

GENDER AND DEMOCRACY: A SURVEY OF WOMEN AND MEN REPRESENTATION IN NIGERIA'S NATIONAL ASSEMBLY (1999-2009)

BY

Ezeani, Onyebuchi Emmanuel
Department of Political Science
University of Nigeria, Nsukka

Abstract

This article interrogates the issue of gender and political participation in politics in Nigeria with a particular focus on the National Assembly from 1999 to 2009. Adopting Marxist feminism as its theoretical framework of analysis and documentary method of data collection, the article notes as follows: (i) politics in Nigeria has been predominantly a male affair; the number of women in elective positions still falls far below the target of 30% representation of women in elective posts and decision making positions by 2005 set at the Fourth world conference on women held in Beijing in 1995; and (ii) despite the relatively insignificant number of women in politics in Nigeria, available data show a constant increase of about 2.3% of women voted into the National Assembly at every general election since 1999. The article argues that contemporary gender inequality in political participation in Nigeria is determined ultimately by the capitalist mode of production and not by socio-cultural and biological factors as scholars contend. It argues that only a replacement of the existing capitalist mode of production with a socialist oriented one will guarantee greater participation of women in politics.

Keywords: Gender, Democracy, Legislator, Division of labour and feminism

Introduction

Although democracy remains the form of government cherished by most nations of the world today, gender inequality in political participation remains a feature of all democratic nations. In these countries, politics remains male dominated excluding the overwhelming majority of the women who constitute about half of the world population. Indeed, until well into the 20th century, women did not even have the right to vote.

The international community has made a number of concerted efforts to rectify the under-representation of women in politics. For example, the equal participation of women and men in public life is one of the key issues contained in the 1979 United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), of which Nigeria is a signatory. Again, the issue of

inequality between men and women in positions of power and decision-making was one of the key areas identified in the landmark 1995 Beijing Platform for Action. The Beijing Platform enjoined nation states to aspire to achieve the minimum benchmark of 30% women representation in politics by the year 2005. Regrettably, as of July 31, 2008, the proportion of women in parliaments around the world stood at 18.2%, the proportion of women holding cabinet-level office was even lower at 16%.

In Nigeria, despite the significant leadership roles women play in community and informal organisations both before and after independence, their representation in public office remains considerably lower than that of men. One of the spheres of politics in which gender inequality manifests is representation in the parliament, otherwise known as the National Assembly in Nigeria.

Among the factors often stated by scholars as militating against women participation in politics in Nigeria are pre-determined social roles assigned to women and men, male dominance and control, the negative way women are portrayed in the mass media, women's perception of politics as a dirty game, the dual burden of domestic task and professional obligation, lack of funds, et cetera (WARDC, 2003:3). The impact of the existing capitalist mode of production on women participation in politics was ignored by these scholars.

This article explores the issue of women participation in politics in Nigeria with a special focus on the National Assembly from 1999 to 2009. It argues that contemporary gender inequality is determined ultimately by the capitalist mode of production and not by socio-cultural and biological factors.

Conceptualising Gender and Democracy

Gender

There is often a popular misconception that gender is about women only and that it has nothing to do with men. But as the World Health Organisation (2002:4) rightly points out:

Gender is used to describe those characteristics of women and men, which are socially constructed, while sex refers to those which are biologically determined. People are born female or male but learn to be girls and boys who grow into women and men. This learned behaviour makes up gender identity and determines gender roles.

Therefore, gendered differences those that society associates with men and women have no necessary biological component. Rather, socially agreed upon and constructed conduct, and the meanings cultures assign to that conduct, constitute the area of gendered difference (<http://www.answers.com>). In other words, every society emphasises particular roles that each sex should play, although there is wide latitude in acceptable behaviours for each gender (Hesse Biber and Carger 2000:91; Borgatta and Montgomery, 2000:1057). It is important to note that gender relations

“refer to a complex system of personal and social relations of domination and power through which women and men are socially created and maintained and through which they gain access to power and material resources or are allocated status within society” (IFAD, 2000:4).

