# DYNAMICS OF WOMEN POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT IN NIGERIA

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## Abstract

*The task of this paper is to examine the incessant question of women empowerment with relation to politics in Nigeria. The paper observes that gender discourse is globally pervasive, calling to attention the unwarranted discrepancy between men and women in every facet of human life. It places emphasis on the oppression and political exclusion of women at all levels. The feminist movements have for years continued to advocate for gender equality. Yet, not much has been done to address the ostracism of women in the decision-making process. Drawing inference from contemporary Nigeria, the paper argued that if gender discourse will ever be productive, the quest for affirmative action must be practically executed rather than theoretically debated. The paper observes the impact of lopsidedness of governance in modern day Nigeria. It notes that the patriarchal, masculinist nature of political rule in the country has not delivered anything other than the crisis of governance which has engulfed the very fabric of our body politic. It relies on the political economy approach as prime plank for its analysis. The paper submits that the continued marginalization and sometimes political exclusion of women undermines democracy both in terms of content and output.*

**Keywords:** Gender, governance, political economy, women empowerment, social production

## Introduction

Women constitute more than half of the world's population and have no doubt contributed significantly to the well-being of humanity. In Nigeria however, women constitute about 50% of the population and they seem to be at the centre of any developmental activity. Their activities and actions play very -paramount roles in the developmental process of Nigeria. For instance, Nigerian women have always played five key roles- mother, producer, home manager, community organizer, and social, cultural and political activists (UNDP, 2009).

The identification of a child's birth, either as a male or female brings along the discriminatory tendencies of sexism, especially in Nigeria. The male child is referred to as a bouncing baby boy while the female child is only celebrated in a situation where the couple had remained childless for several years or a couple who

have several male children without a female, thus signifying incompleteness. In Nigeria, the male children inherit the father's property at death while the female children get nothing since they are/will belong to another family at the time of marriage. A woman has no name or voice of her own except her husband's. This is only the beginning of sexual discrimination in most African cultures (Ayeni and Ajibogun, 2013), which are patrilineal and patriarchal in nature (Abuya, 2002).

Following the declaration of 1975 as the international year for the women by the United Nations, there has been an increase in the attention drawn to gender issues. This climaxed with the fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, China in 1995, the aim of which is to review and appraise the achievement of the UN Decade for Women, 1975-1995. The increasing attempt to mainstream gender issues, not only into academic discourse but also advocacy and public policy is understandable (Omotola, 2007).

For instance, women represent half of the global population and have contributed immensely to societal development. They function as mothers, community organizers, home managers, producers and social, cultural and political activists. By this, women have been seen as positive agents of social change. Despite this central role of women towards development, given their demographic strength, they are still being treated as weaker sex in political appointment and elections. This concern, many view as constituting one of the many paradoxes of demographic politics in Nigeria. It is a situation in which the demographic majority constitutes both the least politically represented and socially, economically and materially marginalized (Anifowose, 2004; Ojo, 2006).

The struggle to integrate mainstream gender issues into national politics and policies have been the pivot of feminist movement as it is now internationally recognized that the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women, including discrimination from participating in public affairs and addressing exclusion and gender lopsidedness of power structure, is a potent instrument of national development. For decades, feminists have continued to advocate for gender balance especially through affirmative action, whereby both elective and appointive positions are allocated to women automatically.

The wholesale subjugated position of women in Nigeria definitely has an impact on their political lives. Is it possible for women to have equal voice (in terms of political representation, whether as Governor, President or Vice President) as the men in Nigeria? Can women have equal opportunities with men to an extent that she has the same elective or appointive position? This is almost impossible on the ground that the meeting place and time where such decisions are taken always inhibit women's active participation and because of her home care role, she cannot attend such meeting and as a result of which cannot play any active role in the party decision making process. Thus, because she cannot perform any functional key role in party decision making process, the vicious circle of exclusion continues.

The political exclusion and deprivation of women has been a source of concern to feminist movements across the world. The problem is further aggravated especially in Nigeria where culture plays a prominent role in reducing the woman to a

mere home keeper such as purchasing household goods, preparing and serving food and caring for the children. For instance Ganiyu Adams was quoted as saying,

> The campaign for 35% of Nigeria women participation in politics would be inimical for Nigeria and her future. I will be the last person to encourage my wife to go into politics because I realise women are agitating that they should be given more percentage in politics. The culture of the black race does not allow too many women to go into politics. However, the few that go into it should do so with integrity. The more you encourage them to go into politics to seek power, the more reduction in integrity we see in women (Ganiyu, 2010:11).

It is no surprise that Nigeria is ranked 118 out of 192 countries in gender parity. The situation is even more disturbing in northern Nigeria. The region is a very complex social setting reflecting all the social diversities of the country (Hussaini, 2015) where most women are confined to their homes. These women are not allowed to vote nor contest for elective positions.

**Conceptual Clarification**

For the purpose of clarity, it is pertinent that intended users of this work are acquainted with the concepts frequently used in order to remove ambiguity. They include, but not limited to: Gender, Women empowerment, Politics, Governance.

**Gender**

Gender remains a cardinal element in our humanity which cannot be wished away with any form of gusto. Yes, despite the attempt by gays and transsexuals, gender remains a natural gift that cannot be short-changed, even by technology (Ukun, 2002). It is the qualities associated with men and women that are socially and culturally rather than biologically determined. It includes the way in which society differentiates appropriate behaviour and access to power for women and men. Although, the details vary from society and change over time, gender relations tend to include a strong element of inequality between women and men and are strongly influenced by ideology (UNDP, 1998). Thus, gender concerns involve women as well as men, it therefore refers to the roles, socially constructed rather than physically or biologically ascribed to women and men (Omotola, 2007).

