

Effective Mobilization of Women for Meaningful Participation
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Dear Sisters,

Thank you for the honour of this conversation with FIDA, once more. It is always a great opportunity to reach such an organized collective of professional high achieving women who have remained rooted in their societies and who engage the state through their calling, the law. At this congress, I do not think my task is to tell you about mobilization or why it must be meaningful or why it is important. Rather, I hope to share with you some of the posers and lessons that I have collected along the way as I met and worked with some of the most amazing women and men ever. Many of them unsung heroes, who do everyday things that hold our world together. These extraordinary actions are unseen precisely because they are done successfully. What do I mean; you only know the worth of a good person when they are no longer there. When they are around, they make sure life runs on a smooth rail. And, when life is good, you don't remember the possibility of what it could be like if it were bad. This is the life of women, fixing, facilitating, and fast-tracking things that make life better for others. This behind the scenes, 'doing for others' structure of women's role further renders women invisible, until and unless society and state are prompted to remember the role of women.

How do you then begin to mobilise effectively, such a social category that is always doing for others and is little remembered except as a symbol of the custodian of societal fabric which itself puts a burden on women?

The Premise

Mobilising assumes a galvanising and pulling together in a certain direction, or towards a determined goal. To make that process a meaningful one, which means one which has purpose that is acceptable, trusted and impactful, I have learned that there are two preconditions that need to be fulfilled, they are; 1. Understanding who we are as women and 2. having a clear and galvanising cause.

Understanding Who We Are As Women

To effectively mobilise women, we must '**historicise**' our journey. This means beginning with an understanding of who we are, as women. Women are not a

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homogenous category, we are a diverse multifaceted social category, yet we are united by our experience of socialisation. We are defined by variables of access and opportunity such as education, income, paid employment and credit and women are further stratified into subcategories of elite, working class, and peasants, therefore a one size approach will not fit all. What is required in engaging across all categories however, is the need to have an awareness of the lived reality, and the needs to be met for women and to show mutual respect. Equally important is an understanding of the forms of poverty facing women which includes; economic, political voice, psychosocial, and time poverty. All these define women's many struggles.

'Herstoricising' means writing history from the perspective of women. It is a feminist term that seeks to tell the story of individuals, communities and countries from the perspective of women. It does this by clearly locating women's experiences, struggles and actions where they would otherwise have been lost, or told mainly from a male point of view. 'Herstory' is an approach that celebrates the lives of women. It redefines winning not as a zero-sum game but as a process, which begins with the ability to act to change the outcome of events around women and not necessarily as an end². Finding an answer to the question of women's place in Nigeria today thus requires that we trace from all angles, the trajectory of where we are coming from.³

Our experiences are multivariate defined by generation, geography, poverty, conflict, power, position, opportunity, some of us are colluding with power, some are confounded by power, some are confused about their location, including sexuality, some are clear about where they want to go. The strategies for mobilizing each cannot be the same. First, we must know who we want to mobilize and why, then the 'how', becomes easier to know. Yes, everything is political, but some issues are more political than others. In other words, some issues attract more tension and contestations, and are more difficult to resolve in a patriarchal context, than others.

Mobilising is More Meaningful When the Cause is Dear and Clear

What are those issues that resonate with women across differences? What are those topical issues of the here and now that we can engage? How do we create a here and now moment that can galvanise communities? I enumerate some of the issues that have served as pull factors for our community/movement of women, here:

- Women's leadership in the public space
- Women's bodily integrity
- Population and reproductive rights
- Conflict and peace building
- Access to social services including education

²Salihu, A. 2007. Perspectives to herstory: redefining women's winning, discussion paper 2007. See also <http://www.her-stories.co.uk/>

³Salihu, A. 2007. Perspectives to herstory: redefining women's winning, discussion paper 2007. See also <http://www.her-stories.co.uk/>

- Economic independence

I have found that it's easier to first find a common ground for mobilization to be effective. The common denominator for mobilizing women is economic independence. While the other five listed above may have people taking sides; for and against them, I am yet to hear a voice that disagrees with the assertion that women are stronger when they have control over their means of livelihood, or that everyone wins when women and girls are self-reliant.