Democracy

There are diverse opinions about the meaning of democracy that Finer (quoted in Chaturvedi, 2006:82) states “Democracy has come to mean so many different things, some very hostile to each other, that the word needs careful analysis if misunderstanding and idle controversies are to be avoided, and if possible, quite legitimate differences of connotation, and its very varied institutional arrangements are to be revealed”. Democracy is a term derived from two Greek words, 'demos' (the people) and 'cratia' (power), meaning the power of the people. Lincoln (quoted in Chaturvedi, 2006:82), therefore, defined democracy as “the government of the people, by the people, for the people”. This definition of democracy is most suitable for the type of democracy practised in ancient Athens where the supreme power was vested in the 'ekklesia', the assembly of all male citizens, at which each was entitled to participate directly by discussion and voting. In other words, the Greek city-states practiced the direct form of democracy in which the citizens were directly engaged in self-government and self-regulation (see Enemuoh and Anifowose, 1999).

But the socio-economic conditions under which Athenian democracy thrived have long since disappeared. For instance, the small Greek city states have been replaced by large modern nation states as the basis for political identification. As a result, democracy in modern times is conceived as a means of 'conferring authority on those periodically voted into office to represent the people. In other words, the type of democracy practised today in most countries of the world is 'liberal' or 'representative democracy'. Democracy, therefore, denotes “a set of ideals, institutions and processes of governance that allow the broad mass of the people to choose their leaders and that guarantees them a broad range of civic rights” (Enemuoh, 1999:145). Democracy requires the existence of certain basic elements or conditions in order to thrive. These basic elements include political equality (one man one vote), sovereignty of the people (power belongs to the people), respect for fundamental human rights (right to life, right to religion, freedom of association, etc), rule of law, to mention but a few (Ezeani, 2010:58).

The Nexus Between Gender and Democracy

The question concerning the nexus between democracy and gender continues to be asked and, therefore, needs to be answered. Although democracy falls almost exclusively within the domain of politics, in the contemporary society, politics belongs to the public sphere which is male-dominated. Despite the

dominance of men in politics and, by implication, in modern democracy, there is strong link between gender and democracy.

First, if by definition "democracy" allows for diversity of opinion and participation of different groups in formulating any decision or carrying forward any strategy, then it must be inclusive of the opinions and perceptions of women as well as men. This argument is also used to justify the need to bring minorities into decision-making process (WARD, 2003:1). Second, "women's political rights with politics being broadly defined to include everyday concerns are an integral and inseparable part of their human rights; and human rights, in turn, are a fundamental aspect of any democratic framework" (Women possess the same rights as men and, therefore, should participate actively in governance and politics. Finally, and perhaps the single most important rationale for linking democracy and gender is that women constitute half the world population, and half of each and every single national population. Therefore, democracy cannot thrive by excluding women. The involvement of women and men in decision-making processes is a *sine qua non* of any democratic framework. Therefore, "democracy by definition, cannot afford to be gender-blind. It must strive towards equality and representation of women and men in decision-making processes and in the opportunities to achieve both these goals").

This view was re-echoed by Kandawasvika-Nhu-ndu, (2009) as follows "A democracy worth the name must have women's equality with men at its heart. Thus gender equality must be an explicit goal for democracy building processes and institutions".

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework adopted in this article is Marxist Feminism. Marxist Feminism developed a "more sophisticated analysis of the relationship between capitalism, the prevailing sexual division of labour and women's inequality" (Steans and Pettiford, 2005:159). According to the theory, private property, which gives rise to economic inequality, dependence, political confusion and ultimately unhealthy social relations between men and women, is the root of women's oppression in the current social context. Marxist feminism has its origin in Marx and Engels analysis of gender oppression in *The origins of the family, private property and the state*. Here, they contend that women's subordination is not a result of her biological disposition, but from social relations. The family as an institution is a complex system in which men command women's services.

According to Marxist theory, "the individual is heavily influenced by the structure of society, which in all modern societies means a class structure; that is, people's opportunities, wants and interests are seen to be shaped by the mode of production that characterises the society they inhabit" (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/marxist-feminism>). Elaborating on this theory, Steans and Pettiford (2005:159) state:

The gist from the Marxist-Feminist position was that the emergence of capitalism as a social and economic system brought about a clear distinction between the public world of work and the private realm of the home and the family. This led to particular ideas about what constituted 'work' and 'production' and in this process 'women's work', came to be denigrated and undervalued. Marxist analysis showed how the home and the family had come to be viewed as 'private' areas of human life; clearly separate and distinct from the public realm... this idealised view of the family disguised the reality of power relations and inequality that permeated both the public and private realms. The construction of a public/private division effectively served to reduce women and children, to the private property of men. It also rendered invisible the vital role that women's unpaid labour in the home made to the capitalist economy.

