



Women and Political Participation: Toward Attainment of 35% Affirmative Action and Obstacles to the Women Participation in Nigerian Politics and Decision Making Process

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ABSTRACT: Women political participation in Nigeria is an issue of concern to many because of the continuing record of women's underrepresentation in both elective and appointive positions. Although, several efforts have been made by both government and non-governmental organizations to increase the level of women's participation in politics through affirmative action. This paper examined these efforts and the obstacles facing women in political participation. Previous literature shown that, after the reintroduction of democracy from 1999 – 2011, women political participation trend witnessed a drastic change. This was due to the efforts made by government and non-governmental organizations towards attainment of the mandated 35% affirmative actions. However, despite the increasing number of women in both elective and appointive positions from 1999-2011, it has been observed that women are still marginalized considering the disparity in the proportion of men to women in political and decision making positions. The authors found that, some factors, such as socioeconomic, ecological, cultural practice, political violence, illiteracy among women, contradictory nature of government policies has led to the lower level of women's political participation, and these factors consequently become an obstacle to the full realization of 35% affirmative action in the Nigerian political system.

Keywords:- Government and NGOs, participation, Politics, Women, Nigeria.

I. INTRODUCTION

Women political participation in global politics is one of the contemporary issues of discussion in the political arena. Women constitute almost half of the world population, but their participation in decision making and general political processes is relatively low when compared to their male counterpart. Sbaity [1] observed that, low levels of women's representation in elected public offices and gender inequality are a pervasive global phenomenon in politics. Women were underrepresented and discriminated in the global politics. The trend has a very long history as observed by Asma'u [2] that "the women in ancient civilization sprang from Europe, Asia, Africa and the world over were no value and are merely regarded as chattels. The Encyclopedia Britannica describes the legal status of women in the Roman civilization as completely dependent; and if married, her property is passed to her husband" (p. 1). In essence the wife has purchased property so she is akin to a slave [2]. Janova and Sineau [3] assert that, in numerous western democracies, suffrage became universal but excluded women. They further argued that, in the late 1950s all west European women, whether from Latin or Scandinavian countries were in general in the same boat: the narrow door of politics only allowed a tiny minority of women to participate in the decision-making bodies.

The trend remains the same in African and indeed in Nigerian political process. Women participation in politics in Nigeria is an issue of concern to many because of the continuous low record of female representation after elections. As described by Udodinma [4] that, men occupies a large number of political positions while women are constantly left behind despite their significant contribution in the electoral process. Agbalajobi [5] observed that over the years, there has been a series of debates over the participation or desire for women to participate in Nigerian politics. He further argued that, some cultures and norms regard women as

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weak in terms of social struggle which necessitates them to assumed a subordinate position to men in politics and other aspects of life. In Nigeria, low level of women's participation in the country's politics is disturbing and at an alarming rate. This phenomenon affects the politics greatly from attaining a high level of recognition at international level and makes the government to face a lot of critics from its citizens.

II. POSITION OF NIGERIAN WOMEN IN THE COLONIAL PERIOD

The women's participation and general political representation in Nigeria has a very long history of marginalization and domination by men. Perhaps, from antiquity, the history of man has been characterized by discrimination: racial, class, and of course, gender or sex discrimination. When it is racial, the discrimination is against someone or a group of people who is/are of a different race or color. The race being discriminated against is normally regarded as an inferior one. When it has to do with class, the social status the person or group is occupying in the society comes into play. It is between the haves and the have-nots. Finally, if it is gender or sex discrimination, it has to do with the two sexes, that is, male or female discrimination [6]. However, whenever gender discrimination is mentioned, what is normally meant is discrimination against women [7]. In this regard, political leadership in Nigeria is not favorable to women since the colonial government. Even though, colonialism brought many changes in the African traditional political system, especially in the role of women. Whereas the Western society at the time of colonization shielded women from the socioeconomic and political affairs of that society, African women on the other hand were an integral part of all the aspects of their society. Colonization however displaced African women from these roles by handing them to the home front while their male counterparts were empowered through education and leadership positions [8]. Hunter cited in [2] asserts that the contact with Europe adversely affects African women who had always been strong participants in the different sectors of their society.

