

AN ASSESSMENT OF INSTITUTIONAL CONSTRAINTS TO GENDER MAINSTREAMING IN CROSS RIVER STATE, NIGERIA

Livinus Ature Nandi¹ and Patrick Nnadozie Udefuna²

National Institute for Legislative and Democratic Studies (NILDS)

livinusnandi@gmail.com¹, udefunap@gmail.com²

DOI: 10.64290/aijpam.v3.i3.14

Abstract

This study examined the institutional constraints affecting the implementation of gender mainstreaming policy in Cross River State, Nigeria. The study was motivated by the gap between existing gender policy commitments and the limited progress achieved in practice. Specifically, it identified the key institutional constraints influencing policy implementation and assessed their effect on implementation outcomes. A mixed-method approach based on a concurrent triangulation design was adopted. Primary data were collected through questionnaires administered to 400 respondents, of which 380 were successfully retrieved, alongside semi-structured interviews with nine key informants. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics, while qualitative data were analysed using Grounded Theory. The findings revealed that inadequate policy enforcement, limited budgetary allocation, weak institutional capacity, poor political commitment and ineffective coordination remain the major obstacles to effective gender mainstreaming. The study concludes that the existence of gender policies alone is insufficient to guarantee successful implementation unless public institutions possess the capacity, resources and commitment required to enforce them effectively. It recommended strengthening institutional capacity, increasing financial support, improving policy enforcement, enhancing inter-agency coordination and establishing effective monitoring systems to ensure that gender mainstreaming policies produce meaningful and sustainable outcomes.

Keywords: *Institutional Constraints, Gender Mainstreaming Policy, Policy Implementation, Gender Equality, Public Institutions.*

Introduction

Gender equality frameworks achieve minimal structural transformation unless public institutions possess the technical capacity, resource allocations, and political commitment required to translate statutory mandates into routine administrative action (Waylen, 2014). Over the past three decades, gender mainstreaming has emerged as a dominant global paradigm for addressing systemic disparities across public administration, governance, and development planning. Formalised internationally during the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing (1995), the strategy requires integrating a gender perspective into every stage of policy formulation, resource allocation, implementation, and evaluation, rather than treating gender as a siloed sectoral concern (True, 2010; Sustainable Development Goals 5). However, a central paradox in comparative public policy is that while formal adoption of gender mainstreaming is near-universal, substantive implementation

remains blatantly fragmented (Hankivsky, 2013). Feminist institutionalist scholars argue that this implementation gap persists because formal gender policies are continually subverted by informal patriarchal norms, weak administrative mandates, and entrenched bureaucratic inertia within state machinery (Mackay, Kenny, & Chappell, 2010; Waylen, 2017).

Globally, empirical evidence underscores that the proliferation of gender equality strategies rarely correlates directly with operational success. Reports from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2023) highlight that while over 80% of member states maintain national gender strategies, execution is routinely crippled by weak cross-ministerial coordination, inadequate gender-responsive budgeting (GRB), and deficient accountability frameworks. In developing and post-colonial contexts, this implementation defect is even more acute. UN Women (2023) notes that national gender machineries are frequently positioned as peripheral entities lacking financial autonomy, statutory authority, and specialised technical expertise. Scholarly literature reinforces these institutional findings: Goetz (2020) and Rai and Waylen (2014) assert that public administration systems often exhibit a "policy enforcement deficit," wherein state actors enact progressive laws to secure international legitimacy while systematically failing to fund or enforce them at the domestic operational level.

Across Sub-Saharan Africa, regional legislative instruments such as the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (the Maputo Protocol) and the African Union Gender Strategy have established progressive legal benchmarks. Yet, national outcomes vary drastically due to divergent institutional arrangements (Tripp, 2015; Okome, 2021). Comparative African studies such as Tamale (2011) and Ahikire (2014) demonstrate that the transition of gender mainstreaming from policy documentation into administrative routine depends heavily on executive leadership, bureaucratic capability, inter-agency synergy, and sustained resource deployment. Consequently, states operating under similar regional mandates achieve markedly different outcomes, demonstrating that institutional architecture and socio-political environments, rather than policy design alone, dictate the success or failure of gender interventions.

