

Project Factsheet: Overcoming Barriers to Women's Political Participation through Advocacy Training

Designing a Field Experiment in Nigeria

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This factsheet describes a planned project in Nigeria, working with existing partners, that will provide useful policy recommendations for empowering women in the public sphere. It has the potential to inform implementation of the National Gender Policy in Agriculture prepared by the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (FMARD) and programming by the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development (MWASD) by sharing specific lessons on how to harness women's social capital and leadership skills to promote more equitable agricultural and development policies.

The project pairs an intervention aimed at generating leadership skills, a sense of collective efficacy, and effective participation in local politics among women's groups in Nigeria with a rigorous randomized controlled trial (RCT) to understand what works and how to give women a voice in their communities. It builds on programming by [ActionAid Nigeria](#), our implementing partner; we will further refine this programming through qualitative work and embed it in a theory of change. ActionAid Nigeria prioritizes the leadership of women, especially those living in poverty and exclusion.

Introduction

Policy affects all citizens, yet women are underrepresented in politics. Women make up 49.5% of the global population, yet comprise a mere 25.6% of national parliaments, 36.3% of local governments, and 28.2% of managerial positions (Duflo 2012; Lawless 2015). Beyond representation, women's participation in the political process is also low (Iversen and Rosenbluth 2006; Desposato and Norrander 2009; Isaksson, Kotsadam, and Nerman 2014). For example, recent Afrobarometer data for sub-Saharan Africa show that 28% of men compared to 17% of women had contacted local officials on an issue affecting them in the past year; 71% of men compared to 66% of women had voted in the most recent national elections; 45% of men compared to 35% of women had attended a campaign rally; and 27% of men compared to 18% of women had worked for a candidate or party. Women participate less for many reasons, including a lack of relevant skills and training (Burns, Schlozman, and Verba 2001; Inglehart et al. 2003; Iversen and Rosenbluth 2008) as well as norms that proscribe such behavior (Cheema et al. 2019). This is the case in

Nigeria: women have less education than men, face gender-based violence and restrictive norms, and their political participation lags far behind that of men.

Women's absence from politics matters. It has negative implications for economic development (Chattopadhyay and Duflo 2004), poverty alleviation (Doepke and Tertilt 2019; Miller 2008), and gender equity (Lawless 2015). Women and men often have differing policy objectives and may compete over common pool resources and access to publicly provided goods and services (Svaleryd 2009; Morgan 2013; Hessami and da Fonseca 2020). When women are not making the policies governing their access to public sector resources and services, they are unlikely to access and benefit from them on par with men (Gates 2019). Existing research often focuses on promoting women's political representation (e.g., Atkeson and Carrillo 2007), but women's leadership through broader political participation can also profoundly affect women's access to resources and services, and even fuel political representation by women (Beaman et al. 2009). How can women's political voice and agency be catalyzed for positive change?



Group of women in Nigeria
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Study Aims

Existing literature has identified three main barriers to women's effective political participation which our intervention seeks to overcome. The first is resource-based: many women have neither the time nor skills and information to participate in politics (Burns, Schlozman, and Verba 2001; Inglehart et al. 2003; Iversen and Rosenbluth 2008). The second is socio-cultural: in many countries, women are expected to stay out of the public sphere and allow men to make decisions there (Cheema et al. 2019). The third, which can be related but may also operate even when women have training and social norms are permissive, is psychological: women may forego political participation because they feel disempowered to effect change.

Existing studies have addressed these first two barriers, with mixed results. We propose to address this third, psychological barrier to women's political participation, which to our knowledge has not been tested in the field. Lab experimental studies in psychology have found that increasing the salience of group identity and perceived group efficacy increases stated intentions to participate

in collective action (Van Zomeren, Spears, and Leach, 2008, 2010). However, evidence from the field is lacking. One study from India showed that expanding women's social networks improves their political participation (Prillaman 2017), but how this works—via increased skills and information, or the perception of increased capacity for collective action—remains unclear. This is a key omission, given that social networks could provide a tractable lever to catalyze women's political participation.

