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URGENT ACTION REQUIRED: ERADICATING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN POLITICS (VAWIP) TO FOSTER INCLUSIVE GOVERNANCE AND INCREASE WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION IN NIGERIA

To: Key Stakeholders in Nigerian Governance, Political Parties, Civil Society Organizations, and International Partners

Tackling Violence Against Women in Politics (VAWIP) to Address Underrepresentation in Nigeria

I. Executive Summary

Nigeria's democratic aspirations are significantly hampered by the pervasive underrepresentation of women in political leadership. While various factors contribute to this disparity, Violence Against Women in Politics (VAWIP) stands as a critical, yet often overlooked, barrier. VAWIP, encompassing physical, sexual, psychological, economic, and cyber violence, deters women from entering politics, forces others to withdraw, and undermines the integrity of democratic processes.

This policy brief outlines the urgent need for comprehensive strategies to combat VAWIP, thereby creating an enabling environment for women's full and equitable participation in Nigerian politics. Baobab for Women's Human Rights advocates for a multi-pronged approach involving legislative reform, institutional strengthening, awareness campaigns, and support mechanisms for victims.

II. The Challenge: VAWIP and Women's Underrepresentation in Nigeria

Despite Nigeria's commitment to gender equality through various national and international instruments (e.g., the National Gender Policy, CEDAW, Maputo Protocol), women's political representation remains alarmingly low. For instance, women's representation in the national parliament has historically hovered around 3-7%. This stark reality is inextricably linked to the prevalence of VAWIP, which manifests in various forms:

- **Physical Violence:** Direct assaults, beatings, and threats targeting female candidates, voters, and their supporters.
- **Sexual Violence:** Harassment, sexual assault, and even rape used as tools of intimidation and control.
- **Psychological Violence:** Intimidation, threats, verbal abuse, hate speech, and gender-based slander designed to damage reputations and instill fear. This is particularly prevalent in online spaces (cyber violence).

- **Economic Violence:** Withholding financial resources, destroying property, or denying opportunities to women involved in politics.
- **Systematic Disenfranchisement:** Exclusion from party structures, denial of nomination forms, and manipulation of electoral processes to disadvantage women.

The consequences of VAWIP are far-reaching:

- **Deterrence:** The fear of violence discourages qualified women from contesting elections or engaging in political activities.
- **Withdrawal:** Women who initially venture into politics may withdraw due to the hostile and dangerous environment.
- **Limited Participation:** VAWIP restricts women's ability to campaign freely, engage with constituents, and perform their political duties effectively.
- **Negative Public Perception:** The normalization of VAWIP can reinforce societal biases against women in leadership, perpetuating the cycle of underrepresentation.

While Nigeria has ratified key international conventions and treaties such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol), which include provisions against sexual harassment and other forms of violence, the full domestication of these instruments into national law remains a critical unaddressed issue.

This gap limits their enforceability and effectiveness in providing robust protection for women against sexual misconduct and other forms of violence in the political sphere. Existing national legal frameworks, such as the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act (VAPP Act) of 2015, offer a strong foundation. However, inconsistent domestication across states and inadequate enforcement continue to limit their impact.

III. Proposed Policy Recommendations

Baobab for Women's Human Rights urges the Nigerian government, political parties, and all relevant stakeholders to adopt the following comprehensive policy recommendations to combat VAWIP and promote women's political representation:

A. Strengthening Legal and Policy Frameworks:

Full Domestication and Enforcement of the VAPP Act and International Instruments:

- Accelerate the domestication of the VAPP Act across all Nigerian states, ensuring its provisions are widely understood and enforced.
- Prioritize the domestication of relevant provisions from international conventions and treaties, such as CEDAW and the Maputo Protocol, specifically those pertaining to the protection of women from all forms of sexual misconduct and violence. This will ensure that international standards are legally binding and enforceable within Nigeria's domestic legal system.
- Allocate adequate resources for the effective implementation of these legal frameworks, including training for law enforcement, judicial officers, and relevant agencies.