Nigeria exemplifies this acute gap between policy formulation and administrative execution. The National Gender Policy (NGP), updated in 2021, sets a comprehensive baseline for integrating gender perspectives into state institutions while mandating a 35% affirmative action quota for women in appointive and elective positions. To operationalise this vision, the Federal and State Ministries of Women Affairs established institutional mechanisms, including departmental Gender Desks and partnerships with international development agencies. Nonetheless, administrative practice remains deeply disconnected from policy aspirations. According to the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2025, Nigeria ranked 124th out of 146 countries globally, exhibiting particularly

severe deficits in political empowerment and decision-making representation. Scholars such as Para-Mallam (2011) and Agbalajobi (2021) attribute this chronic underperformance to the weak legal enforceability of the NGP, resistance from male-dominated political structures, and the marginalisation of state gender machinery within broader budgetary frameworks.

At the sub-national level, Cross River State presents a compelling case for investigating these institutional realities. Historically regarded as a progressive state within Nigeria's South-South geopolitical zone, Cross River was among the earliest sub-national entities to adopt state-level gender initiatives, establish the Ministry of Women Affairs, and collaborate with international organisations like the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and UN Women on gender-responsive governance projects (Cross River State Ministry of Women Affairs [CRSMWA], 2018; Anyadike, 2019). Despite these visible structural arrangements, empirical assessments reveal marked inconsistencies in execution across Ministries, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs) and Local Government Areas (LGAs) (Bassey & Itam, 2020). For instance, departmental Gender Desks within key line ministries (such as Agriculture, Health, and Education) frequently operate without dedicated line-item funding, clear operational mandates, or monitoring tools needed to evaluate policy impact (Oqua & Essien, 2022). Furthermore, informal patriarchal political dynamics and patronage networks continue to undermine formal directives aimed at increasing female recruitment, leadership retention, and political appointment (Odey, 2021).

While Cross River State has created the formal administrative architecture for gender mainstreaming, its public institutions exhibit varying levels of technical capacity, inter-agency coordination, and political commitment to transform policy mandates into actionable outcomes. Examining the period between 2011 and 2023 provides a critical longitudinal frame to analyse how shifting gubernatorial administrations, fluctuating budgetary allocations, and structural bottlenecks influenced policy execution. Against this background, this study critically interrogates the institutional constraints impairing gender mainstreaming within public institutions in Cross River State from 2011 to 2023, testing the foundational hypothesis that there is no significant relationship between institutional constraints and women's political representation and decision-making leadership.

Literature Review

Conceptual Literature

Institutional Constraints: This refers to the formal and informal rules, structures and practices that influence how organisations function. According to North (1990), institutions are the humanly created rules that shape political, economic and social interactions. Similarly, Hofstede (2001) explains that institutional arrangements, values and organisational culture influence behaviour and decision-making within organisations. In this study, institutional constraints are defined as the

organisational, legal, administrative and cultural barriers that limit the effective implementation of gender mainstreaming policy. The concept is measured using indicators such as leadership commitment, availability of resources, institutional capacity, organisational culture and enforcement mechanisms.

Gender Mainstreaming: Gender mainstreaming is the process of ensuring that the concerns and experiences of both women and men are considered in policy design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. United Nations Economic and Social Council (1997) defines gender mainstreaming as the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action in all areas and at all levels. Likewise, Rees (1998) describes it as a strategy for promoting gender equality by integrating gender perspectives into every stage of policy development and implementation. In this study, gender mainstreaming policy refers to government or organisational policies that seek to integrate gender equality into programmes, decisions and institutional processes. The concept is measured through the extent of policy implementation, gender-responsive planning, staff training, monitoring mechanisms and compliance with gender equality guidelines.