**Women Empowerment**

Sandbrook and Halfani (1995) conceptualized women empowerment as a multi-dimensional process involving the transformation of the economical, political, social, psychological and legal circumstances of the powerless with its aim of dismantling the cultural, traditional and social norms, which disvalue, disempower and dispossess women with its central objective tied to the needs of women to opportunities, facilities, skill acquisition and position of authority, especially within

the political sphere. The process must necessarily include the `expansion of women's access to educational opportunities. The Forum of Nigerian Women in Politics (FONWIP), whose central objective is to promote women empowerment and eradication of all forms of violence and discrimination against women, support women in decision making in both public and private sectors. It requested that the Nigerian government should yield to 30% female representation in all appointments and, made several attempts at increasing official awareness on gender issues in public policies (Agbalajobi, 2010).

**Politics**

Politics is primarily and ultimately about human welfare. It is about the improvement of the material condition of life; it is also about the maintenance of the psychological and emotional stability of man; and about his spiritual growth as well (Asobie, 2007). It defines the basic conditions of social life within which we define ourselves (Rodee *et al*, 1983). It denotes all activities that have to do with struggle for state power, the seizure of state power, the use of state power and the consolidation of state power (Nnoli, 2003). Other popular definitions of the subject matter that interest political scientists do not deviate much from this. For instance, David Easton sees politics as authoritative allocation of values. This means that politics involves the use of state power to determine who gets what, when and how in society which conforms with Harold Lasswell's definition of politics as essentially concerned with who gets what, when and how (Asobie, 2007). If politics is all about the improvement of man's welfare, then it is necessary that women are allowed to play major role since they are reputed to be home keepers and care givers.

**Governance**

The concept of governance has gained currency as nations and international institutions seek appropriate mechanisms to enhance the role of government by making it more transparent, accountable, responsive and responsible to constituencies. Often, there is the temptation to use governance and government interchangeably. While government is a collective body of elected and appointed institutions empowered to legislate and adjudicate for the good of the society, Governance is conceptualised as the process and the system by which a government manages the resources of a society to address socio-economic and political changes in the polity. Thus a government is elected or appointed to provide good effective and efficient governance (Oyovbaire, 2007). Our argument here is hinged on the ground that in providing these governance roles, there is the need for women to be incorporated, not just for the purpose of gender balance but due to the fact that most Nigerian women have performed in their chosen careers both in the public and private domain.

**Theoretical Consideration**

This study adopts the Social Production and Reproduction system theoretical perspective. According to Ogban-Iyam (2005), it is an analytical tool, it uses

dialectical materialism and sees society as a complex unit with components characterized by movement and dynamism which are explained in terms of contradiction that pervades social existence. Its major focus is on material conditions of man. The root of this analytical framework dates back to the works of many classical economists such as Adam Smith, John Keynes, David Ricardo, among others. However, the most scientific elaboration and application of political economy must be reserved for the long tradition of Marxist political and economic thought exemplified by the works of Karl Marx (1859), Vladimir Lenin (1916), Friedrich Engels (1843), among others. It is thus seen as the science that studies the economic laws governing the production and distribution of material benefits in human society at various stages of its development.

Once the constraints and material assets of a society are understood, how the society produce goods to meet its material needs, how the goods are distributed and what type of social (gender inclusive) relation arises from the organization of production, we have come a long way to understanding the culture of that society, its laws, its religious system, its political system, even its mode of production. There are general and specific laws governing the development of society that regulate social and natural phenomenon and determine the path transverse by mankind in the process of social change. The dialectics of historical materialism are inherent in the root of these laws. The highpoint of dialectical materialism is the primacy of material conditions, the dynamic character of reality and the inter-relatedness of different elements of society (Ake, 1981).

A brief look at the Nigerian social production and reproduction system would perhaps help us to situate the linkages among politics, gender and governance. A major feature of the oil dominance of Nigeria political economy is the pervasiveness of high state rentier politics. Giving the centrality of oil rents to the economy and societal life in Nigeria, the general orientation to political issues, discourse and phenomenon is pervaded by high state rentier mentality, calculations and maneuvers (Omeje, 2006).

Nigeria as a country is heavily affected by the oil curse, with population more impoverished than ever. The dominance of oil and gas in the Nigerian economy has led to a narrow revenue base that has lent itself to rent seeking and elite capture, and it has developed a ruling elite (excluding women) in control of the resources emanating from oil and gas rent. One important feature of Nigerian politics is that women have always been treated as weaker sex, marginalized and alienated from offices (such as that of the President and Vice President) which are perceived as the exclusive preserve for men.

These deprivations not only manifest in politics, but also in economy and socio-cultural dimensions. Politically, it has been argued that women are not only underrepresented in elective and appointed offices but also almost completely excluded from prime party positions. Economically, women are said to have been discriminated against, particularly in-terms of employment in the economy due to the occupational structure of employed persons, access to land, credit facilities and other financial resources, and as victims of poverty. On the socio-cultural front, women are

known to have suffered more. Gender differences have been identified in the development of human health capital in Nigeria. For instance, men have reportedly fared better than women in-terms of life expectancy at birth, total fertility rate, etc. studies now talk about HIV/AIDS feminization infection in Nigeria.