But since the era of colonialism, women have been placed on the lower rungs of the proverbial ladder by the dominant forces of capitalism and now globalization, which emphasizes the need for power, superiority and compartmentalization of roles and responsibilities with different values attached to them [4].

III. ILLUSTRATION OF POLITICAL POSITIONS HELD BY WOMEN IN NIGERIA FROM 1999-2011

Nigeria returns to civilian regimes on 29th May, 1999 after a very long period of military dictatorships. Although after Nigerian independence on 1st October 1960 prior to 1999, two civilian administrations were witnessed, that is, from 1960 to 1965 and from 1979 to 1983 but the two said periods lasted for only few years each. From 1999 to date is the longest civilian administration in the history of Nigerian democracy with about four successful civilian regimes; and with changes in women political participation trend when compared with that of the colonial period [9]. Luka [10:29] attests that, 1999 is the year marked the beginning of a new democratic journey in the history of Nigerian democracy; women's political participation witnessed sharp improvement over previous period in the appointive positions. He further mentioned that, the trend of women's political participation witnessed an increase of women appointments as ministers, permanent secretaries, advisors and special assistance to the president and vice president. In line with Luka [10] idea, Kolawale, Abubakar, Owonibi, and Adebayo [11] also confirmed that, in recent years, women's political participation witnessed an increase in terms appointments as commissioners across the 36 states of the federation. Ngara and Ayabam [9] observed that, from 1999 to 2011, there is an increase of women in elective positions in to national assemblies (Senate and House of Representatives), state assemblies as well as local government councils. Despite this increase, yet the participation and general representation of women in the political realms in Nigeria remained insignificant when compared to their Men counterpart and by considering the international benchmark of 30-35% [19]. UKaid [12] perceived that, only 9% of those who stood for election in Nigeria's April 2011 National Assembly elections were women. This is below the global average and well behind South Africa and Rwanda. Based on this that, the paper discusses the state of women political participation towards attaining 35% affirmative action to woman participation in Nigeria. Table 1 below illustrates the electoral positions held by Nigerian women from 1999 – 2011.

Table 1: Illustration of the positions held by women from 1999-2011

Office	1999		2003		2007		2011	
	Seat Available	Women	Seat Available	Women	Seat Available	Women	Seat Available	Women
President	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0
Senate	109	3 (2.8%)	109	4 (3.7%)	109	9 (8.3%)	109	7 (6.4%)
House of Representative	360	12 (3.3%)	360	21 (5.8%)	360	25(6.9%)	360	26 (7.2%)

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Governors	36	0	36	0	36	0	36	0
State House of Assembly	990	24 (2.4%)	990	40 (3.9%)	990	57 (5.8%)	990	68 (6.9%)
State House of Assembly (committee Chairperson)	829	18 (2.2%)	881	32 (3.6%)	887	52 (5.9%)	887	—
Local Government Chairperson	710	13 (1.8%)	774	15 (1.9%)	740	27 (3.6%)	740	—
Councilors	6,368	69 (1.1%)	6,368	267 (4.2%)	6,368	235 (3.7%)	6,368	—

Source: Ngara & Ayamba (2013)