Theoretical Review

A critical evaluation of the literature assessing institutional constraints to gender mainstreaming in Cross River State, Nigeria, highlights Feminist Institutionalism Theory as a dominant theoretical paradigm. Feminist Institutionalism posits that public administration structures are not gender-neutral, but are historically entrenched with patriarchal norms, informal power dynamics, and masculine organisational cultures (Mackay et al., 2010; Waylen, 2017; Kenny, 2020). When applied to sub-national governance in Nigeria, this theory explains the glaring disconnect between formal egalitarian policies such as the Revised National Gender Policy and actual administrative practice (Agbalajobi, 2021; Odey, 2021). While Cross River State has established formal gender machineries like departmental Gender Desks and Ministry frameworks, these structures are routinely neutralised by informal institutional rules, such as male-dominated political patronage networks and traditional norms regarding authority (Waylen, 2017; Goetz, 2020). To complement this, scholars utilise Implementation Theory (Sabatier, 1986; Lipsky, 2010; Oqua & Essien, 2022) to account for concrete operational bottlenecks. This framework demonstrates that gender mainstreaming across state Ministries, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs) suffers from a severe "*implementation deficit*" characterised by a lack of line-item funding, insufficient technical expertise among civil servants, weak administrative authority, and non-existent monitoring systems (Bassey & Itam, 2020; UN Women, 2023).

Despite its utility, the theory exhibits notable conceptual limitations when applied to the specific socio-political context of sub-national Nigeria. A major limitation of Feminist Institutionalism in

African public administration studies is its tendency to treat "*informal institutions*" as homogeneous patriarchal barriers, often failing to account for how local chieftaincy systems, clientelism, and regional ethnic dynamics interact with state power in ways that can either suppress or unexpectedly facilitate female agency (Ahikire, 2014). By focusing primarily on the formal-versus-informal institutional binary developed in Western democratic settings, Feminist Institutionalism sometimes overlooks the fluidity of post-colonial state machinery, where informal patron-client networks are not merely parallel structures, but constitute the core mode of governance itself (Okome, 2021). Consequently, treating the failure of gender desks purely as a technical "implementation gap" risks oversimplifying what is fundamentally an issue of political economy, elite capture, and institutional survival.

Empirical Literature

Recent empirical studies show that many countries have adopted gender mainstreaming policies. Yet, implementation remains uneven because institutions often lack the capacity, resources and commitment needed to turn policy into practice. Lombardo & Mergaert (2021) examined gender mainstreaming across European public institutions. He found that weak political commitment and resistance within organisations reduced policy effectiveness. The study concluded that institutional support is essential for achieving meaningful gender equality outcomes. Building on this, Spasojevic et al. (2026) scrutinised how formal and informal institutional norms dictate the outcomes of gender-responsive reforms. Their findings showed that informal rules and established organisational practices often limit the implementation of gender-responsive policies despite formal commitments.

Similarly, Alex et al. (2023) assessed gender mainstreaming in public governance and found that its implementation was more effective where institutional leadership demonstrated strong commitment to gender equality and robust accountability mechanisms were established. In the absence of these enabling conditions, however, the translation of gender mainstreaming policies into tangible outcomes remained limited. Extending the discussion to developing countries, World Bank (2012) and UN Women (2015) found that inadequate funding, limited institutional capacity and poor coordination among agencies slowed the implementation of gender-related policies. They stressed the need for stronger administrative systems. Studies by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2023) and Steccolini (2020) showed that gender equality initiatives achieved better results when public institutions integrated gender concerns into planning, budgeting and decision-making rather than treating them as separate programmes. A related study by Kantola and Lombardo (2021) explored institutional responses to gender equality reforms. They found that organisational culture and resistance to change remained major barriers, even where comprehensive gender policies already existed.

Omotoso and Enweremadu (2022) reported that weak institutional coordination, limited technical expertise and inconsistent policy enforcement constrained gender mainstreaming efforts in public institutions. They recommended strengthening institutional accountability. Childs and Krook (2023) examined reforms designed to institutionalise gender equality. Their findings indicated that long-term success depends on sustained political commitment, effective monitoring systems and continuous staff capacity development rather than policy adoption alone. While many studies focus on Europe and other developed settings, fewer empirical investigations examine these institutional barriers in developing countries, particularly Nigeria. This gap provides a strong justification for the present study on institutional constraints in the implementation of gender mainstreaming policy at the sub-national level of Cross River State, Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Feminist Institutional Theory, which was popularised by Fiona Mackay, Meryl Kenny and Louise Chappell in 2010. The theory evolved from early political science approaches that viewed institutions as formal, gender-blind rules into a dynamic paradigm capable of analysing how informal patriarchal norms, historical male privilege, and masculine organisational cultures continuously shape, resist, or subvert formal policy mandates (Waylen, 2017; Kenny, 2020). The theory explains how formal rules, informal norms and long-standing institutional practices shape gender relations and influence the success or failure of gender equality policies. It argues that institutions are not gender-neutral; rather, they often reflect existing power structures that make it difficult for gender reforms to achieve their intended goals.

