



Legislating for Inclusion: The Role of State Assemblies in Empowering Women-Led Community Responses to Economic Crisis

Ya'u Abdullahi YAKUBU^{1*} & Aliyu ADAMU (Ph.D.)²

¹Centre for Gender and Women Studies, University of Jos, Nigeria.

²Plateau State House of Assembly, Nigeria.

Submit Manuscripts through: <https://www.internationalpublishersijmrasfp.com/call-for-papers>

ABSTRACT

Economic crises disproportionately affect women, especially in developing countries like Nigeria where structural inequalities persist. Women-led community responses have proven effective in mitigating the impact of such crises, yet they often lack institutional support. This paper explores the role of Nigerian state assemblies in legislating for inclusion by empowering women-led initiatives. It examines legislative mechanisms, challenges, and policy solutions, drawing on national and international examples. The study argues that inclusive governance particularly through gender-sensitive legislation is essential for sustainable development and community resilience during economic hardship.

Keywords: Gender-inclusive governance, women-led responses, state assemblies, participatory lawmaking, legislative empowerment, Nigeria, economic crisis.

Article ID: IJMRASFP-AHL-1128442

Copyright © 2025. The Author(s): This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any format or medium, provided the original author(s) and source(s) are credited.

1 INTRODUCTION

Economic hardship in Nigeria has intensified due to global shocks, inflation, and internal instability. Women, particularly in rural and low-income communities, are disproportionately affected due to their limited access to resources, education, and formal employment (UN Women, 2020). They often bear the burden of unpaid care work and are more vulnerable to poverty and food insecurity during crises. Despite these challenges, women frequently lead community-based responses to economic shocks. These include organizing savings groups, managing food distribution, and initiating small-scale enterprises to support families and neighbors (Action Aid, 2021). However, these efforts are often informal and underfunded, lacking the legislative backing needed to scale and sustain their impact.

State assemblies in Nigeria have the constitutional mandate to legislate on matters affecting their constituents, including gender equity and community development. Their proximity to local populations positions them uniquely to support grassroots initiatives. Yet, many state legislatures have not fully embraced their role in promoting inclusive governance, particularly in empowering women-led responses (Okon, 2021).

This paper explores how state assemblies can legislate for inclusion by enacting gender-sensitive policies, allocating resources to women's programs, and institutionalizing participatory lawmaking. It also examines the barriers to women's political participation and the structural challenges that hinder effective policy implementation. By analyzing case studies, legislative frameworks, and global best practices, the paper provides actionable recommendations for strengthening women's leadership in community development. It argues that empowering women through legislation is not only a moral imperative but also a strategic necessity for economic recovery and resilience.

The outcome of this study would also serve as a benefit to the state house of assembly, and also, the federal in the area of rating and valuation of existing policies in different capacities on gender inclusiveness, in line with global best practices. Furthermore, the outcome of this study would be beneficial to the society as it would form a yardstick used to evaluate government policies in order to create value, so as to make an informed decision regarding gender equity and community development.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Empirical

Gender-inclusive governance refers to the integration of women's perspectives, needs, and leadership into policymaking and implementation. It is grounded in principles of equity, participation, and accountability, and challenges patriarchal norms that exclude women from decision-making (Cornwall & Goetz, 2005). Inclusive governance ensures that policies reflect the lived experiences of all citizens, especially those most affected by crises.

Women-led community responses are grassroots initiatives where women take leadership roles in addressing local challenges. These responses are often more adaptive and context-specific, leveraging women's social networks and local knowledge. Studies show that women-led initiatives enhance community resilience and deliver high returns on investment during crises (Action Aid, 2021; UNDP, 2021).

State assemblies can support these efforts through inclusive legislation. This includes laws that mandate gender representation, allocate budgets for women's programs, and protect women's rights. For example, the Lagos State Women Economic Empowerment (WEE) Policy Roadmap outlines strategies for dismantling systemic barriers and promoting women's participation across sectors (Lagos State Ministry of Economic Planning, 2022).