With respect to education, women are also under-privileged, coming second far behind their male counterpart in-terms of adult literacy level, primary and secondary school enrolment, and record high rate of primary school dropouts (Dauda, 2004; Omotola, 2007; Omeje, 2010; Mathur-Helm, 2005). In reality, a woman is asked to come with her husband in some cases when she needs credit facility for whatever reason. In most private organizations today in Nigeria especially in the banking sector, married women are in most cases not employed, which explains the reason most women remove their wedding rings and deny being married during job interview.

## Nigerian women in governance: An overview

Tracing the events that led to the demand for gender based affirmative action within the context of the Nigerian constitution; Nkoyo (2004) argued that a cursory look at the representation of women in political office in Nigeria reveals a striking marginalization of women from politics and governance throughout the post-colonial period. Under the first republic (1960-1966), only two women, Beatrice Kwango and Wuraola Esan were members of the 36 member Senate, while females were completely absent in the Federal House of Representatives. At the regional level, only three women were elected into the Eastern House of Assembly, while at the Centre, no woman was appointed/elected into the executive branch.

In the second republic (1979-83), four women contested for the senate, but only one won. In the same elections, two women were elected to the House of Representatives and four to the state legislatures. In Northern Nigeria for instance, though women got the franchise in the countdown to the first republic, many were still disfranchised by electoral requirements and irregularities (Ojo, 2006) with, such requirements like wealth, property, taxation, education and others. The truncated third republic (1991-1993) was marked by a generalized women absence. Of the 91 seats in the Senate, women constituency occupied only one. In the House of Representatives, 13 women were elected out of 593. In all state legislatures, women could only garner 27 seats, representing 2.3 percent (Nkoyo, 2004). An era that need not be forgotten is the long years of military governance in the country, 1966-1999, except for the brief civilian period between 1979 and 1983. The post-colonial military class was exclusively male. Consistent with the undemocratic nature of the military institutions, coupled with the pre-existing male domineering culture, women were largely neglected and had virtually no voice under the dictatorial military era. Throughout the military regime, no woman was appointed into the supreme Military Council. Most of the Constitutional Drafting Committees that were constituted by the various military regimes were also 99% masculine (Terwase and Decker, 2010). Ironically, it was the military regime of General Obasanjo (1976-1979) that entrenched northern women's enfranchisement in 1976, while the Babangida regime (1985-1998) introduced the

Better Life for Rural Women. The late Abacha's regime (1993-1998) converted the National Council of Women into the Ministry of Women Affairs, thereby increasing the capacity for the discussions of women related issues (Terwase and Decker, 2010; Oyebade, 2003). These brief explanations reflect women's low participation and under representation in the power structure of the country since independence.

**Political marginalization of women in Nigeria: factors and resistance**

There are several modes of women political marginalization in Nigeria. Among them are the labeling of women politicians as cultural deviants, undermining of moral standing of women, using the distinction between marital and birth indignity as a means of excluding women married in states other than their state of birth, as well as other techniques within political parties, such as zoning, violence, rigging as well as nocturnal meetings and events (Ibrahim and Salihu, 2004). For instance, in the run-off to the 2015 general elections, the wife of Edwin Clarke who hails from Ogun State had a lot of opposition to contest in her birth place on the ground that she is married in another state and so lost the legitimacy to hold any position in Ogun State.

The traditional social structures in Nigeria have been offering limited incentive for amending the existing distribution of power between men and women. The Nigerian society, pre-modern and contemporary, has been significantly dotted with peculiar cultural practices that are potently inimical to women's emancipation, such as early/forced marriage, wife inheritance and widowhood practices (Nmadu, 2000:165-171).

For instance, a girl's immediate usefulness as a care provider for siblings, income contributor, or potential bride may be deemed more valuable than the uncertain return from her education. As a result, girls who may have only started their schooling at the age of ten may be pulled out as soon as they reach puberty two or three years later (UNESCO, 2012). When she is married at that early age, she is confined to her marital home and thus unable to attain any level of education and then because she cannot acquire education, she cannot hold any office whether in the private or public domain.  A woman's inheritance denial limits her access to wealth thereby making it difficult for her to favourably compete financially with the men in Nigeria's moneybag politics. The accusation in some places like Benin and the Igbos where women are always held responsible anytime the husband dies is inimical to her growth due to the stigmatization that follows. In some cases, she is denied lucrative appointment either as a single or a widow. The case of Ms. Ifueko Omoigui that was almost denied Chairman of Federal Inland Revenue in 2007 by the Yar'Adua administration simply because she was single.

Of all the constraints, cultural strangulation and the character of party politics stand out as critical factors. Traditionally in Nigeria, women are considered men's properties, a belief that was reinforced by two important religions; Christianity and Islam, both of which preaches that women should be submissive to their husbands, the family head. This dominant narratives of religion in both colonial and post-colonial Nigerian society, indeed privileges men at the detriment of women, even in educational accessibility. As such, our society remains entrapped in history (Mandani,

1996). Thus, society tends to measure a woman's devotion to God partially in terms of her loyalty and submission to the husband. Within this concept therefore, women are expected to be home keepers and child bearers in all ramifications. It is worthy of note that Nigeria's continued enforcement of Customary and Sharia laws have succeeded in fuelling the relegation of women to the background. Most Customary laws in Nigeria especially those of Igbo, and Edo are gender discriminatory and very illiberal towards women's rights. Similarly, Sharia law, which is accorded the role of customary law (for Muslims) also, discriminates against women in many respects (Karibi-Whyte, 1994).