The main assumption of the theory is that institutions influence how policies are designed, interpreted and implemented. Even when gender mainstreaming policies exist, hidden practices, cultural beliefs, unequal power relations and weak institutional commitment can slow or even prevent effective implementation. The theory also assumes that meaningful change requires both policy reforms and changes in institutional behaviour, values and routines. Despite its usefulness, the theory has limitations. One of them is that it pays more attention to institutional structures than to individual actions and leadership. Again, it may also overlook the influence of economic conditions, political interests and limited financial resources, all of which can affect policy implementation. In addition, the theory does not fully explain why similar institutions sometimes produce different outcomes in different settings. Notwithstanding its shortcomings, the theory is relevant to this study because it provides a clear explanation of the institutional barriers that affect the implementation of gender mainstreaming policy. It presents a suitable framework for understanding how organisational rules, administrative practices, leadership commitment and workplace culture can either support or hinder policy implementation.

Methodology

This study adopted a mixed-method approach using a concurrent triangulation design. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected at the same time so that findings from the two methods could be compared and used to support one another. Three local governments, Calabar Municipal, Ikom and Obudu, with a total population of 458,802, were purposively chosen to represent the three senatorial districts of the state. Their selection was based on the fact that they have the highest number of registered voters in their respective senatorial districts (INEC, 2023). This selection criterion ensured that the sample encompassed politically significant and electorally active communities, making it suitable for an investigation into gender mainstreaming and political representation. The quantitative component involved 400 respondents, and a structured questionnaire was used for data collection. The sample size was determined using the Taro Yamane formula, thus:

$$\begin{aligned}n &= 458,802 / [1+458,802 \times (0.05)^2] \\&= 458,802 / [1+458,802 \times 0.0025] \\&= 458,802 / [1+1,147.005] \\&= 458,802 / 1,148.005 \\&\approx 399.65\end{aligned}$$

Rounded up to 400 respondents.

Using the formula, the sample size for each stratum was calculated below:

$$\begin{aligned}S_1 (\text{Southern Senatorial district}) &= 192,866 \div 458,802 \times 400 = 168.15 = 168 \\S_2 (\text{Central Senatorial district}) &= 116,627 \div 458,802 \times 400 = 101.68 = 102 \\S_3 (\text{Northern Senatorial district}) &= 149,309 \div 458,802 \times 400 = 130.17 = 130\end{aligned}$$

The qualitative aspect involved a semi-structured interview guide administered to nine key informants who have practical experience in gender mainstreaming and women's political representation in Cross River State. Thematic saturation was reached during the interviews, as no new information or themes emerged beyond the ninth participant. These provided the primary data, whereas secondary data were obtained from textbooks, journal articles, newspapers, conference papers, government documents, and other published materials. Reliability was tested using Cronbach's Alpha, which produced a coefficient of 0.87, indicating a high level of internal consistency among the questionnaire items. This suggests that the instruments were reliable for

collecting the required data. Combining these sources helped provide a broader understanding of the study and strengthened the credibility of the findings.

Method of Data Analysis

The quantitative data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive analysis involved frequencies, percentages, tables, means, and the five-point Likert scale. Mean scores were interpreted using predetermined decision rules to determine the level of agreement for each statement. Inferential analysis included Pearson Product Moment Correlation and Independent Samples t-test. Statistical significance was assessed at the 0.05 level. These techniques were selected because they matched the research objective and the nature of the variables under investigation. The qualitative data were analysed using Grounded Theory. Interview transcripts were coded through open, axial, and selective coding to identify patterns and develop concepts directly from participants' accounts. NVivo software supported the organisation and coding of the interview data, while triangulation with policy documents helped improve the trustworthiness of the findings. Ethical standards were observed throughout the study. Informed consent was respected, member checking was used to validate interpretations, and the researcher maintained reflexivity to reduce personal bias during data analysis.