In summary, Marxist Feminism sees contemporary gender inequality as determined ultimately by the capitalist mode of production. Gender relation is similar to class relation. In other words, the relationship between a man and a woman is similar to the relations between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. Women's subordination is seen as a form of class oppression, which is maintained (like racism) because it serves the interests of capital and the ruling class.

Marxist Feminism believes that elimination of the capitalist system is the panacea to gender inequality and other forms of oppression. In other words, the liberation of women can only be achieved through socialist revolution which will lead to materially changing the conditions of women for the better.

Marxist Feminism is very useful to explaining and understanding gender inequality in political representation in Nigeria, particularly, as it affects representation in the legislature. The distinction under capitalism between the public world of work and the private realm of the home and the family not only serves to reduce women to the private property of men, it equally supports and legitimises male dominance in politics. Women's special responsibilities are confined to the 'private sphere' of the home and the family which is dominated by men. The public world of work and politics is also dominated by the men. This state of affair is further exacerbated by the prevalent ideas about the 'naturalness' of the sexual division of labour. It is within the context of the public/private division and sexual division of labour under capitalism that we can understand gender inequality in representation in Nigeria's National Assembly. Politics belongs to the public sphere which from the Marxist perspective is male-dominated.

Gender Profile of National Assembly Members (1999-2011)

Politics in Nigeria has been predominantly a male affair; the number of women in active partisan politics has been relatively very low. Presently, in both the National and State Assemblies in Nigeria, there is a glaring gender imbalance. The

number of women in elective positions still falls far below the target of 30% representation of women in elective posts and decision making positions by 2005 set at the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995.

Despite the relatively insignificant number of women in politics in Nigeria, available data show a constant increase of about 2.3% of women voted into the National Assembly at every General election since 1999 (see National Assembly Statistical Information, 2008:37).

Distribution of Legislators by Gender (1999-2003)

Here, an attempt is made to analyse the gender distribution of Senators and Honourable members of the House in the Fourth (1999-2003) Assembly. Table 1.0 presents the numerical and percentage distribution of Senators by gender in the Fourth Assembly. The table shows that out of a total of 109 Senators, 106 or 97.2% were men, while 3 or 2.8% were women. So women were grossly under represented in the Senate than men.

Table 1.0: Numerical and Percentage Distribution of Senators by Gender in the Fourth Assembly, (1999-2003)

Gender	No. of Senators	% Distribution
Male	106	97.2
Female	3	2.8
Total	109	100

Source: National Assembly Statistical Information (2008:37).

Distribution of Legislators by Gender in the Fifth Assembly (2003-2007)

Table 1.1 presents the numerical and percentage distribution of Senators in the Fifth Assembly. As shown in the table, out of a total of 109 Senators, 105 or 96.3% were men while an insignificant number 4 or 3.7% were women.

Table 1.1: Numerical and Percentage Distribution of Senators by Gender in the Fifth Assembly (2003-2007)

Gender	No. of Senators	% Distribution
Male	105	96.3
Female	4	3.7
Total	109	100

Source: National Assembly Statistical Information (2007:5)

Table 1.2 shows the numerical and percentage distribution of Honourable members of the House by gender in the Fifth Assembly. The table reveals that out of a

total of 360 Honourable members of the House, 338 or 93.2% were men while only 22 or 6.1% were women. What is clear from tables 1.1 and 1.2 is that men dominated the Fifth Assembly while the women were in the minority.

Table: 1.2: Numerical and Percentage Distribution of Honourable Members of the House by Gender in the Fifth Republic (2003-2007)

Gender	No. of Hon. Members of the House	% Distribution
Male	338	93.9
Female	22	6.1
Total	360	100

Source: National Assembly Statistical Information (2008:43)

Distribution of Legislators by Gender in the Sixth Assembly (2007-2011)

A detailed analysis of the distribution of legislators by gender in the Sixth assembly reveals the predominance of men over women. Table 1.3, for instance, shows that out of a total of 109 Senators, 100 or 91% are men, while only 9 or 8.26% are women. Similarly, Table 1.4 reveals that out of 360 Honourable members of the House, 330 or 92.50% are men, while 27 or 7.50% are women.

Table 1.3: Numerical and Percentage Distribution of Senators by Gender in the Sixth Assembly (2007-2011)

Gender	No. of Senators	% Distribution
Male	100	91.74
Female	9	8.26
Total	109	100

Source: National Assembly Statistical Information (2008:43).