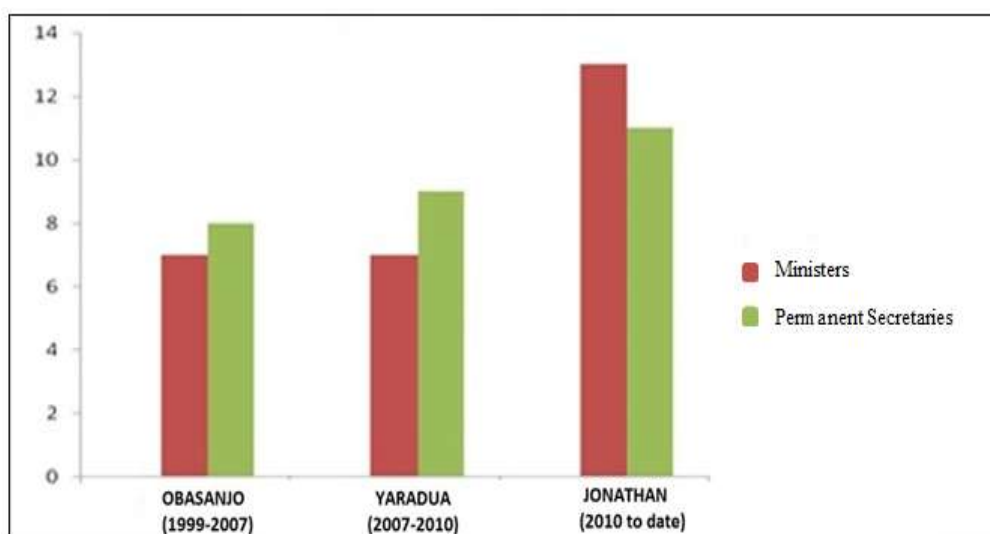


Figure 1: Illustrates Women Ministers and Permanent Secretaries from 1999 – 2010 [9]

IV. ROLE OF GOVERNMENT AND NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS (NGOs) TOWARD ENANCING PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN THE POLITICAL PROCESS

The design principles, policies and actions that aim at ending gender inequality in Nigerian politics have been advanced and undertaken with the influence of government, international organizations and non-governmental organizations. President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan’s fulfillment of his promise to ensure at least 30% women’s participation in his government through affirmative action has been commended globally, but more has to be done, particularly in women contesting and winning elective positions in the various political parties [13]. President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria has recently shown his desire to respect gender targets by appointing 13 women among his 42 member cabinet. For some, this demonstrates a high level of commitment to take the National Gender Policy (NGP) seriously. Olufemi and David [14] argued that this approach to gender parity will need to cascade down through the public services, where women are still underrepresented.

International organizations were among the key actors that agitate for the improvement of women political participation status quo. United Nations conferences such as the Convention for Elimination of all forms of Discriminations against Women (CEDAW) plays an important role in improving women political participation worldwide; to CEDAW, women's participation and equal representation both for sexes in the political process are an integral part of the modern political system. Therefore, it is recommended that all available majors should be taken to improve women political participation.

The Beijing conference in 1995 discussed thoroughly about the discriminatory attitude, practices and unequal power relation that leads to the underrepresentation and marginalization of women in the political process. The conference focus on cultural and institutional bottlenecks to women's political participation, such as socioeconomic status of women, political violence, unwillingness of women to take part in the political process and so on. Base on the above mentioned problems the conference makes it mandatory for all

government to employ means of identifying the institution that are responsible for the marginalization of women in politics and correcting them [15]. The conference demand for gender balance which promote the idea of more women in political decision making process, equal participation and equitable distribution of power and decision making at all levels. This is in line with Wedo's 50-50 campaign, although, the Beijing conference often agitates for 20-30% women representation (FWCW act, 1995 [16])

