

AUGUST 7, 2025**TO: The National Assembly of Nigeria, The Presidency, State Houses of Assembly, Political Parties, Civil Society Organizations, and International Development Partners**

A Strategic Opportunity: The Special Seats Bill as a Catalyst for Economic Prosperity and Inclusive Governance in Nigeria

I. Executive Summary

Nigeria's persistent underrepresentation of women in political leadership—with women holding less than 5% of federal legislative seats—is a critical barrier to national development. The Special Seats Bill, a proposed constitutional amendment to create additional legislative seats exclusively for women, is a strategic and necessary intervention. This brief demonstrates that the bill is not a matter of political cost but a sound economic investment. While the financial cost of implementation is negligible (estimated at less than 1% of the national budget), the potential economic return is monumental, with improved women's representation projected to boost Nigeria's GDP by as much as nine percent. The bill is an opportunity to correct historical injustice, strengthen democratic institutions, and unlock a new era of inclusive governance and sustainable prosperity.

II. The Current Challenge: Underrepresentation and its Consequences

Nigeria's democracy suffers from a profound gender imbalance. This imbalance is not merely a social issue; it is a fundamental governance failure with tangible negative consequences for the entire nation. A government that fails to represent half of its population cannot create truly effective policies. The result is a legislative agenda that often overlooks critical issues related to women's and children's welfare, health, and economic empowerment—all of which are vital for a nation's long-term prosperity.

III. The Special Seats Bill: A Strategic Solution

The Special Seats Bill offers a clear and decisive path forward. As a temporary affirmative action measure, the bill's aim is to correct the deep-seated structural and social barriers that have historically prevented women from gaining political power.

• A Negligible Cost for a Colossal Gain:

It is imperative to distinguish between the small financial cost of the bill and the massive economic return it promises. The cost of creating and maintaining the additional seats is projected to be less than 1% of the national budget. This investment is dwarfed by the potential for a nine percent increase in Nigeria's GDP, as a more inclusive government can harness the full potential of its population for economic growth and innovation. This is not a political expense; it is a critical investment in Nigeria's future economic stability.

• Inclusive Governance and Enhanced Policy-Making:

The inclusion of more women in governance would lead to a more representative and effective legislative body. Female legislators are uniquely positioned to champion policies that address critical social issues, such as education for girls, maternal healthcare, and the reduction of gender-based violence. The passage of the bill would ensure that legislative agendas are more comprehensive and responsive to the needs of all citizens, thereby strengthening the nation's human capital.

- **Upholding Human Rights Obligations:**

The Special Seats Bill is a powerful tool for fulfilling Nigeria's international human rights commitments. As a signatory to the Maputo Protocol, Nigeria is obligated to promote and protect women's rights, including their right to political participation. The bill provides a legislative mechanism to move beyond ratification to the practical domestication of these principles, ensuring that women's rights are protected and advanced through concrete policy and law.

IV. Policy Recommendations

In light of the compelling economic and democratic benefits, Baobab for Women's Human Rights urges key stakeholders to take decisive action:

- The National Assembly must prioritize the passage of the Special Seats Bill without further delay. We urge all members to view this legislation not as a partisan or gender-specific issue, but as a crucial national project for sustainable development and democratic consolidation.
- The Presidency should provide strong executive support for the bill, emphasizing its strategic importance for Nigeria's economic prosperity and global standing.

- Political Parties must embrace the spirit of the bill by actively supporting female candidates and ensuring a transparent and equitable process for filling the special seats once the bill is enacted.
- Civil Society Organizations and gender advocates must continue to engage in a coordinated and sustained advocacy campaign to educate the public and pressure lawmakers to pass this historic legislation.

V. Conclusion

The time for debate is over; the time for action is now. The Special Seats Bill offers Nigeria an unparalleled opportunity to correct a historical wrong, strengthen its democracy, and, most importantly, unlock an era of unprecedented economic prosperity. By making a small investment, Nigeria can secure a future of inclusive governance and shared wealth for all. To fail to pass this bill would be to consciously choose a path of limited potential and continued underdevelopment. We urge you to make the right choice for Nigeria's future.

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