveness of its political institutions, participation programmes and works in Nigeria. (Which includes control of power ii. Findings from table 4 shows that within such institutions), and 32% of the respondents strongly quantitative and qualitative agreed that the nature of USAID representation. These four supports for improvement of women requirements must be met to participation in Nigeria is not increase the political empowerment adequate and 39% agreed that the of women. Nature of USAID supports for improvement of women participation in Nigeria is not adequate. On the other hand, 14% of

Conclusion

The findings of this study reveal that UN Women plays an important role in advancing gender equality in Nigeria. USAID has shown tremendous commitment to its aim of promoting gender equality in Nigeria in the four thematic areas of engagement through campaigns and advocacy, capacity building, partnerships and strategic alliances; service delivery and improving access to services. However, despite its efforts the UN Women has faced challenges which undermines the effectiveness of its programmes and works in Nigeria. In spite of USAID, the United Nations and other international Organization's advocacy and declaration of the rights and equality between men and women of which Nigeria is a signatory, results show that women still constitute a small percentage of those participating in political decision-making and leadership (elective and appointive positions).

It was revealed that various factors and forces, positive and negative, have worked together to cause and maintain the differentiation. Specifically, the study indicated that women in the FCT have low numbers in the structures that provide opportunities even as they have suffered from intimidation and discrimination, unfavorable cultural practices, low self-confidence, low level of education and training and limited resources. These have limited their political fortunes in elective and appointive politics.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this paper, the following recommendations are proposed;

i. Economic well-being and education are the key indicators that can strengthen and encourage women to take stand for their rights and face the challenges of the undemocratic forces. Customary laws should be engendered through advocacy, sensitization, and equal access to the laws irrespective of gender. All these would help in consolidating the nature of USAID's support to women's political participation in Nigeria.

ii. Creating an enabling environment for women to participate in politics should be prioritized. On their own part, Civil society organizations have an important role to play in conducting information and awareness-raising campaigns to encourage women to stand for election, give women reorientation to what politics is all about.

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