In Igboland for example, in the event of a man's death, the woman's hair is shaven (this is a shame since the hair is a woman's glory) and made to drink the water used to wash the late husband's forehead as a sign of her innocence while same cannot be said of the husband when the wife dies. This is discriminatory and derogatory. Similarly, Shariah law confines the woman to Pudhah where she is allowed to only take care of her husband, children extended family members and other dependants. In this case, she cannot be educated, and because she is uneducated, she cannot be empowered.

There is also the issue of women against women. In Nigerian politics, there is high level of women opposition to women aspirations. It is on record that most women are envious of fellow women aspiring high politically such that either for reasons of hatred, envy or jealousy, an average Nigeria woman voter would prefer to vote for a man rather that a fellow woman. They suggest that this is true to the nature of women. This study holds strongly that this trait is exclusively peculiar to the women folk alone.

Another dimension of this system of marginalization is the character of party politics. Nigeria politics is bedeviled by violence because of the gruesome nature of party politics which scholars like Ake (2001) and Nnoli (2003) have long equated to warfare. Since independence, party politics in Nigeria has been characterized by thuggery and unmediated/unrestrained violence. The violent spectacle remains unabated after the return of democratic governance in 1999. Electoral and political violence remains a common feature of the electoral process, resulting in high causalities from the politicians, innocent electorates, security agents and even electoral officials. The declaration, en route the 2007 general elections by former President Olusegun Obasanjo, as a do or die affair for himself and his ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP), epitomizes the structural violence inherent in Nigerian politics (Terwase, 2010).

Scandalous monetization of the electoral process is another factor of women marginalization in Nigeria. With each succeeding election, the financial stakes are raised to such a level that only those who have previously tasted state power in the primitive accumulation of capital pattern are able to back their political claims. The violent and monetized political clime has therefore led to the emergence of powerful political patrons (godfathers) who provide the needed machinery and personnel for violence as well as the necessary cash for the prosecution of electoral warfare. These features of Nigerian politics have therefore made it a serious commercial enterprise

requiring huge initial capital. It is only those who have access to state resources that can provide the enormous funds required, hence the godfathers who finance or invest heavily in this enterprise want their candidates to win at all cost in order to make returns. In most cases, only those (usually men) who are ready to win at all cost get party ticket at all cost too (Terwase, 2010). That is, they are willing to go to any length to get what they want, including assassination if need be. It therefore follows that in most cases only a few women who have strong political will and patrons, those who are ready to imbibe the culture of 'if you cannot beat them you join them'; including those with the willingness to throw caution to the wind by sleeping around with godfathers and political gladiators, and make themselves political merchandise, that gets elective office(s).

It is of importance to mention that women have never relaxed in this attempt at reducing them to mere breeding commodities. They have at various times and situations resisted certain subjugational policies in the country, especially in the pre-colonial and colonial era. According to (Adekeye, 2003; Olumese, 1998), Nigerian women have not been passive to their subordination. There is a history of women's resistance to injustice and discrimination in pre-colonial and colonial times. In 1914 and 1947, Egba women protested against colonial tax system, which culminated in the establishment of Abeokuta Women's Union in 1946. between 1925-1928, women in Calabar, Owerri and Aba, called the Dancing Women Movement, resisted cultural imposition, introduction of the Native Authority System and payment of tax by women. In 1953, the Nigerian Women Society was formed while the National Council for Women Societies was inaugurated in Ibadan in 1959.

**The impact of marginalization of women in political governance**

There is an absence of a value network and moral fabric in Nigeria politics and governance. The Nigerian state since independence has faced the crisis of values or morality in politics and governance, issues such as freedom, liberty, democracy, accountability, human rights, rule of law, tolerance, succession, compromise (Oyovbaire, 2007:28). These are critical and fundamental to modern governance and yet have not found a place in the political conscience of the country. Like culture in the lives of the people of a nation, morality and values provide the foundation of institutions, structures and process. It is they that regulate and undergird the performance of political actions and govern the distribution of authority and exercise of power (Nnoli, 2003; Rodee *et al*, 1983). Yet, these are values which women are seen to embody. In fact, the behavioural perspectives on women's disposition to love, care and inherent probity has been popularized and given scientific validation by two studies conducted in 2011 by Sammy et al and Dollar et al. Following the deductions made from the studies, the World Bank evolved a policy statement that supports greater absorption of women into public life as an accountability measure (Ojo, 2006; Terwase, 2010).

It is an undeniable fact that governance crisis in Nigeria is real. It is obvious and clear, even to the deaf and blind as it is to the common and uncommon in the country. The crisis of governance has indeed engulfed every department and

dimension of the Nigerian state (Oyovbaire, 2007). Nigeria as a country is heavily affected by the so-called resource curse; it has a population more impoverished than ever. The dominance of oil and gas in the Nigerian economy has led to a narrow revenue base that has lent itself to rent seeking and elite capture, and it has developed a ruling elite in control of the state apparatus. Rent-seeking mentality driven to a pathological extremity causes the state to largely sacrifice the wellbeing of the populace in policy making and governance in preference for the self-seeking interest of state officials and the hegemonic elites (Omeje, 2006).