Results and Discussion

The findings, as seen in Table 1, reveal that respondents generally agreed that institutional constraints significantly hinder the successful implementation of gender mainstreaming policies in Cross River State.

Table 1: Institutional Constraints to Gender Mainstreaming in Cross River State

Statement	Sex	SD (F/%)	D (F/%)	U (F/%)	A (F/%)	SA (F/%)	Mean	Decision
Inadequate policies and laws to promote gender mainstreaming	Male	10(5.4%)	24(13.4%)	19(10.7%)	82(44.6%)	47(25.9%)	3.73	Agree
	Female	7(3.3%)	16(8.2%)	13(6.6%)	97(49.2%)	65(32.8%)	4.00	Agree
Lack of effective policy enforcement	Male	13(7.1%)	16(8.9%)	29(16.1%)	75(41.1%)	49(26.8%)	3.71	Agree
	Female	8(4.1%)	19(9.8%)	23(11.5%)	88(44.3%)	60(30.3%)	3.87	Agree
Limited budgetary allocation	Male	8(4.5%)	23(12.5%)	16(8.9%)	85(46.4%)	50(27.7%)	3.81	Agree
	Female	10(4.9%)	18(9.0%)	15(7.4%)	90(45.9%)	65(32.8%)	3.93	Agree
Existence of discriminatory	Male	15(8.0%)	19(10.7%)	21(11.6%)	77(42.0%)	50(27.7%)	3.71	Agree

Statement	Sex	SD (F/%)	D (F/%)	U (F/%)	A (F/%)	SA (F/%)	Mean	Decision
laws/customary practices	Female	8(4.1%)	23(11.5%)	16(8.2%)	97(49.2%)	54(27.0%)	3.84	Agree

Source: Field survey (2025)

Both male and female respondents strongly identified a lack of adequate policies (Mean = 3.73 for males, 4.00 for females) and laws to promote gender mainstreaming in Cross River State (Mean = 3.71 and 3.87, respectively) as key obstacles. This aligns with Igiebor (2021), who argues that formal gender equality policies are often adopted without corresponding institutional changes or effective enforcement mechanisms, resulting in largely symbolic or tokenistic outcomes. Similarly, Tildesley et al (2021) contend that institutional resistance and the absence of robust accountability mechanisms frequently undermine the implementation of gender equality reforms.

The result, as seen in Table 1, shows that both male and female respondents agreed that there are no adequate policies and laws to effectively promote gender mainstreaming in Cross River State, with mean scores of 3.73 and 4.00, respectively. This demonstrates that respondents perceive a substantial gap in the legal and policy structures that should institutionalise gender equality initiatives. The mean recorded among females suggests a stronger concern about the insufficiency of gender-related laws, which may be attributed to their direct experience with gender-based inequalities in both the public and private spheres. This finding aligns with the arguments of Arowolo and Aluko (2020), who maintained that Nigeria's legal and institutional frameworks for gender equality remain largely declarative, lacking the necessary enforcement mechanisms to translate policy into practice. A respondent stated as follows:

“The challenge is that although policies and legal provisions address gender equality, they are not sufficient to address the realities women face in Cross River State. In many cases, the existing policies are not specific enough, and where provisions exist, there are weak mechanisms to ensure that they are properly implemented. We need stronger and more comprehensive gender-responsive laws and policies that can guide institutions and also hold them accountable for promoting women's participation and equality”.

Similarly, the result reveals that both male and female respondents agreed that existing policies and laws are not effectively enforced, with mean scores of 3.71 and 3.87, respectively. This underscores a shared perception that, even where gender-related laws exist, implementation remains weak due to institutional inertia and political apathy. The responses suggest that enforcement mechanisms are either underdeveloped or inconsistently applied, thereby limiting the impact of gender policies on governance outcomes. This corroborates the findings of Agbalajobi and Oluwalogbon (2019), who

noted that the absence of political will and accountability structures hinders the practical enforcement of gender equality provisions in Nigeria's political system.