Participatory lawmaking is another key mechanism. Public consultations, town hall meetings, and stakeholder forums allow women's groups to influence legislation. In Kaduna State, the Women for Women Coalition successfully lobbied for increased funding for maternal health through participatory budgeting (UNDP, 2021).

Oversight and accountability are essential to ensure that inclusive policies are implemented effectively. Legislative committees on Women Affairs and Social Development can monitor government programs, conduct audits, and hold agencies accountable. Without robust oversight, even well-designed laws may fail to produce meaningful change (PLAC, 2022).

2.2 Challenges and Limitations

Despite progress, significant challenges remain. Patriarchal norms continue to limit women's participation in governance. Cultural beliefs about gender roles discourage women from seeking leadership positions or engaging in public life. These norms are deeply entrenched and require sustained advocacy and education to change (Cornwall & Goetz, 2005).

Low female representation in state assemblies hinders inclusive policymaking. Women hold less than 10% of seats in most Nigerian state legislatures, limiting their influence over legislative agendas. The lack of role models and mentorship opportunities further discourages women from entering politics (National Assembly, 2023).

Funding constraints pose another major challenge. Economic crises often lead to budget cuts, and women's programs are among the first to be affected. Without adequate resources, even well-intentioned policies may fail. Legislators must prioritize funding for gender-inclusive initiatives and explore alternative financing mechanisms (PLAC, 2022).

Political exclusion and instability also undermine progress. In states like Rivers and Lagos, political crises have disrupted legislative processes, delaying the passage of critical laws and affecting economic growth (Daily Trust, 2023). These disruptions reduce the effectiveness of assemblies and erode public trust.

Implementation gaps are common. Laws may be passed but not enforced, or programs may be launched without proper monitoring. Weak institutions, corruption, and lack of coordination can derail progress. Strengthening governance structures and promoting transparency are essential for overcoming these challenges (UNDP, 2021).

3 METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative research design using document analysis and case study methodology. Information were retrieved from government publications, legislative records, NGO reports, academic journals, and media sources. Case studies from Plateau, Lagos, Ekiti, Kaduna, and Cross River States were also selected based on their legislative innovations and impact on women's empowerment. International examples from Rwanda and South Africa were included for comparative analysis. The study focuses on legislative mechanisms, participatory processes, and institutional partnerships that promote gender-inclusive governance.

4 DOCUMENT ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.1 Legislative Mechanisms for Inclusion

State assemblies have several tools at their disposal to promote inclusion. Policy formulation is the most direct mechanism. Legislators can draft and pass laws that prioritize gender equity, such as mandating quotas for women in local councils or creating reserved seats in the legislature. The Reserve Seats for Women Bill, currently under consideration, aims to increase women's representation in both national and state assemblies (National Assembly, 2023).

Budget allocation is another powerful tool. Gender-responsive budgeting involves analyzing how public spending affects women and men differently and allocating resources accordingly. Lagos State has implemented gender budgeting to support women-led SMEs, healthcare, and education initiatives, particularly during post-pandemic recovery (Lagos State Ministry of Economic Planning, 2022).

Oversight functions are critical for ensuring accountability. Legislative committees can track the implementation of gender-sensitive policies, request progress reports, and organize public hearings. These mechanisms help ensure that allocated funds reach intended beneficiaries and that programs are evaluated for impact (PLAC, 2022).

Participatory lawmaking enhances the legitimacy and effectiveness of legislation. When women's groups are involved in drafting laws, the resulting policies are more responsive and grounded in community realities. Kaduna State's participatory budgeting process is a model for inclusive governance, demonstrating how citizen engagement can shape policy outcomes (UNDP, 2021).

Partnerships with civil society organizations and international donors can amplify legislative impact. These partnerships provide technical expertise, funding, and advocacy support. Collaborative efforts between state assemblies and NGOs have led to successful policy reforms in states like Ekiti and Cross River (Ekiti State Government, 2020; Okon, 2021).