- Establish dedicated units within security agencies to investigate and prosecute VAWIP cases promptly and impartially.

Electoral Reforms to Address VAWIP:

- Amend the Electoral Act to explicitly define and criminalize all forms of VAWIP during electoral processes, including pre-election, election-day, and post-election periods.
- Introduce stringent penalties for perpetrators of VAWIP, with clear mechanisms for reporting and redress.
- Mandate political parties to include anti-VAWIP clauses in their internal codes of conduct and party constitutions, with clear disciplinary actions for violations.

Affirmative Action and Quotas:

- Implement and enforce the National Gender Policy (2021-2026) recommendation of 50% affirmative action for women's representation in appointive and elective positions.
- Consider introducing legislative quotas for women's representation in political parties' candidate lists and in elected bodies, with strong sanctions for non-compliance.
- Review internal rules and procedures of federal and state legislatures to encourage more inclusive participation
- **B. Institutional Capacity Building and Accountability:**

Training and Sensitization:

- Conduct mandatory gender sensitivity and VAWIP training for political party leaders, electoral officials, law enforcement agencies, judiciary, media professionals, and traditional/religious leaders.
- Integrate VAWIP awareness into civic education programs for all citizens, particularly youth.

Establishment of Reporting and Response Mechanisms:

- Create accessible, confidential, and victim-centered reporting mechanisms within political parties, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), and security agencies.
- Establish dedicated support services, including legal aid, psychological counseling, and safe spaces for victims and survivors of VAWIP.
- Ensure timely investigation and prosecution of VAWIP cases to foster a sense of justice and deter future offenses.

Data Collection and Research:

- Mandate the systematic collection and disaggregation of data on VAWIP, including its forms, perpetrators, and impact on women's political participation.
- Support research initiatives that analyze the root causes of VAWIP and identify effective interventions

C. Public Awareness and Advocacy:

Nationwide Public Awareness Campaigns:

- Launch sustained media campaigns (traditional and social media) to raise public awareness about the negative impact of VAWIP on democracy and women's rights.
- Challenge harmful gender stereotypes and cultural norms that perpetuate violence against women in politics.
- Highlight positive role models of women in leadership to inspire and encourage greater participation.

Engaging Men and Boys:

- Actively involve men and boys as allies in combating VAWIP and promoting gender equality in politics.
- Develop programs that encourage male politicians to champion women's political participation and condemn all forms of violence.

Collaboration and Partnerships:

- Strengthen collaboration among government agencies, civil society organizations (CSOs), women's rights groups, political parties, media, and international partners to collectively address VAWIP.
- Support networks and support groups for women in politics to share experiences, strategies, and provide peer support.

IV. Conclusion

Addressing Violence Against Women in Politics is not merely a women's issue; it is a fundamental democratic imperative. By creating a safer and more inclusive political landscape, Nigeria can unlock the immense potential of its female population, leading to more equitable, responsive, and effective governance.

Baobab for Women's Human Rights stands ready to collaborate with all stakeholders in implementing these vital recommendations to ensure that every Nigerian woman can participate in the political life of her country free from fear and violence.



Women **INCLUSION**
in politics
is the path to
PROGRESS



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE



**THINK OF THE
FUTURE,
INVOLVE
WOMEN NOW**

True Democracy can only be
achieved when **WOMEN**
and **MEN** are equally
represented in
POLITICAL LEADERSHIP

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EMPOWERING WOMEN **ARTICLE 9 OF THE MAPUTO PROTOCOL**



Equal Representation:
Women are
represented
equally at all
levels with men
in all electoral
processes;

Equal Participation:
Women
participate
without any
discrimination
in all elections;



Partnership in Development:
women are equal partners with
men at all levels of development
and implementation of State
policies and development
programmes



**EVERY FEMALE
POLITICIAN
DESERVES
A SEAT AT
THE TABLE**

*Prepared by: Baobab for Women's
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