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STRENGTHENING THE CAPACITY OF WOMEN IN PUBLIC OFFICE AND MALE ALLIES IN BORNO STATE TO ADVOCATE FOR AND DELIVER GENDER SENSITIVE PLANNING AND GENDER RESPONSIVE BUDGETING AT LGA LEVEL

October 2025

ISSUE BRIEF No. 5

SHIFTING GENDER NORMS IN BORNO STATE FOR FEMALE POLITICAL ACTORS AT LGA LEVEL



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Executive Summary

The “Shifting Gender Norms” emerged a significant theme during the 3-day training workshop. This theme was addressed in most discussions and especially evolved from the session “Strengthening the Capacity of Political Actors, Women in Public Office and Male Allies in Borno State to Advocate for and Deliver Gender Sensitive Planning/Policy Making and Gender Responsive Budgeting at LGA Level.”



Participants acknowledged that gender inequality in governance is sustained by a complex web of cultural, religious, institutional, and political barriers that limit women’s participation in public life. Through group exercises, role playing and plenary dialogue, participants identified how negative gender norms conspired to impede women in politics, especially at the LGA level in Borno state. Key obstacles, and barriers to shifting norms in the political domain were identified as the persistence of patriarchal cultural norms, male-dominated political structures, a lack of mentorship and resources, and insufficient political will to promote and support women’s leadership within political parties.

Participants agreed that shifting these gender norms requires intentional and culturally responsive actions. In terms of a priority of actions for shifting negative gender norms, participants emphasised the importance of training female political actors on leadership, gender-responsive budgeting and gender-informed advocacy. They argued that such skills would equip female political actors to an extent where they could influence planning and policy decision making processes. Secondly, participants identified training media on gender responsive reporting as a critical factor for changing public perceptions of women in public life and for highlighting women’s contributions to public and political life. Thirdly and very importantly, participants called for the updating INEC’s Gender Policy (due to expire in 2025) which they saw as a key institutional reform priority for shift negative gender norms in the political party system. In terms of strategies to be implemented in pursuing these three recommended action points, participants recommended seven strategies as cross cutting to implement all three action points:

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1. Recognize that males can be and are allies and strengthen male allyship in political spaces;
2. Institutionalize administrative, legal and procedural systems of government for gender-responsive policies and accountability mechanisms;
3. Establish mentorship and networking platforms for women leaders;
4. Generalize training and capacity building on GRB and advocacy amongst Community Based Organizations
5. Set standards for the media for gender-sensitive reporting;
6. Reform political party structures to ensure equity and access;
7. Conduct community-level awareness campaigns to challenge and replace negative cultural stereotypes with positive ones

Overall, the training provided a safe space for reflection, dialogue, and commitment among political actors and male allies in Borno State. It affirmed that transforming gender norms and achieving gender equality in governance requires not only empowering women but also reshaping the attitudes, systems, and institutions that limit them.



The Issue: Negative Gender Norms

The theme “*Strengthening the Capacity of Political Actors, Women in Public Office, and Male Allies in Borno State to Advocate for and Deliver Gender Sensitive Planning/Policy Making and Gender Responsive Budgeting at LGA Level*” of the 21st to 24th October 2025 training workshop underscores the need to challenge

entrenched gender norms that continue to marginalise women in governance, especially at local government levels in Borno state. Throughout the training sessions, participants engaged critically with the gender norms informed barriers faced by women and explored actionable strategies to dismantle discriminatory structures.

The “Shifting Gender Norms” component of the workshop particularly highlighted how societal attitudes, institutional biases, and political gatekeeping reinforce women’s limited participation

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in decision-making. Through interactive group work and role play, participants reflected on their lived experiences and developed recommendations to promote gender-sensitive governance in Borno State.

Understanding Gender Norms and Their Impact on Female Political Actors

Discussions from the *Building Blocks Session* revealed how deeply embedded cultural and social hierarchies place women in subordinate positions within political and public spaces. Men often justified these hierarchies on the grounds of tradition, religion, and perceived gender roles — citing women’s “domestic responsibilities” and “emotional nature” as reasons to exclude them from political decision-making. This justification was openly debated, with participants acknowledging that such narratives perpetuate inequality and hinder the attainment of inclusive governance.

Female participants shared experiences of being overlooked in party structures, excluded from budget discussions, and underrepresented in leadership spaces. Men in the room also admitted that unconscious bias and cultural conditioning have often influenced their perceptions of women’s capabilities. This honest reflection marked a crucial step toward shifting gender norms by recognising the problem and creating a shared commitment to reform.

Barriers Faced by Women in Political and Governance Spaces

Across the group presentations, several recurring themes emerged regarding the barriers women face. These include:

1. **Cultural and Religious Norms:** Deep-rooted cultural expectations and religious interpretations often confine women to private spaces and discourage public leadership. Group 2 described this as “political gatekeeping,” where male dominance and cultural conservatism work together to exclude women.
2. **Male dominance of the Political Party Structures:** Participants identified “biased party systems” as a key barrier. Party structures often favour men for leadership positions, relegating women to supportive or ceremonial roles. The “pull her down” syndrome, noted by Group 1, further weakens women’s solidarity and undermines collective progress.
3. **Socioeconomic Constraints:** Limited access to financial resources, mentorship, and networks restricts women’s ability to campaign effectively or sustain political engagement. As Group 3 highlighted, the absence of “a network of women in governance mentorship” leaves many new appointees isolated and underprepared.
4. **Gender-Based Violence and Intimidation:** Gender-based violence (GBV) remains a significant deterrent. The fear of harassment, both physical and psychological, discourages many women from participating actively in politics.

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5. Lack of Enabling Environment and Political Will by male political leaders: Participants agreed that government institutions often lack mechanisms to support women's participation. Without political will and gender-responsive policies, progress remains slow.

Strategies for Overcoming Barriers and Shifting Norms

The plenary discussions yielded several actionable strategies to transform gender norms and promote equality. These include:

1. Recognize that males can be and are allies and strengthen male allyship in political spaces;
2. Institutionalize administrative, legal and procedural systems of government for gender-responsive policies and accountability mechanisms;
3. Establish mentorship and networking platforms for women leaders;
4. Generalize training and capacity building on GRB and advocacy amongst Community Based Organizations
5. Set standards for the media for gender-sensitive reporting;
6. Reform political party structures to ensure equity and access;
7. Conduct community-level awareness campaigns to challenge and replace negative cultural stereotypes with positive ones

Conclusion

The theme of “Shifting Gender Norms” evolving from multiple sessions of the workshop demonstrated that while barriers to women's participation remain deeply entrenched, change is possible when stakeholders, both male and female, commit to collective action. By addressing discriminatory norms, strengthening capacity, and building institutional accountability, women in Borno State can advance gender equality in governance. Participants left the session with a renewed understanding that gender inclusion is not a women's issue alone but a societal imperative, one that requires the active involvement of political actors, institutions, and communities alike. As these strategies are implemented, they hold the potential to transform not only the political landscape of Borno State at LGA and state levels.

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