Table 1.4: Numerical and Percentage Distribution of Honourable members of the House by Gender in the Sixth Assembly (2007-2011).

Gender	No. of Hon Member	% Distribution
Male	330	92.50
Female	27	7.50
Total	360	100

Source: National Assembly Statistical Information (2008:43)

Table 1.5 Comparative Analysis of Numerical and Percentage Distribution of Senators and Hon. Members of the Sixth Assembly (2007-2011) by Political Parties and Gender, 2008

Chamber	Political Party	Gender		Female		Total		
		Male		No	%	No	%	
PDP	Senate	80	17.06	8	1.71	88	18.76	
	House		237	50.53	24	5.12	261	55.65
ANPP	Senate		13	2.77	1	0.21	14	2.90
	House		61	13.01	1	0.21	62	13.21
AC	Senate		5	1.07	-	-	5	1.07
	House		31	6.61	2	0.42	33	7.04
PPA	Senate		1	0.21	-	-	1	0.21
	House		3	0.64	-	-	3	0.64
ACCORD	Senate		-	-	-	-	-	-
	House		-	-	-	-	-	-
LP	Senate		-	-	-	-	-	-
	House		1	0.21	-	-	1	0.21
Total			433	92.28	36	7.72	469	100

Source: National Assembly Statistical Information (2008:40).

A comparative analysis of the distribution of legislative seats in the Sixth assembly by political parties and gender shows a glaring under-representation of women. For example, table 1.5 reveals that out of a total of 469 seats in the National Assembly, women have 36 or 7.72%, while the remaining 433 or 92.28% are men. The table also shows that PDP has the highest number of female legislators amounting to 32 or 6.83%, while ANPP and the AC have 2 or 0.42% each. The sex ratio stands at approximately 1.13 (National statistical information, 2008:41).

Table 1.6 presents a comparative analysis of the distribution of legislators in the two chambers of the National Assembly from 1999-2011. The table shows that the number of women in the Senate increased from 2.8% in 1999 to 4 or 3.7% in 2003 and then to 9 or 8.2% in 2007. It also shows that the number of men in the Senate decreased from 106 or 97.2% in 1999 to 105 or 96.3% in 2003 and then to 1000 or

91.74% in 2007. Table 1.6 further reveals that the number of women in the House of Representatives increased from 12 or 3.3% in 1999 to 22 or 6.1% in 2003 and then to 27 or 7.50% in 2007. In contrast, the number of men in the House decreased from 340 or 96.7% in 1999 to 338 or 93.9% in 2003 and then 330 or 92.50% in 2007. What is obvious from the above analysis is that the marginal increase in the number of female legislators results in a constant decrease in the population of male legislators in every general election. The increase in the number of female legislators has been attributed to the activities of the federal government, non-governmental organisation (NGOs) and civil society organisations in promoting gender equality in Nigeria (National Assembly Statistical Information, 2008:44).

Table 1.6: Comparative Analysis of the Distribution of Senators and Honourable Members from 1999-2011 by Gender

1999-2003		2003-2007		2007-2011					
Chamber	No	Gender		Chamber	No	Gender	Chamber	No	Gender
		M	F			M	F		
Senate	109	106	3	Senate	109	105	4	Senate	109
	%	97.2	2.8			96.3	3.7		
								100	9
								91.74	8.26
House	360	348	12	House	360	338	22	House	360
	%	96.7	3.3			93.9	6.1		
								92.50	7.50
Total	469								469

Source: National Assembly Statistical Information (2008:43).

4.4.5: Comparative Analysis of the Distribution of Legislators in the National Assembly by Gender in Nigeria and other Countries around the World.

Data compiled by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) in 2008 on women in National Parliament Worldwide show that the proportion of legislative seats held by women around the world stood at about 16-17%. The IPU report indicated that Nigeria was ranked 119th out of 188 countries in descending order of the percentage of women legislators in the lower House in National parliament. Based on the data collected by IPU, a comparative analysis is made in this report on Nigeria and ten African and ten developed countries.

Table 1.7 shows the comparative analysis of the distribution of legislators by gender in the National parliament in Nigeria and ten African countries. The table indicates that Rwanda has the highest female representation of 56.30%, and as a result, it ranks first not only in Africa but in the world. Nigeria has the lowest women representation in the lower legislature among the ten African countries.