The result likewise shows that both male and female respondents, with mean scores of 3.81 and 3.93, respectively, agreed that limited budgetary allocation is a critical institutional challenge to gender mainstreaming in the state, as it constrains policy implementation and enforcement. This indicates that respondents recognise the centrality of financial resources in sustaining gender initiatives, policy advocacy, and women's empowerment programmes. The higher mean among female respondents reinforces the view that inadequate funding of gender and women's empowerment programmes disproportionately affects women's advancement and participation in decision-making processes. This finding is consistent with UN Women (2019), which emphasises that inadequate and inconsistent financing of gender equality programmes can reinforce structural inequalities by limiting women's access to empowerment opportunities, institutional support, and political participation. The following was stated by a respondent:

"Funding is particularly important for women because most empowerment programmes require resources for training, advocacy, mobilisation and capacity building. When these programmes are underfunded, women are usually the first to lose out, especially those who depend on such initiatives to develop the confidence and skills needed to participate effectively in politics and decision-making".

The perception that certain legal provisions or customary laws still discriminate against women was strongly supported. The relatively high mean scores of 3.84 for females against 3.71 for males emphasise that legal reforms are crucial. Women's stronger agreement may reflect their lived experience of restrictions on inheritance, land ownership, and political candidacy that limit their full participation in political processes. This result is consistent with studies showing that statutory and customary legal frameworks can restrict women's access to political representation. Idike et al. (2020) argue that gendered institutional structures and social norms continue to constrain women's participation in Nigerian democracy. In the interview analysis, when respondents were asked to reflect on the key challenges affecting the implementation of gender mainstreaming policies in Cross River State, their accounts painted a picture of systemic and cultural hurdles that go beyond policy documents. The responses revealed that the bulk of the challenge is not a dearth of relevant gender-related policies but a lack of political will to effectively implement the policies. According to a respondent:

“A sheer lack of political will to carry out proper and effective implementation and enforcement of existing gender-related laws and policies, as well as the non-domestication of internationally ratified conventions, remains a major challenge in the state. Most of these policies only exist on paper. Political party structures remain overwhelmingly male-dominated, and even when women are encouraged to participate, they often face a shortage of practical support”.

Test of Hypothesis

H0: There is no significant relationship between institutional constraints and women’s political representation in Cross River State.

Table 2: Chi-Square Test Result

	Agree	Disagree	Total	Decision
Institutional constraints to Gender Mainstreaming have an impact on Women’s Representation	108	74	182	
Institutional constraints to Gender Mainstreaming do not have an impact on Women’s Representation	126	72	198	
Total	234	146	380	
			$\chi^2\alpha=3.64$	
Chi-Square (χ^2)	82.59	df = 24	p = 0.00	Reject H ₀

Source: Computation using Stata 19 (2026)

The chi-square test, as presented in Table 2 ($\chi^2 = 82.59$, $df = 24$, $p < 0.001$), clearly shows that the challenges respondents identified are not random complaints; they have a real, measurable effect on how gender mainstreaming policies are implemented in Cross River State. In other words, the ability of the state to create inclusive governance is strongly tied to how these institutional barriers are addressed.

The result means that policy implementation is not happening in a vacuum but in a space where women are still struggling to find their footing against structural and cultural headwinds. This resonates with research on women’s political participation in Nigeria, which shows that party structures often remain dominated by informal male networks and gatekeeping practices that restrict women’s access to leadership positions. Agbalajobi and Oluwalogbon (2019) argue that institutional resistance and weak commitment to gender equality reforms continue to limit women’s political

advancement, while Krook and Norris (2014) demonstrate that party recruitment processes and informal political norms remain significant barriers to women's representation.

The results reveal that institutional challenges to gender mainstreaming in Cross River State are multifaceted. While policies exist, they are widely perceived as inadequate and poorly enforced. Effective reform requires a balance between legal-institutional strengthening and grassroots strategies such as education, awareness creation, and leadership support. These findings emphasise the need for greater political commitment, institutional capacity-building, and inclusive policy design to ensure that gender mainstreaming moves from rhetoric to meaningful implementation and sustainable impact.

