

# ATHENA NOTES

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## Gender Equity and Nigeria's Governance Gap

By Dr Izuchukwu Christiantus Anyanwu



Gender equity outcomes in Nigeria remain persistently weak despite decades of policy commitments, legal frameworks, and programme interventions. Women constitute roughly 49 per cent of the population yet remain significantly under-represented in political leadership, senior public administration, and high-productivity sectors of the economy. This gap is often framed as a social or cultural challenge. In reality, the binding constraint is institutional: weak coordination, fragmented policy ownership, and limited enforcement capacity across government systems.

The problem is not the absence of policy intent, but the absence of effective governance mechanisms to translate commitments into

measurable outcomes.

Three structural governance failures define the challenge.

### **First: policy fragmentation across institutions.**

Responsibility for gender outcomes is dispersed across multiple ministries—women's affairs, education, labour, health, finance, and justice—without a binding coordination framework. Although sectoral policies exist, they operate in parallel rather than as an integrated implementation system. This weakens accountability and allows performance gaps to persist without consequence.

### **Second: weak integration of gender objectives into core economic planning.**

Gender equity considerations are not consistently embedded in macroeconomic planning, budget formulation, or public investment decisions. While gender-responsive budgeting frameworks exist, implementation remains uneven. As a result, public expenditure does not systematically address structural barriers to women's participation in labour markets, skills acquisition, and access to productive assets.

### **Third: limited enforcement of existing legal protections.**

Nigeria has ratified international conventions and enacted domestic laws addressing discrimination and gender-based violence. However, enforcement remains inconsistent across states. Labour force data from the National Bureau of Statistics show female participation remains below 50 per cent, compared with over 60 per cent for men, indicating a clear gap between legal provisions and economic reality.

The economic consequences are substantial. According to the World Bank, closing gender gaps in labour force participation could increase Nigeria's GDP by up to 23 per cent over the long term through improved productivity and human capital utilisation. UNESCO data further show that girls remain disproportionately affected by school dropout rates in conflict-affected and low-income regions, weakening future workforce quality and intergenerational opportunity.

At a time of fiscal constraint and demographic pressure, the underutilisation of nearly half the population represents a structural inefficiency. Gender equity is therefore not only a

matter of fairness; it is a question of governance effectiveness and economic performance.

Responsibility is dispersed but identifiable:

- The Federal Ministry of Women Affairs provides policy stewardship but lacks enforcement authority across government.
- The Ministry of Finance, Budget and National Planning controls the planning and expenditure systems where gender objectives should be operationalised.
- Sector ministries determine service delivery outcomes in education, health, labour, and employment.
- State governments are central to implementation and enforcement of many protections.

The core failure lies in the absence of a central coordination mechanism that links gender outcomes to planning, budgeting, and performance management across these institutions.

The immediate policy requirement is to treat gender equity as a cross-government performance issue, not a sectoral programme.

Three practical and institutionally feasible actions follow:

- Embed gender outcome indicators in performance systems.
- The Ministry of Finance and national planning institutions should require ministries and states to report gender-disaggregated outcomes in education, labour participation, and public employment as part of routine performance assessment frameworks.



**According to the World Bank, closing gender gaps in labour force participation could increase Nigeria's GDP by up to 23 per cent.**

- Link budget releases to measurable gender outcomes. Rather than creating new funding structures, existing budget instruments should condition portions of programme financing on verified progress in agreed indicators, particularly in education, skills development, and employment access.
- Strengthen national gender data systems.

The National Bureau of Statistics should standardise gender-disaggregated reporting across labour, education, and health datasets to improve comparability, reduce ambiguity, and strengthen accountability.

These reforms require coordination discipline rather than new legislation.

International experience reinforces this approach. Rwanda's integration of gender indicators into budget processes and performance contracts has contributed to significant improvements in women's parliamentary representation and measurable gains in social outcomes. The lesson is not replication, but institutional logic: alignment of systems matters more than expansion of programmes.

If current governance patterns persist, Nigeria risks embedding gender inequality as a structural inefficiency. Labour market disparities will continue to suppress productivity, education gaps will weaken workforce quality, and public expenditure will yield suboptimal returns. Over time, this erodes growth potential, institutional credibility, and policy effectiveness.

The cost of inaction is cumulative but substantial.

## Conclusion

Gender equity in Nigeria is constrained less by policy absence than by weak coordination, fragmented implementation, and limited integration into core governance systems. Treating gender outcomes as a cross-government performance priority is essential to improving efficiency, accountability,

and long-term development outcomes.

A state that fails to align its institutions around the full productive use of its human capital accepts avoidable economic loss as a permanent feature of its development trajectory.

## Key Insights

1. Gender inequity in Nigeria is primarily a governance failure, not a social or cultural one
2. Fragmented institutional responsibility undermines accountability
3. Gender goals are poorly integrated into economic planning and budgeting
4. Enforcement gaps persist between legal rights and lived reality
5. Closing gender gaps has significant economic returns



Dr Izuchukwu Christianus Anyanwu is a Senior Research Fellow at Athena Centre.