Table 1.7: Comparative Analysis of the Distribution of Legislators by Gender in Nigeria and Ten selected African Countries.

Rank	Country	Lower Or Single House				Upper House Or Senate Elections Seats Women Men					
		Year of elections	Seats	Women No. %	Men No %		Seats	women No %	men No %		
1	Rwanda	2008	80	45 56.30	35 43.70	2003 65.4	26	9 34.6	17 65.4		
2	Angola	2008	220	85 38.6	135 62.40	-	-	-	-		
3	Mozambique	2009	250	98 39.2	163 65.2	-	-	-	-		
4	South Africa	2009	400	178 44.5	222 65.5	2009	54	16 29.6	38 70.4		
5	Uganda	2006	324	102 31.5	222 69.5	-	-	-	-		
6	Burundi	2010	106	34 31.5	72 68.50	2010	4	19 46.3	22 63.4		
7	Tanzania	2005	323	99 30.70	224 69.30	-	-	-	-		
8	Namibia	2009	67	18 26.90	49 73.10	2004 83.10	26	7 26.9	19 83.1		
9	Lesotho	2007	120	29 24.2	91 75.8	2007 71.00	33	6 18.2	65 91.8		
10	Nigeria	2007	360	28 8.00	333 92.00	2007	109	9 8.3	100 91.7		

(2) National Assembly Statistical Information (2008:43 &46)

Table 1.8: Comparative Analysis of the Distribution of Legislators by Gender in Nigeria and Developed Countries.

Rank	Country	Election	Upper House				Lower House			
			Seats	Women No %	Men No %	Seats	Women No %	Men No %		
1	Rwanda	2003	80	39 48.8	41 51.2	2003	26	9 34.6	17 65.4	
2	Mozambique	2004	250	87 34.8	163 65.2	2004	-	-	-	
3	South Africa	2004	400	13 32.8	289 67.2	2004	54	18 33.3	36 66.7	
4	Uganda	200	322	89 27.6	233 72.4	-	-	-	-	
5	Namibia	2004	78	21 26.9	57 73.1	2004	26	7 26.9	19 73.1	
6	Nigeria	2007	109	9 8	100 92	2007	360	28 8	333 92	

Sources: (1) Inter-parliamentary Union, (2008)

(2) National Assembly Statistical Information (2008:43 &46).

Table 1.8 presents a comparative analysis of the distribution of legislators by gender in Nigeria and ten developed countries. The table shows that Sweden has the highest female representation in the lower or single House followed by Netherlands (39.30%) and Denmark (38:00%). Nigeria has the lowest female representation both in the lower House (28 or 8%) and in the upper House or Senate (9 or 8.2%).

Explaining the Under-Representation of Women in Nigerian Politics

In this part of the article, we shall argue that the colonisation of Nigeria and the subsequent introduction of capitalism in the country is largely responsible for gender inequality in political participation in Nigeria. Existing studies show that pre-colonial Africa appears to have encouraged gender equality in politics than the succeeding colonial and post-colonial periods (Whyte, 1978; Wunim, 1977; Hafkin and Bary, 1976; Rosaldo and Lamphere, 1974; Awe 1992:25-36; O'Barr, 1984:140-154, Ezeani, 1998:96:107 among others). Despite variations in political systems, each system had worked out a way to balance power between the sexes, to give a slight edge to men in that system, but to vary the areas of women's control across systems so that no universal pattern of asymmetry emerges (Whyte, 1978; Quinn, 1877; O' Barr, 1984:142). Therefore, whether the society was matrilineal or patrilineal, women usually:

- had political control over some areas of activity, be it farming, marketing, trading or household and family affairs;
- had political institutions (usually councils) to decide how to run their own affairs or to influence the affairs of men; and
- were not subject to general control by men as much as they were autonomous in their own areas of responsibility (Hafkin and Bay, 1976; Okonjo, 1976; Awe, 1977; Rosaldo and Lamphere, 1974; O' Barr, 1984:142; Awe, 1992:26-29).

It was under this conducive environment that women such as Queen Amina of Zaria; Queen Owari of Ilesa; Princess Inikpi of Igalaland; Moreni of Ife and women organisations such as the *Umuada* in Igboland came to play prominent and active roles in politics (Ezeani, 1998:99). The preceding account does not imply that there was gender equality in political participation during the pre-colonial era but that women enjoyed considerable power probably more than they have had in subsequent periods.