The oil resources have given the ruling elite both the incentive for controlling the state apparatus and the means to retain control of the state. The question of good governance is to a large extent a question of the degree to which the institutions of checks and balances can withstand and reduce the patrimonial and rent-seeking pressure of the oil curse. Political power in the republic has become centralized, with the presidency playing a prominent role. The executive alone, to the exclusion of the legislature and even the judiciary, is the government. Personal rule which has become the defining essence of the executive is a fundamental anti-thesis of constitutional and democratic government (Oyovbaire, 2007). In all of this, the Nigerian women have been shut out by the political gladiators of Nigeria's masculinist and patriarchal democracy. The general belief is that no matter the qualification of a woman, she can never be as good as the man in certain jobs, especially those that relates to leadership. More importantly, the continued marginalization and sometimes political exclusion of women remain an indication of the devaluation of our democracy. Not only because it means the exclusion of over 50% of the population, but also because of the numerous anti-democratic techniques (such as late night meetings, allocation of only the position of women leader to women while the men occupies other party positions) used by political parties to effect women's political marginalization. There are currently 24 female world leaders of various countries, both elected and appointed who are contributing immensely to the development of their countries:

**List of current female leaders in the world as at 16th February, 2016**

| S/N | Country | Leader | Length of office till date | Status |
|-----|---------|--------|---------------------------|--------|
| 1 | United Kingdom | Queen Elizabeth 11 | February 6, 1952 | Appointed |
| 2 | Denmark | Queen Margrethe 11 | January 14, 1972 | Appointed |
| 3 | Germany | Chancellor Angela Merkel | November 22, 2005- | Elected |
| 4 | Liberia | President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf | January 16, 2006- | Elected |
| 5 | Bangladesh | Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina Wajed | January 6, 2009- | Elected |
| 6 | Brazil | President Dilma Rousseff | January 1, 2011- | Elected |
| 7 | Kosovo | President Atifete Jahjaga | April 7, 2011- | Elected |

| 8 | Jamaica | Prime Minister Portia Simpson Miller | January 5, 2012- | Elected |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 9 | South Korea | President Part Geun-hye | February 25, 2013- | Elected |
| 10 | Norway | Prime Minister Erna Solberg | October 16, 2013 | Elected |
| 11 | Latvia | Prime Minister laimdota Straujuma | January 22, 2014 | Elected |
| 12 | Central African Republic | President Catherine Samba-Panz | January 23, 2014 | Appointed |
| 13 | Chile | President Michelle Bachelet | March 11, 2014 | Elected |
| 14 | Malta | President Marie-Louise Colei Preca | April 7, 2014 | Elected |
| 15 | Poland | Prime Minister Ewa Kopacz | April 7, 2014 | Elected |
| 16 | Taiwan | Tsai Ing-wen | May 20, 2016– Onward | Elected |
| 17 | **Marshall Islands** | President Hilda Heine | 28.01.2016- | Elected |
| 18 | Finish External Territory | Premier Katrin Sjögren, Åland | 25.11.2015 | Elected |
| 19 | Nepal | President Bidhya Devi Bhandari | 29.10.2015 | Elected |
| 20 | **San Marino** | Lorella Stefanelli | 01.10.2015 | Elected |
| 21 | **Mauritius** | President Ameenah Gurib-Fakim | 05.06.2015 | Elected |
| 22 | **Namibia** | Prime Minister Saara Kuugongelwa-Amadhila | 21.03.2015 | Elected |
| 23 | **The Bahamas** | Governor General *Dame* Marguerite Pindling | 08.072014 | Elected |
| 24 | St. Lucia | Governor General Hon. Dr. Dame C. Pearlette Louisy | 17.07.1997 | Elected |
| 25 | **Republic Srpska (Autonomous Entity Within Bosnia-Herzegovina)** | Prime Minister Željka Cvijanović | 13.03.2013 | Elected |
| 26 | **La Grenade, Granada** | **Governor-General** *Dame* **Cécile** | 07.05.2013 | Elected |

**Source:** http://www.guide2womenleaders.com/Current-Women-Leaders.htm (16/02/2016).

It is worthy of mention that women's participation in politics at local, national and international levels help to promote positive policies and legislations that support women, children and families as well as sustaining democracy. More women in politics and governance therefore mean more tangible changes in policy that would benefit them and by extension, the families. For instance, the role Nigerian women have played and their contribution to the development of the country is an open secret. Women such as Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, former minister of Foreign Affairs; Finance, Economic planning and coordinating Minister for the Economy, and Managing Director of the World Bank; Dora Akunyili (late), Former Director General NAFDAC and information Minister; Ndidi Okereke-Onyuike, former DG Nigeria Stock Exchange; Evelyn Oputu, MD Bank of Industry, etc have contributed immensely to the growth and well being of the country. Nigeria cannot allow such abundant, qualified and skilled resources to be wasted.

The point being made is that a woman can be President, Governor, Senate President, Prime Minister,etc as evident in other democracies without unnecessary political intrigue. For instance, in a special interview in Saturday Sun Newspaper, while responding to a question on who stopped her in the race to become governor of Imo State, Senator Chris Anyanwu said,

> It was the PDP elite, including the women PDP elite who feel a woman shouldn't dare contest for governor. So it's the elite who arrange things such that however you come out, they tie you and shut the door against you. It started with the PDP national chairman handing over the entire delegate list to my younger brother Emeka Ihedioha because he is a big player at the federal level. So it was like going for an election and the people who will elect you are now appointed by your competitor (2015: 41-43).