However, some studies place relatively greater emphasis on legal-institutional measures than on social interventions. Krook (2009) argues that awareness campaigns and empowerment programmes alone may be insufficient to overcome structural barriers unless they are accompanied by binding institutional reforms, such as quota systems and effective enforcement mechanisms. Similarly, Tripp and Kang (2008) demonstrate that well-designed quota systems can substantially improve women's political representation when supported by clear implementation rules. This diverges somewhat from the present study, where respondents placed considerable weight on awareness and education as immediate tools for overcoming institutional challenges. The divergence highlights contextual differences, with respondents in Cross River State appearing to prioritise visible, community-level interventions, possibly because of scepticism toward the state's ability to enforce national legal commitments.

The findings align with a broad consensus in the literature that inadequate laws, weak enforcement, and poor implementation undermine Nigeria's gender mainstreaming framework. The results are particularly consistent with studies by Okoronkwo-Chukwu (2013), Oloyede (2016), and YIAGA Africa (2023), which underscore the persistence of institutional bottlenecks. At the same time, they differ from perspectives that privilege legal quotas above social interventions by revealing a local preference for integrated strategies that combine legal reforms with education, empowerment, and inclusive engagement. This synthesis suggests that the pathway to effective gender mainstreaming in Cross River State must involve both strengthening formal institutions and cultivating social reorientation through grassroots strategies.

Both genders recognised that women face significant difficulties in accessing legal representation, advice, or mechanisms to seek redress for electoral injustice. This highlights the need for legal aid schemes, awareness campaigns, and pro bono legal services specifically targeting women seeking elective offices or justice in electoral disputes. This finding is consistent with Makama's (2013) observation that patriarchal structures and institutional barriers continue to restrict women's

participation in Nigerian politics, highlighting the need for stronger legal and institutional mechanisms to support women's political inclusion.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study's empirical findings directly addressed the central research question by confirming a statistically significant association ($\chi^2 = 82.59, p < 0.001$) between institutional constraints, specifically weak policy enforcement, restricted budgetary allocations, limited technical capacity, and informal patriarchal norms and sub-optimal gender mainstreaming implementation outcomes in Cross River State. While these inferential results established a strong empirical link between bureaucratic bottlenecks and gender representation deficits across state public institutions, they demonstrated structural co-occurrence rather than direct cause-and-effect. By integrating quantitative survey data ($n = 380$) with grounded qualitative accounts from key informants, the study demonstrated that the nominal existence of gender policies was insufficient to secure operational success. Rather, public sector institutions needed to be backed by enforceable administrative mechanisms, line-item financial resources, and executive commitment to convert policy mandates into daily administrative practice.

This study made a distinct theoretical contribution to Feminist Institutionalism and Implementation Theory by demonstrating how informal patriarchal structures and administrative capacity deficits intersected at the sub-national level in Africa to produce an "implementation deficit." Methodologically and empirically, it enriched the literature on Nigerian public administration by providing rare, triangulated sub-national data from Cross River State across a 2011–2023 longitudinal baseline. Practically, the study offered actionable policy insights, highlighting the need to mandate line-item gender budgets, establish legally enforceable monitoring frameworks, and strengthen inter-agency coordination across Ministries, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs). Based on the findings above, the study recommends the following:

- i. Government institutions should strengthen leadership commitment to enforcing existing gender policies. Thus, the Cross River State Government and House of Assembly should institutionalise gender policy enforcement by linking the performance contracts of top MDA leadership directly to mandatory gender indicators, affirmative action targets, and statutory oversight;
- ii. Government should prioritise the funding and staff capacity building of key gender-related institutions, like the Ministry of Women Affairs, as well as the Cross River State Women Resource Centre for effective delivery of their mandate; and
- iii. The Cross River State Government should establish a mandatory inter-agency coordination framework led by the Ministry of Women Affairs to harmonise gender mainstreaming initiatives across all line Ministries, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs) and Local

Government Councils. To support this effort, the State House of Assembly and Executive Council must institutionalise a standardised Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) system equipped with clear gender-disaggregated data indicators to track compliance across public institutions. Enforcing quarterly cross-sectoral audits and public accountability reporting will ensure that gender policies move beyond symbolic adoption and achieve measurable implementation outcomes across Cross River State.