The integration of Nigeria into the world capitalist system through colonialism which started in the nineteenth century had a profound impact on Nigerian women's position in politics. Engels (1884) drew on the works of early anthropologist to show how women's oppression developed in pre-history when communal, matrilineal societies were violently replaced through colonialism with patriarchal societies in which individual wealth and private property were key. Patriarchal, profit-driven societies became dominant by conquest and colonialism though remnants of matrilineal culture survived in many societies throughout the world (Engels 1884). Thus, from a position of early leadership and respect, women became powerless domestic slaves. Engels (1884) describes this as "the world historic defeat of the female sex".

The imposition of Western-based gender role, attitudes and behaviours by the colonial master had a detrimental effect on Nigerian women's political potential. In

general, women were ignored and deprived of their power (1998:100). As O' Barr (1984:144) rightly points out:

All colonial officials shared a belief that the role of women was not of household helpmate to men, and that women were outside the proper realm of politics. The colonial powers did not try to manipulate female leaders; they often did not even know that female leaders existed. Among the Igbo, for example, the British made the male 'Obi' into a salaried official, but bypassed his female counterpart, the 'Omu', thus destroying the 'dual sex' political system.

The basic premise of the colonial capitalist ideology was, therefore, the domestication of women. In other words, women became confined into the domestic sphere and men into the public sphere of paid work and politics. The consequence of the colonial capitalist gender ideology was that economic and social inequality between the sexes increased and women's subordination in marriage, the family and in society in general intensified. The colonial capitalist economy was basically a male economy. One instrument used by the colonial master to perpetuate male dominance in colonial economy and politics was education. Schools were opened to enable men serve as clerks, interpreters, et cetera, for the colonial administration. But that put the men on the ladder for upward mobility as such educational opportunities were denied girls (Ezeani, 1998:100). Indeed, it was not until 1927 that the colonial government established a secondary school for girls - Queens college - though the Anglican and Methodist Churches had established theirs in 1869 and 1879 respectively (Awe, 1992:30; and Ezeani, 1998:100). In the Northern parts of Nigeria, it was only in 1930 that the first schools for girls at any level were established in Kano and Kastina (Awe, 1992:30). It is important to mention here that the main aim of these colonial schools for girls was to make them "good wives, good mothers and good ornaments of society" and not to prepare them for public life.

The neglect and marginalisation of the women by the colonial government did not go unchallenged as some educated women mounted pressure on the British officials to modify their policies not only toward women but to the general administration of the country. As Awe (1992:31):

In Lagos, the educated female elites led by Mrs. Charlotte Obasa formed the Lagos women's league and from 1923 and 1944 campaigned for more employment opportunities for women, vocational training for girls and better working conditions for nurses... In 1944, Lady Oyinka Aboyemi founded the Women's Party and Campaigned for the expansion of opportunities for women....

Regrettably, not much was achieved in terms of greater participation of women in governance during the colonial era. At the local level, for instance, women were virtually excluded from participation in local government administration. Male

control of the machinery of local government was confirmed in ordinance 18 of 1959, which provided for the formation of a Provincial Assembly in each province of eastern Nigeria (Nwabara, 1977:212). In structure or composition of local leadership, no seats were given to women (Amadiume, 1987:147).

The attainment of independence by Nigeria in 1960 did not stop the marginalisation of women in politics as the country inherited the colonial capitalist system. Women are still confined to the private or domestic sphere while men still dominate the public sphere of politics and the economy.

For example, in the First Republic there were only three elected female legislators (one senate, 2 Regional House members); no women in the position of Minister or other similar post. However, by the second Republic (October 1979 to September 1983) the picture had improved slightly. At the Federal level, there were three women ministers: of National Planning (Mrs. Oyegbola); Education (Mrs. Ivase); and International Affairs (Chief Akinrinade)" (Mma, 1995:45). Very few women were elected into the legislative bodies in 1983. Out of the 17 women who contested for the 450 member House of Representatives, only 3 won, whereas of the 5 women who contested for the 95 member senate, only one won. The scornful attitude towards elected women members manifested when the then speaker of the House of Representatives, Hon Edwin. Umezoke declared that women were not fit to head committees.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Increasing the proportion of women in Nigeria's National Assembly is important to ensure that the National Assembly represents the Nigerian electorate in all its diversity, and that it addresses issues of concern to women. Although some progress has been achieved in the last one decade, men still constitute the overwhelming majority in the Nigeria's national assembly.