The platform suggested the affirmative action as a crusade means for tackling the women's underrepresentation and marginalization in the decision making process. The suggestions are as follows; for governmental and public administration positions, governments should use a specific target and measures that will pave way for women to be appointed in government and public administration positions (FWCW 1995; Act 192a [16]). The platform urges governments to employ ways of making the electoral system to be women friendly, thereby making political parties to integrate women in elective positions in the same proportion and at the same level as men (FWCW 1995; Act 192b [16]). At the same time, the platform act suggested that political parties should consider examining the party structure and procedures to remove all forms of barriers that directly or indirectly discriminate women from being part of the party's decision making body (FWCW 1995; Act 193a [16]). The platform act 194 a, f, and g; suggest that, government, national bodies, private sectors, political parties, trade unions employer's organizations, research and academic institutions, regional and sub-regional bodies, non-governmental and international organizations should take part to build a critical mass women leaders, executives and managers in strategic decision making positions and to develop career advancement programs for women at all ages that include career planning, tracking, mentoring coaching, training and retraining. Restructure recruitment and career development programs to ensure that all women, especially young women have equal access to managerial, entrepreneurial, leadership and technical training including on-the-job training (FWCW 1995; Act 194a,f,g [16])

The Federal Republic of Nigeria, as a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), is under obligation to submit periodic reports on progress recorded in the implementation of the convention acts in the country, as stipulated in Article 18 of the Convention [17]. In a first attempt to eliminate the discrimination suffered by women added to widen participation of women in political and decision making process, Section 42 of the Nigerian 1999 constitution guarantees freedom from discrimination. However, there are corresponding customary tenets practice in many states of the Federation, which specifies the gender roles in the customary system. By the constitutional obligations consistent with sections 13-15, 16(1) (b), 17-18 and 42 of the 1999 Nigerian Constitution, the three arms of government, i.e. the Executive, the Legislature and the Judiciary are competent organs for the promotion and protection of women against all forms of discriminatory practices, policies and laws in Nigeria. This effort and commitment made by the federal government of Nigerian to fully take into cognizance the acts of the Beijing conference, which geared toward addressing the underrepresentation and discrimination suffered by women in world politics was fully recommended by the United Nations CEDAW [19]. The Nigerian CEDAW periodic reports of 2003 and 2008 indicate that, there is an achievement in attempting to bridge the gap of gender imbalance in the Nigerian political arena, though, is it insignificant when looking at the positions occupied by men in the decision making process. The periodic reports indicate that, progress has indeed been made in the promotion of women and elimination of discrimination. The report, however, stressed that, in recent time, there is a remarkable increase of political appointments of women at the federal level of government, such as ministers, permanent secretaries, and heads of national institutions and agencies such as NAFDAC, NEMA, Immigration etc. The report pointed that, more women were also elected into political position at the federal, state and local government levels, and another major democratic gain for women is in the area of judicial appointments in which all the 36 states and federal capital territory (FCT) judiciaries in recent time have women as High court judges. Since the Beijing conference in 2003, three more women were being appointed to the court of appeal, but there is a yet no woman in the Supreme Court (CEDAW report 2003, 2006 & 2008) To further increase women's participation in politics and eliminate discrimination in their sphere of life, the federal government of Nigeria established ministry of women's affairs and youth development (FMWAYD), National Action Committee on Women in politics (NACWIP) was also established with the solid aim at developing strategies for effective mobilization and participation of women to register, vote and to be voted for. National Consultative and Coordinating Committee (NCCC) were also established by the federal government to monitor and evaluate the implementation of the Beijing platform action and African plan action. In a similar vein, a number of the registered political parties have also made positive concessions to encourage women's participation in politics. The ruling Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) has introduced a waiver of the mandatory registration/nomination fees for women aspiring to any elective post on the party's platform.

V. OBSTACLES TO WOMEN POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN NIGERIAN

Researches and analysis of political participation around the world discovered that the level of participation of the individual is influenced by some factors such as:

i. Socioeconomic Factor: Verba and Nie [18] argued that, socioeconomic status is a determinant of individual political participation. They further argued that, individuals with high levels of socioeconomic status such as education and incomes are more likely to adopt psychological orientations that motivate their participation in politics. UNIFEM [19] and DAW [17] confirmed that, feminists and scholars have observed that the status of women is high in countries with higher GDP and per capita income. They argue that as the country's GDP and per capita income rises, the socioeconomic and political situation of women improves as a result of better educational attainment, economic contribution and representation. Nigeria is among the thirty most unequal countries in the world with respect to income distribution. The poorest half of the population holds only 10% of national income. Significant rural-urban differences in income distribution impact, particularly on women, because about 54 million out of 80.2 million Nigerian women live and work in rural areas, where they provide 60-79% of the rural labor force. Nigeria is marked by huge geographical disparities. It has been observed that, human development outcomes for women are worse in the North, where poverty levels are often twice as high as other parts of the South (72% in the North-East compared with 26% in the South East and a national average of 54%).