References

- Agbalajobi, D. T., & Oluwalogbon, L. A. (2019). The Nigerian Senate and the politics of the non-passage of the gender equality bill. *African Journal of Political Science and International Relations*, 13(3), 17-23.
- Arowolo, D., & Aluko, F. S. (2010). Women and political participation in Nigeria. *European Journal of Social Sciences*, 14(4), 581-593.
- Childs, S., & Krook, M. L. (2008). The substantive representation of women. In S. Childs & M. L. Krook, *Women and British party politics: Descriptive, substantive and symbolic representation*. Routledge.
- Hofstede, G. (2001). *Culture's consequences: Comparing values, behaviours, institutions and organisations across nations* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Idike, A. N., Okeke, R. C., Okorie, C. O., Ogba, F. N., & Ugodulunwa, C. A. (2020). Gender, democracy, and national development in Nigeria. *SAGE Open*, 10(2), 1-12.
- Igiebor, O. (2021). Women, academic leadership and the “constricting” gender equity policies in Nigerian universities: An integrated feminist approach. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 43(4), 338-352.
- Kantola, J., & Lombardo, E. (2021). Strategies of right populists in opposing gender equality in a polarised European Parliament. *International Political Science Review*, 42(5), 565-579.
- Krook, M. L. (2009). *Quotas for women in politics: Gender and candidate selection reform worldwide*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.
- Lombardo, E., & Meier, P. (2018). Gender mainstreaming. In G. Waylen, K. Celis, J. Kantola, & S. L. Weldon (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of gender and politics*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.
- Mackay, F., Kenny, M., & Chappell, L. (2010). New institutionalism through a gender lens: Towards a feminist institutionalism? *International Political Science Review*, 31(5), 573-588.
- Makama, G. A. (2013). Patriarchy and gender inequality in Nigeria: The way forward. *European Scientific Journal*, 9(17), 115-144.
- North, D. C. (1990). *Institutions, institutional change and economic performance*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Omotoso, S. A., & Enweremadu, D. U. (2022). Gender mainstreaming in Nigeria's 2019 general elections: Evidence and perspectives from Kano and Oyo States. *Journal of African Elections*, 21(2), 148-167.
- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2023a). *Gender equality in public governance: Towards better government decisions*. OECD Publishing.

- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2023b). *Government at a glance 2023*. OECD Publishing.
- Rees, T. (1998). *Mainstreaming equality in the European Union: Education, training and labour market policies*. London, England: Routledge.
- Steccolini, I. (2021). Introducing gender perspectives in the budgetary process at the central government level. *International Journal of Public Administration*, 44(14), 1274-1285.
- Tildesley, R., Lombardo, E., & Verge, T. (2021). Power struggles in the implementation of gender equality policies: The politics of resistance and counter-resistance in universities. *Politics & Gender*, 18(4), 1-28.
- Tripp, A. M., & Kang, A. (2008). The global impact of quotas: On the fast track to increased female legislative representation. *Comparative Political Studies*, 41(3), 338-361.
- United Nations Economic and Social Council. (1997). *Agreed conclusions 1997/2: Mainstreaming the gender perspective into all policies and programmes in the United Nations system*.
- UN Women. (2015). *Progress of the world's women 2015-2016: Transforming economies, realising rights*. New York, NY: UN Women.
- UN Women. (2019). *Progress of the world's women 2019-2020: Families in a changing world*. New York, NY: UN Women.
- UN Women. (2023). *Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: The gender snapshot 2023*. New York, NY: UN Women.
- Verloo, M. (2016). Mainstreaming gender equality in Europe: A critical frame analysis approach. *The Greek Review of Social Research*, 117, 11-34.
- World Bank. (2012). *World development report 2012: Gender equality and development*. Washington, DC: World Bank.