4.2 Case Studies

Plateau State

In 2018, Plateau State became the first state in Northern Nigeria to enact the Gender Equal Opportunity Law, a landmark legislation aimed at eliminating discrimination against women in political, economic, educational, and socio-cultural spheres (The Eagle Online, 2018). The law was passed by the Plateau State House of Assembly with strong support from former Governor Jonah Jang, members of the legislature, and development partners including UN Women and the state ministries of women affairs and justice (Dickson, 2024).

The law comprises 36 sections and aligns with international conventions such as CEDAW. It provides legal backing for women's rights in public life, employment, education, and health care, and prohibits harmful traditional practices that perpetuate gender inequality (Plateau State Government Gazette, 2018).

The Plateau State Gender and Equal Opportunities Commission (GEOC) was created under the law as a corporate body with perpetual succession. It is headed by a Chairperson and includes members from diverse sectors such as the judiciary, religious institutions, gender experts, and ministries of social development and justice (Plateau State Government Gazette, 2018).

Under the leadership of Barrister Olivia Dazyam, the Commission has launched several advocacy campaigns targeting child labor, trafficking, and gender-based violence. It has engaged schools, community groups, and religious institutions to raise awareness on gender issues and promote women's empowerment (Plateau State GEOC, 2025). The Commission also collaborates with other government agencies and civil society organizations to address socio-cultural barriers and improve access to education and health care for women and girls. Notably, it has advocated for free quality care for pregnant women and new mothers, aligning with the law's provisions on health equity (Dickson, 2024). The Gender Equal Opportunity Law and the Commission have significantly increased awareness of gender equity in Plateau State. There has been a rise in girls' school enrollment, improved access to maternal health services, and greater public discourse on women's rights. The Commission's work has contributed to a more inclusive policy environment and inspired similar legislative efforts in other Northern states (The Eagle Online, 2018).

Lagos State

Lagos State has emerged as a leader in gender-responsive governance. The state's Women Economic Empowerment (WEE) Policy Roadmap outlines strategies for promoting women's participation in agriculture, entrepreneurship, and emerging industries. During the COVID-19 pandemic, targeted investments in women-led businesses helped sustain livelihoods and support community resilience (Lagos State Ministry of Economic Planning, 2022).

Ekiti State

Ekiti State provides a compelling example of legislative advocacy. In 2019, the state assembly passed the Gender-Based Violence (Prohibition) Law following sustained lobbying by women's organizations. This law includes provisions for shelters, legal aid, and rehabilitation services, addressing both immediate and long-term needs of survivors (Ekiti State Government, 2020).

Kaduna State

Kaduna State has institutionalized participatory lawmaking. The Women for Women Coalition successfully influenced budget allocations for maternal health through public consultations and advocacy. This inclusive approach has led to improved health outcomes and greater trust in government institutions (UNDP, 2021).

Cross River State

Cross River State has leveraged partnerships with civil society organizations to enhance legislative impact on women's empowerment. Through collaborations with NGOs and donor agencies, the state has implemented programs that support women's access to finance, vocational training, and entrepreneurship development (Okon, 2021). These initiatives have helped women establish small businesses, gain financial independence, and contribute to local economic growth.

The state assembly has also worked with advocacy groups to develop gender-sensitive policies, including frameworks for monitoring and evaluating women-focused programs. These partnerships have strengthened accountability mechanisms and ensured that resources allocated for women's development are effectively utilized.

In addition, Cross River has promoted inclusive governance by engaging women's groups in public consultations and legislative hearings. This participatory approach has improved the relevance and responsiveness of policies, particularly in areas such as maternal health, education, and rural development.

While challenges such as limited funding and cultural resistance persist, the state's commitment to collaboration and innovation has positioned it as a model for gender-inclusive legislative practice in Southern Nigeria.

4.3 International Case Studies

Internationally, Rwanda and South Africa offer models of inclusive governance. Rwanda's parliament, with over 60% female representation, has passed numerous laws supporting women's rights and community development (UN Women, 2020). South Africa's gender-responsive budgeting has improved service delivery in health and education. Nigerian state assemblies can learn from these examples to strengthen their own frameworks

5 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Summary

Case studies from Plateau, Lagos, Ekiti, Kaduna, and Cross River demonstrate that inclusive governance leads to tangible improvements in education, health, and economic resilience. However, challenges persist. Patriarchal norms, low female representation, funding constraints,

and implementation gaps continue to undermine progress. Addressing these issues requires sustained political will, institutional reform, and strategic partnership.