ii. Ecological Factor: Another reason that for low participation in Nigerian politics is the ecological factor. This factor has contributed immensely to the low level of women's participation in Nigeria as perceived by Asma'u [2] that, the Nigerian political scene is not female friendly and above all not very favorable to women. Despite the fact that we have come a long way from the era of the first, second, and third republics when women were used to chant, sing, dance and entertain crowds at rallies, however more needs to be done. The political arena is often perceived as a dirty vocation for crude and uncouth people who bend rules and subvert due process. The media are full of stories of unsavory and manipulative actions of members of the political class who are in essence corrupt. The political process is time consuming with caucus meetings, campaigns, fundraising, primers etc. Nocturnal meetings are a norm rather than an exception. Historically the political scene is associated with women of loose morals who are deemed irresponsible. A great percentage of women are uncomfortable with such issues as hugging, handshakes, being raised shoulder high by youth who are high on drugs, use of foul language. As a result, women hardly will compromise their values for the sake of political participation and contribution to nation building.

iii. Cultural Practice: Culture is another factor militating against the participation of women in Nigerian politics as argued by Dangiwa [17] to him, Hausa women have all along been minors legally and economically, they have been word of men and it is clear they had no political roles. They have no independent thinking powers. A number of cultural practices persist which prevent women from political participation. An institution like child-marriage and purdah are barriers to adult females exercising their basic constitutional rights, biological explanation usually given women low level of participation in politics reinforces the sexual ideology which underpins and emphasizes the social supremacy of men over women. Sara [21] argued that, Nigerian societies use culture to discriminate women. For example, women in Igbo communities are not expected to present kola nut. She further stresses that, party officials don't take a female candidate seriously, female aspirants are associated with negative labeling, the use of abusive language in addition to indignity problem. In addition to this, Sara [21] pointed that, in traditional de-politicization of female personality in childhood and adult socialization through group activities, aggressive political commitment is considered as unfeminine and unhealthy for women; in these cases suffer the threat of stronger sanctions being imposed on them for what may be considered improper in men.

iv. Political violence: Political violence is among the reasons that contributed immensely to the low level of women's participation in Nigerian politics. Political violence has become the feature of democratization in Nigeria. Many political activities were soaked by violence and killings. Political violence seems to be institutionalized in Nigerian political process which make the politics look dirty in the eyes of many Nigerians, and this often discourages people more especially women from participation [22]. Political violence, thuggery and high level of intimidation is one of the factors limiting women from participating in the Nigerian politics as observed by [2].

v. Women's Perception of Politics: Nigerians are awash daily with tales and news of dishonest and disreputable practice of some politicians. Thus, the common perception of politics is that it is a dirty trade that is reserved for people of questionable integrity who have little regard for the rule of law and due process. Therefore, women in politics are seen either as partners in crime or abettors of the vile committed by the political class. In order to avoid the discoloration or blot associated with politicking, some women prefer to stay out or take a back seat [9:53].