Accordingly, Omotola (2007) outlined the responses so far adopted to tackle the challenges facing women marginalization in Nigeria as follows:

**Official and Unofficial Responses to Women Marginalization**
With the increasing attention accorded to gender discourse globally, the state and society have seemingly been responding to its challenges. There are many national and international frameworks for women's emancipation from the male dominated politics. Within the Nigerian context, these responses will be discussed under the official (Government) and unofficial (non-government) responses.

**International Responses**
The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) established by the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) in 1946 is an institution for the protection of women. Its functions are to make recommendations and reports for ECOSOC on promoting women's rights in political, economic, civil, social and educational fields.

It may also make recommendations on problems in the field of women's right that require immediate attention. There is also the Convention on the Political Rights of Women, 1954. This instrument recognizes the right of every woman to partake in the government of her country, to vote and be voted for. Convention on Equal Remuneration for Men and Women Workers for work of Equal Value 1953 is another very potent instrument. Another instrument specific to women was the Convention on the Nationality of Married Women, 1957. This was followed by the Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages, 1962. The human rights of women were further guaranteed through the United Nations International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), 1966 and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), 1966.

These instruments emphasize equality of men and women and non-discrimination on the grounds of gender, race or religion. In 1970, the United Nations advised on the creation of a framework (United Nations Development Fund for Women-UNIFEM) that will be at the centre of struggle to advance women's development. United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), 1979. It is noted that the prevailing injustices in global political economy and resource allocation have led to the feminization of poverty with women forming well over 70% of the world's poor. It has also been reported that two-thirds of the world's illiteracies are women (Galey, 1979; Adekeye, 2003; UNODC, 1966).

It is worthy to mention at this juncture that Nigeria is a signatory to all the aforementioned legal documents which she has since ratified. The question remains: what are the realities of these rights proclaimed by these legal documents in Nigeria today? Are these enjoyable rights in practice? The truth is that in spite of the strenuous efforts aimed at protecting human rights generally, women continue to be denied some of these rights (Falana, 2003; IWTC, 1998).

**Government Response (Nigeria)**
The initial attempt at women empowerment is highlighted in the 1979 constitution as well as Section 15 of the 1999 constitution which expressly prohibits discrimination on the grounds of place of origin, sex, religion, status, ethnicity or linguistic association. Although the sex reference here is important, yet not sufficient to guarantee gender equality. In 1995, the Women Bureau, known as Ministry of Women Affairs was created by the governments at both the state and national level. Since 1999, women have been the occupant of the office with the primary responsibility of promoting women related issues. Similarly, the Presidential Technical Committee on the Review of the 1999 constitution had an initial membership of 29 (all men) but was later changed by former President Obasanjo to include three women due to massive public outcry. In the year 2000, the National Policy on Women was approved by Obasanjo. This policy is hinged on the premise that inequalities exist in the society which are against the women, especially the patriarchy and its related practices which constitutes major impediments to the full integration of women into the Nigerian economy.

The persuasiveness of the policy is suggestive of what is contained in the Beijing Platform for Action which recommended 30% elective and appointive position for women. In 2006, the Nigerian government adopted the National Gender Policy, aimed at adopting special measures such as quotas and other mechanisms to achieve minimum critical threshold of women representation in political offices by pursuing 35% affirmative action to bridge gender gaps in political representation both in elective and appointive positions at all levels by 2015. Others include measure such as, Better life for Rural Women, 1987 by Maryam Babangida, Family Support Programme by Maryam Abacha (Omotola, 2007; Ojo, 2006; Shelter Rights Initiative, 2001) and lately, the Women for Change and Development Initiative, launched in 2000, by Dame Patience Jonathan to stop violence against women as well as work to improve the overall lives of Nigerian women in the areas of health care and education. She also called for an increase in job opportunities – particularly in government with central focus on economic development, health, education and self-help for women.

The Nigerian government, civil society groups, religious and traditional leaders and other Nigerians need to work together in abolishing all forms of women slavery such as early/childhood and forceful marriage, women trafficking, limited access to quality education and other cultural and religious practices that seem to derogate women. This should be done in practical term and not theoretical explanation that amounts to nothing.

## Response from Non-Government Organizations

The post-independent efforts by women to redress socio-economic and political disabilities led to the formation of various women organizations. Excluded women from politics now make their voices heard through NGOs. These NGOs according to (Omotola, 2007) have witnessed explosive growth in number, size and outreach. They handle cases such as violence against women, women's rights, and productive health, etc at various levels. They have many of such groups working towards enhancing women's empowerment and gender parity. Some of them include: Young Women Christian Association (YWCA), Catholic Women Organization (CWO),

Federation of Muslim Women Associations of Nigeria (FOMWAN), International Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA), Women in Nigeria (WIN), Forum of Nigeria Women in Polities (FONWIP), Women, Law and Development (WLD), Country Women Association of Nigeria (COWAN), National Council of Women Societies (NCWS), Association of Reproductive and Family Health (ARFH), Women Health Action Research Council (WHARC), National Association of Women Lawyers (NAWL) and a host of others.

NGOs in Nigeria can be classified into four groups: Professional groups, Activist women groups, Research driven groups and Women religious groups. While the activist women groups are concerned with the total emancipation of women and the eradication of any form of class inequality and oppression, for example (WIN), the professional groups such as (NAWL) focus on the struggle to empower women in

their respective professions. Women religious groups (CWO, YWCA, FOMWAN) concern themselves with the eradication of harmful traditional practices against women (Karunwi, 2004).