We must be clear about why we are mobilising and what we are mobilizing for and what is the end result. The proper framing of the issue matters – we need to move away from the gender argument solely. Everyone knows women are 50% of the population, have triple roles that are either not paid or underpaid, etc. We need to look at the perspective of justice and law – which is the forte of this eminent group. We need to connect law and accountability lens. This is to say in mobilizing women we need to bring an accountability lens to the discourse. This gives a rationale for 'why we should listen to you' Asking specific questions such as:

- How are the resources earmarked for social services utilized?
- How are their children and communities adversely affected?
- Who is giving account of how resources are used?
- What is the cost of corruption to women?

Mobilization is more effective when it is closer, personal and the issue is dear to the focus group or person. Based on this two pronged foundation of understanding who women are, and choosing to mobilize around issues that resonate, I will like to submit some key strategies, which FIDA may want to consider, or strengthen, or revise as the case may be.

Strategies for Effective Mobilization

Building generations of strength: Generations of strength are built when tradition is passed down from one age to the other. Telling the stories of Beijing was immensely empowering to us young women in our 20s. We dreamt big, and sisters in the movement helped nurture the dream by fashioning global and local linkages. They created learning opportunities for many of us on the continent. It is a truism in the feminist circle that older feminists have to plant trees knowing that only younger feminists may sit under its shade. FIDA must first mobilise within its own ranks. A conscious decision must be taken to see how many young lawyers join the ranks of FIDA annually. Each senior at the bar must be tasked to facilitate the attendance of a new younger person each year. Such attendees should be given chance to choose a topic that concerns them and to discuss it in a panel or by way of exhibition, moderated by a senior colleague. Panels should reflect intergenerational generational dynamics. One woman sponsoring another. One woman mentoring another.

Greater devolution: FIDA will need to give more support to its state level components to create momentum, find the right voices to build a constituency and then a link to the federal, regional and the global. After all politics is local. Each will need to decide and shape engagement around issues that are pertinent to its location. The strategies of engagement will be relevant to the audience, and time and place. What might work in community A might be a no-no in community B. This requires creating accountability loops at the state level where agenda is set and defended and progress reported to the tiers of leadership.

A political economy approach to mobilization: Economic empowerment as it is popularly called has in fact become over emphasized and politicized as the panacea for women's emancipation. We know it is not. However, economic is the base of politics. Mobilizing women from lower income brackets is more successful when it is premised on enhancing their economic wellbeing. They understand the connection between



income and wellbeing and power. And so should we all. After all, where would our voice be, as the elite we are, if we had no economic value. Intervention designs should be rooted in economic benefit. While not enough by itself, it is the lever and incentive for raising consciousness about any other form of critical issue. Politics and economics must go together.

Single issue campaigns: A blanket approach does not work anymore from a behavioural insight perspective, focusing on one story to tell that of the rest is more strategic. FIDA campaign should not be about all women – people feel overwhelmed and may say how can I begin to make a difference in the lives of so many? But take on women one community at a time, one issue at a time. Use a single life to tell a story showing how that one life might approximate the life of many, and you are more likely to get results and attention. Ochanya, Busola Dakolo are case in point on how a keen focus on a single issue or person at a time can jar the public conscience and sustain a campaign. May I pause to ask where the legal case stands with Ochanya, FIDA Gboko was leading? Her story is replete with a focus on a single issue: Ransome Kuti cohort revolved against unfair taxation⁴ Sawaba wanted suffrage for women in northern Nigeria.

Working across gender: November, 19, is international Men's day. It is on the eve of the week commencing the 16 days of activism against GBV. How do we use that to enable men mentor boys and lead by example? First, we establish the agreed behavior that makes respect for women possible. A most strategic action would be to seek to influence the constitutional process working closely with male and female change

⁴See Mba, N.E. 1982. *Nigerian women mobilized – women's political activity in southern Nigeria, 1900–1965*. University of California Press, Berkeley, CA, USA.

champions that we know in the legislature. Working with the men should however begin from the home as we mobilise our sons and daughters to change the structure of the family. Effectively mobilising women must begin with more space at home. When we free up women's labour we can interest them in more politically strategic organising. So I ask each one of us, what is the gender policy in your home?