5.2 Conclusion

The evidence from Nigeria and beyond shows that state assemblies can play a transformative role in empowering women-led community responses. Legislative mechanisms such as gender quotas, participatory lawmaking, and gender-responsive budgeting are effective tools.

5.3 Recommendations

From the findings, it was recommended that:

i. Legislative Reforms

- a. Enact laws mandating gender quotas and reserved seats for women in state assemblies.
- b. Review existing laws to ensure alignment with international conventions like CEDAW.

ii. Capacity Building

- a. Train legislators and staff on gender analysis, inclusive budgeting, and participatory lawmaking.
- b. Partner with academic institutions and international organizations for technical support.

iii. Participatory Governance

- a. Institutionalize public consultations, town hall meetings, and stakeholder forums.
- b. Ensure that women's groups are represented in legislative processes.

iv. Gender-Responsive Budgeting

- a. Adopt budgeting frameworks that analyze the impact of spending on women and men.
- b. Allocate dedicated funds for women-led initiatives, maternal health, and education.

v. Monitoring and Evaluation

- a. Develop frameworks with gender-disaggregated data and performance indicators.
- b. Conduct regular audits and publish impact assessments.

vi. Institutional Partnerships

- a. Collaborate with civil society, development agencies, and private sector actors.

- b. Support joint initiatives that promote innovation and community engagement.
- vii. Public Awareness Campaigns**
 - a. Launch campaigns to challenge patriarchal norms and promote women's leadership.
 - b. Use media, schools, and religious institutions to shift public attitudes.

6 REFERENCES

- [1] Action Aid. (2021). Shifting the power: Women-led humanitarian response. <https://actionaid.org>
- [2] Cornwall, A., & Goetz, A. M. (2005). Democratizing democracy: Feminist perspectives. *Democratization*, 12(5), 783–800. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510340500322086>
- [4] Daily Trust. (2023). Rivers political crisis: Implications for governance and development. <https://dailytrust.com>
- [5] Dickson, P. C. (2024). Advancing gender equity: The role of the Plateau State gender and equal opportunities commission. *Business Post Nigeria*. <https://businesspost.ng>
- [6] Ekiti State Government. (2020). Gender-Based Violence (Prohibition) Law. <https://ekitistate.gov.ng>
- [7] Lagos State Ministry of Economic Planning. (2022). Women Economic Empowerment (WEE) Policy Roadmap. <https://lagosstate.gov.ng>
- [8] National Assembly. (2023). Reserve Seats for Women Bill. <https://nass.gov.ng>
- [9] Okon, E. (2021). Community-based crime prevention in the Niger Delta. *Journal of African Development Studies*, 9(3), 88–102.
- [10] Plateau State Gender and Equal Opportunities Commission. (2025). Official communications and advocacy reports. Plateau State Government.
- [11] Plateau State Government Gazette. (2018). Gender Commission Law. Plateau State Government.
- [12] Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre (PLAC). (2022). Advancing inclusion through legislative action. <https://placng.org>
- [13] The Eagle Online. (2018). Plateau gazettes Gender Equal Opportunity Law, first in Northern Nigeria. <https://theeagleonline.com.ng>
- [14] United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). (2021). Inclusive governance in Nigeria: Strengthening citizen participation. <https://undp.org>
- [15] UN Women. (2020). Impact of COVID-19 on women. <https://unwomen.org>

To connect with the authors (corresponding author), send a request to the editorial board using:
<https://www.internationalpublishersijmrasfp.com/contact-us>



Connect with Us on



The International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research in Academic Studies and Field Practices (IJMRASFP) is an advocate of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations (UN).

We are Green; Are you Sustainable?

(Protect the environment; only print when it is necessary)

You may want to read about the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

[Click Here](#)

