

SOUTHERN SUDAN WOMEN LEGISLATOR'S CONFERENCE – INTERNATIONAL PRESENTATIONS

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PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY IN PARLIAMENT – A NIGERIA CASE STUDY

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Nigeria is Africa's most populous nation and according to the 2006 national census, the country's population is 140,003,542 with the female population accounting for about 69% of the entire population.

Whilst there is almost equality in terms of equal spread of gender between males and females, the same cannot be said to the case when it comes to equality in every other sphere of human endeavor in Nigeria.

The reasons for the apparent inequalities are truly and well ingrained in the culture of the people. Africa and without exception Nigeria has always been a male dominated society and it is generally believed that the place of the women are (a) to make babies (b) to make food for the family and keep the family going while the man provide for the needs of the family.

Up till now, certain tribes and cultures believe that the female child is inferior to the male child; an assertion that has no basis. For over time it has been proved that what a man can do a woman can do better. To further buttress the aforementioned; lets make reference to a few women who have distinguished themselves in Nigeria, economy and general life in recent times. Hon (Mrs.) Patricia Etteh, Mrs Ngozi Okonji Iweala and Mrs. Oboy Ezekwezili.

Having encountered the above is pertinent for me to talk about what the female members of parliament in Nigeria have been doing in recent times to promote gender equality in the parliament of Nigeria.

Today many countries of the world are making efforts to bridge the gap between men and women in politics. In Nigeria, the representation of women in government even though has improved than before is still very low compared to what obtains in other nations of the world, particularly in the developed nations. The representation of women in the 2003 election was poor; only 3 women made it to the possible 109 Senate seats while 21 were elected out of a possible 360 members of the House of Representatives.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

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1. Learn how the legislature works.
2. Do not put yourself down.
3. Organize and participate in a women's caucus of the parliament with the aim of promoting gender equality and promulgating female friendly laws for the nation.
4. Providing support for female members of parliament who wish to vie for positions that will further serve the interests of the feminine gender.
5. Build a critical mass of women parliamentarians who are willing and able to represent issues and concerns.
6. Participate in all relevant training sessions organized for the benefit of all parliamentarians.
7. Active participation in Committee assignments.
8. Provision of encouragement by way of training and grooming for women to engage and vie for political office
9. Provide on-going support for women advocacy groups across the country so that their voices can be heard and action taken on the issues that need to be attended to by the government.
10. Do not Label women as "anti party people." This creates a basis for their exclusion and it erodes their personal legitimacy.
11. Women in Nigeria or elsewhere must organize themselves independent of state. There is no way, the fight for gender equality can be achieved on a platter of gold, it is non-negotiable.
12. Women organizations need to realign their strategies and learn from past experiences. Non-governmental organizations must be able to identify female aspirants across parties.
13. It is important to understand that the presence of women in decision-making positions is a powerful tool for challenging a patriarchy and will provide other women with role models.
14. Women should come together to organize themselves as a strong and critical constituency.
15. Women should also make media engagement a priority in their bid for victory.