The role of law: In countries where the law has been favourable to women, it has served as a rallying point. Take the samples of South Africa, Kenya, Senegal, And our African poster child for women's political participation, Rwanda which has 63% women representation. It is all thanks to the law that demands equitable representation of women in public life. We are told that Mexico and Nigeria have a lot in common because of high rate of corruption, impunity and exclusion but even in Mexico women form 50% of elected representatives at this present time when a left wing government led by president Lopez Obrador is in power.

Build on policy moments: Sexual assault is assuming epidemic levels. We are no longer safe in places which were our traditional safe spaces – homes, schools, places of worship, each site is replete with horrific and embarrassing instances of abuse. There is an emerging movement in this country to demand that Nigeria operationalizes a commitment to protect women's bodily integrity. The law plays a key role here to deter and to punish. VAPP Act 2015 provides for a sexual offender register. NAPTIP with the support of the EU RoLAC is working with governmental and non-governmental partners to develop one for Nigeria. It is proposed that convicts, those reported in the media and those arraigned in court will be listed on the register. Besides the SOR will be service providers - professionals who are able to offer services to survivors, families of victims and perpetrators alike. This becomes a tool to name and shame perpetrators. Legal and judicial activism will be required to help test this approach. Mark my word, when you fight corruption, it fights back and sexual corruption is no exception. The incorrigible will test the resolve of the register. Where else can we look to, but to FIDA to provide the expertise required to defend the right to bodily integrity for women, girls, and boys. The register presents a mobilisatory policy moment. When the register is operational there will be need for advocacy and sensitization to mobilize awareness and use. Every would - be employee, employer, tenant/ householder and other transactional relationships in whatever sector should carry out a status check on the sex offender register. No employer should employ anyone who does not have this clearance. It is hoped this effort will be a start in enabling state and societal accountability on matters of sexual violence and deter further instances of sexual abuse.

Safe work place

practice: The SOR will prove that sexual harassment is no longer a private thing even if it happens behind closed doors. It is a rallying point right now which deserves the attention of FIDA. The term “*sextortion*” was coined by the International Association of Women Judges and refers to the abuse of power to obtain a sexual benefit or advantage. It is a problem all over the world, with far-reaching costs in terms of physical and mental health and human dignity. Sextortion exacerbates gender inequality and hampers a woman’s development. It violates a woman’s right to protection against sexual harassment, degradation and discrimination.⁵



The global corruption barometer for Latin America and the Caribbean 2019, includes **sextortion**. In its list of indicators for how well countries are doing for or against women. Reuters Foundation lists Nigeria as the 9th most unsafe place to be a woman – What policies and practices do we enable. If we are to begin mobilising from small to the big, then those around us must feel the full impact of our values they will be the first line of defence, and we must show we care. Younger lawyers, women and men in our networks, in our offices our home must feel safe.

Partisan politics: As we mobilise people we must also mobilise material resources. Women are now mobilised and take a keen interest in politics, as testified by the large turnout of women voters registered for the 2019 elections, and the number of aspirants at all levels across parties. To further strengthen women’s position in governance, financial support is necessary. While women continue to solicit support from government and the private sector, particularly multinationals, it is also important for Nigerian women to support their own cause. Can FIDA close ranks and support its members who stand a good chance, to run for public office? Planning must be long term as we seek to build a culture of women’s participation – deepening outreach,

⁵TRANSPARENCY INTERNATIONAL

In Tanzania, several women employees at a court began to fall ill one after the other. What would normally be overlooked as an innocuous seasonal virus proved to be fatal – the women had been infected with HIV. It was eventually discovered that the court clerk who supervised the women had forced them to sleep with him if they wanted to receive their pay for working overtime. He was HIV positive. Sextortion occurs where corruption and sexual exploitation intersect, and it can be fatal. Despite this, it is more difficult to prove in court than the extortion of money and thus is often overlooked.