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# Delayed Diplomacy, Diminished Influence

By Prof. Nnamdi Nwaodu



*Ambassador Yusuf Tuggar, former Minister of Foreign Affairs, resigned on March 30, 2026*

In September 2023, the administration of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu recalled Nigeria's ambassadors as part of a foreign service review. Substantive appointments were only gradually made and deployed between 2025 and early 2026. While full diplomatic representation was eventually restored, the prolonged interval exposed structural weaknesses in Nigeria's foreign policy governance and institutional coordination.

The central issue is not the eventual restoration of ambassadors but the cost of delay: how extended diplomatic vacancies constrained Nigeria's external engagement at a time of economic reform, shifting geopolitical alignments, and intensified global competition for investment and influence.

The 2023–2026 cycle reveals three systemic constraints.

## **First, absence of binding timelines for ambassadorial appointments.**

Nigeria's foreign service architecture does not contain a codified sequence linking recall, vetting, nomination, confirmation, and deployment. This gap allowed what was intended as a routine diplomatic review to evolve into a prolonged leadership vacuum. In many missions, *chargés d'affaires* operated for extended periods, limiting access to senior-level political engagement and weakening Nigeria's negotiating leverage.

## **Second, weakened economic diplomacy during a sensitive reform period.**

The delay coincided with major domestic economic adjustments, including exchange-rate liberalisation, subsidy reforms, and efforts to attract foreign capital. Without resident ambassadors, follow-up on state visits, trade negotiations, and investment

commitments proceeded more slowly and with reduced coordination. While missions remained operational, their ability to convert political engagement into economic outcomes was constrained by limited authority at the top of the diplomatic hierarchy.

## **Third, uncertainty within the foreign service system.**

Extended interim arrangements affected both career diplomats and political appointees awaiting confirmation. This created ambiguity in leadership structure, weakened morale, and reinforced perceptions of unpredictability in foreign service management at a time when institutional clarity was required.

The costs of delay were incremental rather than abrupt but cumulative in effect. In strategic postings such as the United Kingdom, the United States, Brazil, and South Africa, ambassadorial vacancies reduced Nigeria's visibility in high-level political,

economic, and multilateral forums. Diaspora engagement continued, but escalation channels were weaker. Policy continuity was maintained, but influence was diluted.

Comparative experience underscores that this is not an isolated phenomenon. Delays in ambassadorial deployment in countries such as Brazil and South Africa have similarly coincided with reduced diplomatic momentum and weaker consular responsiveness. The lesson is consistent: diplomatic effectiveness is time-sensitive, and delays impose real, if often gradual, costs.

Responsibility for the delay period was institutionally distributed:

- The Presidency controlled nomination timing and political clearance.
- The Ministry of Foreign Affairs managed mission continuity and coordination.
- The National Assembly oversaw confirmation processes.
- The fiscal authorities influenced operational readiness through funding cycles.

The underlying problem was not individual failure, but the absence of enforceable coordination rules across institutions.

Three lessons emerge from the 2023–2026 experience.

1. Ambassadorial processes require defined timelines.

Recalls without clear redeployment schedules generate avoidable diplomatic stagnation.

2. Interim arrangements are not substitutes for full representation. Chargés d'affaires maintain continuity but lack the political authority required for strategic engagement.

3. Diplomatic readiness is part of economic reform infrastructure. Foreign missions are extensions of domestic policy; delays reduce external confidence in reform credibility.

If repeated, such delays risk normalising diplomatic lag as a feature of political transitions. Over time, this would erode partner confidence, weaken trade execution, and gradually diminish Nigeria's influence in multilateral decision-making spaces. The result would not be sudden isolation, but steady strategic marginalisation.

### Conclusion

Nigeria's experience between 2023 and 2026 demonstrates that delayed ambassadorial appointments constitute a governance cost, even when eventual deployment is achieved. Diplomatic systems depend on continuity, authority, and timing. When these elements are disrupted, external engagement loses momentum and strategic presence is weakened.

The lesson is institutional rather than procedural: effective foreign policy requires predictable appointment cycles, disciplined sequencing, and uninterrupted mission leadership. In diplomacy, time lost is influence diminished—and some moments cannot be recovered once missed.



**Effective foreign policy requires predictable appointment cycles, disciplined sequencing, and uninterrupted mission leadership.**

### Key Insights

1. Prolonged ambassadorial vacancies weakened Nigeria's influence, visibility, and negotiating leverage during a critical reform period.
2. The lack of a structured, time-bound appointment process allowed a routine recall to become an extended diplomatic gap.
3. Chargés d'affaires maintained continuity but lacked the political weight required for high-level engagement and strategic influence.



Prof. Nnamdi Nwaodu is the Director General of the Centre for African American Research Studies

**NB:** *The opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not reflect the position of Athena Centre on the issues canvassed.*

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