Whatever their leanings, these NGOs have important roles to play in the advancement of women affairs. Essentially, they are expected to provide veritable platforms for the advancement of gender balance through popular education and empowerment, social mobilization and sensitization, not only of women, but also of the government and general public, on the need to formulate and implement gender-friendly policies (Omotola, 2007).

**Women Marginalization in Nigeria's Fourth Republic: Any Respite Yet?**

Despite these responses, assurance and attendant progress, there is still a wide gulf between theory and reality. The exclusion/deprivation of women from the political domain in Nigeria since the country returned to democratic governance in 1999 has continued despite widespread concerns for political parties and the government to implement global call for Affirmative Action. The return to democracy in 1999 has seen a steady rise in the number of women joining politics and winning political positions, albeit, below expectation. For instance, in 1999 only 1.8% of the main elective positions (Presidents, Governors, Deputy Governors, Senators, Members of the House of Representatives and members of the State Houses of Assembly) were occupied by women. This increased to about 4.3% in 2003, reaching 6% in 2007 (Terwase, 2010).

**Table 2: Women and Political/Decision-Making Political Positions in Nigeria (1999)**

| Position | Seat Available | Male | Female | % of Female |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| President | 1 | 1 | - | 0 |
| Vice President | 1 | 1 | - | 0 |
| Senate | 109 | 106 | 3 | 2.8 |
| House of Representatives | 360 | 348 | 12 | 3.3 |
| Governors | 36 | 36 | - | 0 |
| Deputy Governors | 36 | 35 | 1 | 2.8 |
| Speaker House of Assembly | 36 | 35 | 1 | 2.7 |
| State Legislators | 990 | 978 | 12 | 1.2 |
| Cabinet Ministers | 44 | 35 | 9 | 20.5 |
| Local Government Chairmen | 774 | 765 | 9 | 1.2 |
| Councillors | 8,810 | 8,667 | 143 | 1.6 |

**Source:** United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), 2000.
Out of a total of 11,197 available positions in 1999, women occupied 190 seats, which represents 1.9 percent.

**Table 3: Women in Decision-Making Political Positions (Elected/ Appointed) in Nigeria, 2003**

| Position | Seat Available | Male | Female | % of Female |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| President | 1 | 1 | - | 0 |
| Vice President | 1 | 1 | - | 0 |
| Senate | 109 | 105 | 4 | 3.7 |
| House of Representatives | 360 | 339 | 21 | 5.8 |
| Governors | 36 | 36 | 0 | 0 |
| Deputy Governors | 36 | 34 | 2 | 5.6 |
| Speakers of Houses of Assembly | 36 | 36 | - | 0 |
| Cabinet Ministers | 34 | 28 | 6 | 17.7 |
| State Legislators | 990 | 950 | 40 | 3.9 |
| Local Government Chairmen | 774 | 759 | 15 | 1.9 |
| Councillors | 6,368 | 6,101 | 267 | 4.2 |

**Source:** Udodinma Okoronkwo-Chukwu, 2013: 41.

Of a total of about 8,745 positions (both elective and appointive) in 2003, women occupied 355, representing 4.3 percent which is slightly higher than that of 1999.

**Table 4: Women in Decision-Making Political Positions (Elected/ Appointed) in Nigeria, 2007**

| Position | Seat Available | Male | Female | % of Female |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| President | 1 | 1 | - | 0 |
| Vice President | 1 | 1 | - | 0 |
| Senate | 109 | 100 | 9 | 8.3 |
| Speaker, House of Representatives | 1 | - | 1 | |
| Members, House of Representatives | 360 | 333 | 27 | 7.5 |
| Governors | 36 | 36 | 0 | 0 |
| Deputy Governors | 36 | 30 | 6 | 16.7 |
| Speakers of Houses Assembly | 36 | 35 | 1 | 2.8 |
| Cabinet ministers | 39 | 31 | 8 | 20.5 |
| State legislators | 990 | 936 | 54 | 5.5 |
| Local Government Chairmen | 774 | 747 | 27 | 3.6 |
| Councilors | 6,368 | 6,133 | 235 | 3.7 |

**Source:** United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), 2009; Udodinma Okoronkwo-Chuku, 2013:41.

In 2007, a total of 8,750 positions were available out of which women occupied 368, representing about 6 percent with a slight increase when compared to 1999 and 2003, respectively. Regrettably, the first female Speaker of the House of Representatives, Hon. Olubunmi Folake Etteh inaugurated in June 2007 was ousted in October 2007 (5 months later) owing to house renovation scandal worth 628 million Naira. Thereafter, the male folks took back the seat till date.

**Table 5: Women in Decision-Making Political Position (Elected and Appointed) in Nigeria**

| Position | Seat Available | Male | Female | % of Female |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **President** | **1** | **1** | **-** | 0 |
| Vice President | 1 | 1 | - | 0 |
| Senate | 109 | 102 | 7 | 6.4 |
| Members, House of Representatives | 360 | 333 | 27 | 7.5 |
| Governors | 36 | 36 | 0 | 0 |
| Deputy Governors | 36 | 30 | 6 | 16.7 |
| Speakers, Houses Of Assembly | 36 | 35 | 1 | 2.8 |
| Cabinet Ministers | 39 | 31 | 8 | 20.5 |
| State Legislators | 990 | 922 | 68 | 6.9 |

**Source:** Udodinma Okoronkwo-Chukwu, 2013:41; INEC, 2011.

In 2011, women occupied 117 positions out of available 1608, representing 1.8 percent.