Women are a primary target, and instead of being asked to pay a monetary bribe to access a basic service or to advance in school, women are pressured to pay with their bodies. The victim is then forced to suffer in silence for fear of reprisal.

https://www.transparency.org/news/feature/sextortion_undermining_gender_equality

organising ourselves across gender, class and generations. Women must start to prepare for elections and mobilising citizens to participate early. Election timelines must be a milestone, not the destination.⁶

Connecting via technology: Mobilization is more strategic when it is done in real time. When the issue is relevant and demands urgent action. Technology makes it that much easier to do. The example of the Feminist WhatsApp forum is a study in such effort. It is a place to speak unhindered, to galvanise energy and ideas. Although WhatsApp is a limited tool to engage effectively, people can reach each other offline. Tech was a lifeline, when the friends of a young girl who was accused of attempted murder in Kano – reached out, and FIDA CVP Rhoda Tyoden linked me with the Kano FIDA Chair, whom I had never met before in a formal capacity. Communication should not be an afterthought but an integral part of mobilization design. It goes beyond just media-orthodox or new- while it includes both, communication means understanding the most effective way to craft your message and to deliver it to your focus audience in a way that reaches their heads and hearts.

MEL and Documentation: Monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) are an essential part of planning. We need evidence based data to tell our story and for evidence based advocacy. Templates that show interventions, locations, and outcomes should help track how well we are doing. It is good to capture your own data. It tells your story. If you do not tell your story yourself or tell it well, some other persons will, and you might not like the outcome. Follow through and tenacity are crucial. The story of the process is as important as the goal itself. We have heard of societies where activists have persistently pursued a single issue for several years waiting for an outcome. We need to see through what we have started and are committed to however long it takes. For this, we will need energy for the long-haul, not for a sprint. Where is the story of FIDA in Nigeria domiciled so that we may remember or learn about how we got here and how far we have come? Stories can galvanize a whole new generation of ideas and actors.

Timing: Linked to the point about MEL and the opportunity which technology presents is timing. It is crucial. Sometimes it is not what you say but when and to whom – timing is crucial, for example, there is no point agitating for political representation after the cabinet is formed, the train has left the station. You can't reach people when the seasonal calendar demands they should be somewhere else. We have always said that beginning to make plans early is very essential.

Conclusion: Redefining Winning

⁶ NWTF ed Salihu 2007

I close by returning to the first theme of historicising women's lives by requiring that we redefine winning from a women's perspective. What does it mean to 'win'? A historical perspective to winning means it is not a zero sum game but a process, which begins with the ability to act to change the outcome of events around women and not necessarily as an end i.e. winning an election. Winning therefore is not victory measured by a radical transformation in the lives of women or a jump from 0% to 50% increase in the political participation of women. Victory comes in different colour shades and is measured, as an incremental array of baby steps. The process matters as much as the end goal. It meant a lot to women activists and gender aware policy makers that government was at least forced to ask the question how will a project benefit women, why is maternal mortality on the increase? How many girls are going to and finishing a course of school?

Women have learnt to live with the 0.4 % of the total appropriation budget given to the women affairs ministry and now instead demand for gender desks established in each Ministry Department and Agency after all our mission is to ensure a great understanding of women's rights as integral to every sphere of planning and development.

We must emphasise the common and not the different and be there for each other, at set moments. Whether city or rural dwellers, formally educated or lettered in the school of life, older or younger, with or without disabilities, we are all women affected by patriarchy, one way or another. What may vary is the degree and form of experience, for example having economic independence helps us meet the daily needs and have a voice, but it does not protect you from workplace harassment. Ultimately, the key to overcoming gender challenges in all social, economic and political spheres is to stick together and help each other. We must begin to see one another as partners in progress and not as competitors.⁷

We must commit for life. We had the right of entry to choose to care about women's human rights, we now do not have the right of exit. There is no time to 'sign off'. We have to keep engaging, keeping an open mind to new ideas, and creating channels of feedback, while drawing strengths from each other, mobiliser and mobilised. One thing is clear; doing nothing just because we fear the risks is not an option. Fear can be a positive force. After all, what would we do if we were not afraid? May our words fall on fertile ears.

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⁷ Amina Mohammed **NWTF** Hajiya Amina Az-Zubair, OFR Senior Special Assistant to the President on MDGs, 2007