Specifically, we propose to run an intervention to reduce social and psychological barriers to women's political participation by promoting women's leadership skills and raising women's sense of collective efficacy, and to rigorously test its effects. We draw from theoretical insights from social psychology and will work with partners on the ground to better understand the precise nature of the psychological barriers faced by women in the Nigerian context. We will then co-design and test a series of trainings promoting these skills and raising women's sense of collective efficacy.

Study Design

Our research question asks whether interventions aimed at changing collective efficacy and societal norms can improve the extent and effectiveness of female political participation. To test this question, we will conduct an RCT across 460 wards in two Nigerian states, Ogun and Lagos (these states were identified by our local implementing and evaluation partners as places where field activity can be conducted relatively safely; the possibility remains that locations change prior to implementation). Based upon power calculations (statistical calculations of the sample size required to be able to identify effects when they indeed exist), we will randomly assign wards to treatment and control—230 of each. In each study ward, we will recruit 8 women (aiming for 6 women assuming an attrition of 2) to join a women's group to receive the intervention (treatment) or placebo training. The treatment will consist of 4 days of training over 5 months. Each training day will last 4 hours. The training will focus on women's advocacy, training women on how to identify their collective grievances and advocate for change at the local level. Group interactions and teamwork will be emphasized. The control communities will receive a placebo training; women assigned to the control group will be recruited to attend a single meeting on financial literacy, with little to no interaction among the women or with the facilitator; its content will be largely mono-directional, coming from an ActionAid facilitator to women, rather than being bi-directional. Women in the treatment and control groups may choose to meet outside of our trainings.

ActionAid Nigeria will carry out all trainings. Baseline (prior to any trainings) and endline (after all trainings are complete) surveys, along with a survey of local political leaders, will be conducted by Innovations for Poverty Action (IPA) with women participants across treatment and control wards. Researchers from UC Berkeley, UC San Diego, and IFPRI comprise the research team responsible for the research design that will analyze and report on all the collected data.

Outcomes to Be Measured

We expect three effects of our intervention. First, women in treatment groups should participate more in local politics. Second, women in treatment groups should participate more effectively in local politics. Third, government decision-makers should be more likely to respond to the preferences of women in treatment groups, given their greater organizational capital.

We will first measure all three outcomes using a small community grants program; during the first meetings of women's groups (both treatment and control), an independent, nonpartisan, nonprofit implementing partner (not ActionAid Nigeria) will run a competitive call for applications from individuals and groups. The small grants competition will also be advertised in the community from that point until shortly after the trainings end, at which time all applications will be formally due. Both women's groups and other community members will have the opportunity to apply. The grants

program will be administered at the level of the local government area (LGA), the administrative unit that sits between the state and the ward. This will allow wards in the same LGAs to compete with each other for the grants. The grants will be awarded after local leaders and officials review proposals collected by the implementer and decide which to fund. (We have a secured budget of \$50,000 for these grants.)

Using this grants competition, we will hire independent researchers to carefully catalogue and study submissions to measure: (1) whether a women's group has submitted an application; (2) the content of each application (specifically, the researchers will read and score the applications to assess objective quality); and (3) the success of each application (i.e., whether or not it is funded). Beyond these community grants-related outcomes, we will also gather data at both baseline and endline on women's self-reported sense of individual and collective efficacy, and other political participation measures through surveys. Finally, we will survey policymakers who would potentially interact with women in these groups.

Anticipated Policy Engagement and Recommendations

The research results are likely to suggest actions that NGOs (like ActionAid Nigeria) and donors can take to provide women with the critical skills they need to participate fully in the public sphere, as well as identify actions government can take to open public sector spaces and channels to women. In this way, governments and NGOs can work together to build women's social capital and leadership skills to promote more equitable agricultural and development policies. Within government, this project has the potential to inform FMARD's National Gender Policy in Agriculture as well as MWASD programming; they will be critical partners for any scale-up efforts.

Beyond Nigeria, our project will also be conducted in coordination with four other projects testing the same hypotheses in different contexts as part of [EGAP's Metaketa Initiative, Round V](#): Kyrgyzstan, Malawi, Pakistan, and Viet Nam. If these programs work across contexts, each organization will have developed training materials and programs that can be shared with their partners across regions. They will also generate concrete evidence on what works under particular contextual conditions.

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