vi. Government Policies: Some obstacles to women's participation can be found even in Nigerian policies which often contradict the provision of the constitution itself. For instance, with the provisions of the Nigeria Policy Regulation 124 and 127, and Nigeria tax laws and policies. Taxation of women in the public sector is still based on the preposterous premise that married women have no family responsibilities and are maintained by

men, hence where both worked the men have the tax relief for children and dependents while women do not. The Policy regulation that places restriction on married policewomen officers while in service is discriminatory. For example, women officers cannot marry without the prospective husband undergoing screening. This, however, is not applicable to the male officers. Furthermore, some provisions of the 1999 Nigeria Constitution are discriminatory against women, especially in the areas of language (Section 131), on citizenship (Section 29), and in the construction of section 42 that prohibits discrimination on the ground of sex, this is because the section preserves the equal status for men and women only in relation to law but does not extend the protection to practice neither does the provision protect women from private actors [23].

vii. Illiteracy or Low Level of Education: Illiteracy or low levels of education are one of the major obstacles to women's political participation in Nigeria. UNICEF survey 2004 revealed that, in Nigeria, only 60% of women aged 30-45 years manage to complete their elementary education and only 26% proceeded to the secondary level. Similarly, a survey by the National Planning Commission indicates that 50% of women had no formal education [24:159]. This invariably translates to why comparably few numbers of women qualify for jobs in the formal sector. The limited number of educated women also accounts for why only few women present themselves as candidates for elective positions.

viii. Religious Teachings: Nigerian society is dominated by two major world religions; (Islam and Christianity) and perhaps the religions preaches male supremacy and domination over the affairs of the family, and female subordination and submit to the husband, and it has been established right from creation. This is one of the reasons that limit women from participating in Nigerian politics. Nolte, Danjibo and Oladeji [25] mentioned that, the religious dimension has become more prominent since 1999, when political liberalization allowed a greater degree of freedom of worship; this makes it possible and easier for religion to play a role toward shaping the participation of women in the political process.

Islamic views:

Al-Qur'an [26];

"....Men is the protectors and maintainers of women, because Allah has given the one more (strength) than the other, and because they support them from their means...." (The Holy Qur'an: surah 2 verse 34)

Hadith [27];

".... Enjoying good treatment for women, for they are like prisoners who own nothing for themselves. You may not treat them otherwise, unless they commit a clear obscenity. Verily if they do so, you should forsake their beds and strike them without causing pain, but if they obey you then you may not do so. You have rights over your wives and they have rights over you. Your rights over your wives are they do not give their beds to anyone but you and they do not let anyone you dislike enter your houses. Their rights over you are that you treat them well, clothe them and feed them." (Sunnah At-Tirmidhi 1163)

While from the Christian perspective:

Bible [28];

".... Submitting your selves' one to another in the fear of God. Wives, submit yourselves unto your husbands, as unto the lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the Church: and he is the Savior of the body. Therefore, as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything....." (The holy Bible: Ephesians 5:21-24)

VI. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Women in Nigeria were underrepresented, marginalized and discriminated in the political arena. Although, in recent time, there is an increase in number of women in the decision making process as observe by Ngara [9] that, from 1999 with the reintroduction of democracy, there has been a drastic increase in women's political participation in both elective and appointive capacities. In spite of these increases, women are still highly marginalized considering the disparity in the proportion of men to women in politics and decision making position [9]. Although, this study highlighted some efforts made by both government and Non-governmental organization to address the problem through many design policies and programs yet more efforts is needed in order to address problem of underrepresentation, marginalizing and domination of women in the decision making process. CEDAW report [22] attests that, Women in Nigeria still face barriers that hinder their full participation in various aspects of social life. In the area of politics, the level of women's representation is still low.

To consolidate on the current gains, women's leadership organizations, government and relevant stakeholders should continue to advocate for the revision of legislations to favor the protection of women from abuse, empower them economically, socially and politically, especially through the strengthening of affirmative action and allocation of quotas for women in politics and decision making positions.

Political parties should promote women's participation more effectively, and should develop accountability mechanisms and seek technical assistance from civil society to meet this objective. The Independent National Electoral Commission should conduct a focused drive on female voter registration and run specific voter education campaigns for women during elections. Nigerian civil society organizations should lead and promote gender training and orientation for political parties.

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