**Table 6: Women in Decision-Making Political Position (Elected and Appointed), 2015 in Nigeria**

| Position | Seat Available | Male | Female | % of Female |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| President | **1** | **1** | **0** | 0 |
| Vice President | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Senate President | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Senate | 109 | 101 | 8 | 7.3 |
| Speaker, House of Representatives | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Members, House of Representatives | 360 | 346 | 14 | 3.9 |
| Governors | 36 | 36 | 0 | 0 |
| Deputy Governors | 36 | 31 | 5 | 13.9 |
| Speakers, Houses of Assembly | 36 | 36 | 0 | 0 |
| Cabinet Ministers | 39 | 33 | 6 | 15.3 |
| State Legislators | 990 | N/A | N/A | N/A |

**Source:** Authors' compilation.

In 2015 however, the situation is a lot different from the previous ones. For instance, four female Deputy Governors of Enugu, Lagos, Ogun and Rivers states were inaugurated on May 29. (Aziken, 2015) observed that only six female ministers made the Buhari list of cabinet members.

The data in the above tables show that women representatives recorded high since the return of civilian governance in 1999 and have continued to marginally increase with each administration except in 2011. Despite this increase, the average increase is still comparatively negligible considering their numerical strength (Terwase, 2010). These figures are far below the West African average of 12% and the globally recommended figure of 30%. It can thus be argued that women are yet to fully penetrate the core circle of power politics in Nigeria. The only woman that ever became governor in Nigeria was Dame Virgy Etiaba of Anambra state, who functioned for only six months following the impeachment of her boss, Governor Peter Obi on November 2, 2006. While it could be argued that women's political exclusion are significant, issues such as how wealth is created and distributed have been ignored.

**Conclusion**

The paper attempts to look at women marginalization in Nigeria and the factors that have inhibited their empowerment. It begins with the political economy theorization with focus on the material conditions for the understanding of politics and gender. The paper argued that though there are official and unofficial responses to the feminist exclusion/limitation from the political life of the society, yet it seems these responses were meant to calm frayed nerves by appointing them to positions which is perceived they are perceived qualified to handle. Hence, the differentiation between theory and practicability. Though there is a marginal improvement in women's political representation, however, the 2015 general election witnessed a slide in the number of women that won election to the National Assembly. For instance, there are eight female Senators, 14 female members of the House of Representatives (Ogala, 2015) as compared to 27 female House of Representatives members in 2007 and 2011 respectively, which calls to questioning the actual role being played by political parties to ensure Affirmative Action. There is still a long way to go as these restraining factors against women's political participation are still there: conformity with culture and tradition, religious beliefs, lack of political astuteness by female politicians, the need to field strong/combatant candidates are usually employed by political parties to step-down the women, seeing politics as a dirty game meant for the men and failure by male voters to vote for female candidates, etc are all strategies employed to further marginalize the women. If the meaning of democracy is anything to go by, then the largest group in terms of demographic representation should be the decisive factor in the allocation appointive and elective offices. It therefore becomes unjust, illegitimate and undemocratic to exclude from the political process, the views and participation of over 50% of the population. In effect therefore, if gender-based Affirmative Action would be worth the while in Nigeria, there is the urgent need to challenge the status quo and societal

structure (such as limiting meetings held at night, allotment of elective and appointive positions to women, relaxation of cultural practices which tend to strangulate women and de-emphasize the stupendous use of money in politics), that fosters these imbalances. There is also the need to reform the electoral system in order to demonetize and demilitarise the polity as this will allow women to participate effectively and take independent decision without recourse to a corrupt group.

However, the reality is that those stated preconditions could only be met when patriarchy is effectively challenged (Makama, 2013). According to Walby (1990) and Igbuzor (2012), patriarchy is located in six relatively autonomous structures, and the level of work here has to be at the social, national and international levels:

**A. Domestic Production**
-Challenging patriarchal division of labour in the home
-Advocating for equitable distribution of housework
-Promoting male responsibility for fatherhood
-Inclusion of domestic work in the computation of GDP

**B. Paid Employment**
-Challenging stereotype in paid employment
-fighting discrimination against women in paid employment
-promoting women entry into male dominated or reserved professions

**C. Culture and Religion**
-Combating cultural practices that oppress women, e.g. widowhood practice, widowhood inheritance, female genital mutilation
-Challenging cultural taboos that subordinate women
Challenging practices that promote sonship preference
-Challenging stereotypes in upbringing of the boy and girl child
-Challenging gender stereotype in the media
-Promoting education of the girl child
-Promoting radical and women sensitive interpretation of religion

**D. Sexuality**
-Empowering women and girls to have control over their sexuality
-Challenging practices that predispose women to infections such as STIs and HIV/AIDS
-Promoting women sexual and reproductive rights

**E. Male violence**
-Combating violence against women
-Interrogating masculinity and feminity and promoting new conceptualization of transformed man and woman

**F. State**
-Challenging the patriarchal arrangement of the state and the violence in the state
-Challenging neo-liberalism and fundamentalism
-Challenging state practices and fuelled violence
-Promoting women's participation in governance
-Promoting women friendly constitution and legal frame works
-Promoting redistribution of national budgets in women's favour
-Supporting affirmative action for women and other marginalised groups.

Finally, we hold that because one's destiny lies in his/her own hands, the Nigerian women must mandatorily organise, mobilise and re-orientate themselves towards supporting the aspirations of their fellow women rather than negating same in support of the men folks for reason of mere envy, financial inducement or emotional satisfaction as a house divided against itself cannot stand.

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