Measures proposed to address this imbalance in gender representation in the national assembly include short-term or reformist measures and long-term or fundamental measure. The short-term reformist measures include:

(i) Reforming the electoral system by enacting laws that would enhance women representation in the National Assembly: The Beijing Platform for Action 1995 called on nations to "review the differential impact of electoral systems on the political representation of women in elected bodies and consider, where appropriate, the adjustment or reform of these systems". One change that should be introduced into the current electoral system in Nigeria to enhance women representation in the national assembly is the replacement of the current "single member plurality" or "first-past-the-post" system with "proportional representation" (PR). Most of the countries in which women occupy at least 30% of parliamentary seats use a PR system. The most widely used form of the proportional representation system is the *list system*, whereby each party presents a list of candidates and receives seats in proportion to its overall share of the national vote. It is important to mention here that

the success of this proportional representation system depends on the willingness of political parties to ensure that the lists they present are gender balanced.

(ii) Introduction of Quotas: This is a system whereby a specific percentage of legislative seats are allocated to women by the political parties as a way of promoting gender balance in public life. "Quotas do not discriminate but compensate women for actual barriers that prevent them from pursuing a political career". Quotas can be either legislated or voluntary. Legal quotas are mandatory in a country's constitution or electoral law. All political parties must abide by legal quotas, and may be subject to sanctions in case of non compliance. Countries such as Costa Rica, Belgium and Argentina have legislated quotas; voluntary quotas are developed at the discretion of political parties as is the case in South Africa, Mozambique, Sweden, Norway, Australia, Spain, Germany, Netherlands, among others. This article recommends that the current amendment of the electoral law should include the allocation of 35% of elective positions to women by all the political parties. In other words, Nigeria should adopt legal quota.

(iii) Giving Financial Incentives to Political Parties that nominate more women: The role of political parties in promoting and supporting women to contest elections has been repeatedly identified as the most important factor in increasing the representation of women in parliament. To encourage political parties in Nigeria to allocate a sizeable number of elective positions to women, government at all levels should institute a cash reward to political parties that nominate more women to contest elections. This will spur other political parties to follow suit.

(iv) Making Parliament a Woman-Friendly Environment: This calls for a reform of the values, rules, procedures and practices in parliament to ensure that, once elected, women can apply their unique and diverse perspectives. For example, the National Assembly should re-organise its work to become more gender-sensitive. For example, instituting family-friendly hours, ending parliamentary business at a reasonable time; re-organising work schedules to allow for "family days", or spreading the national assembly business over a number of shorter days (IPU, 2005).

Long-term or Fundamental Measure

These short term measures suggested above are palliatives and temporary measures and, therefore, not fundamental solutions to gender inequality in political participation in Nigeria. As we stated earlier in this article, a woman's subordination is not a result of her biological disposition but of social relations. Contemporary gender inequality is determined ultimately by the capitalist mode of production. Therefore, only the elimination of the capitalist profit-driven economy and its replacement with a socialist oriented system will remove the motivation for sexism and other forms of oppression.

References

- Anifowose, R. and Enemouh, F. (1999)(eds.) *Elements of Politics*. Lagos: Malthouse Press Ltd.
- Awe, B. (1992) "Women and Politics in Historical Perspectives" In Ayoade et al (eds) *Women and Politics in Nigeria*, Lagos: Malthouse Press Ltd.
- Borgatla, E.F and Montgomery, R.J.V. (2000) *Encyclopedia of Sociology*, 2nd Ed. Vol. 2 New York: Macmillan.
- Engels, F. (1884); *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*. Moscow: International Publishers.
- Hafkin, N. and Bary, E. (1976) (eds.) *Women in Africa: Studies in Social and Economic Change*. Standford, Calif.
- Hesse Biver, S. and Carger, G.L. (2000) *Working Women in Africa: Split Dreams*, New York: Oxford University Press.
- International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) (2000) *An IFAD Approach to Gender Mainstreaming: The Experience of the Latin America and Caribbean Division*, Italy: U. Quintile, S.P.A.
- Antiparliamentary Union (2005) Ten years in Review: Trends of women in National parliament's world-wide.
- Kandawasvika Nhundu, R. (2009) "The Gender of Democracy Matters" Accessed on 2/07/10 from <http://www.opendemocracy.net/article/idea/thegender-of-democracy-matters>.
- Nwabara, S.N. (1977) *Iboland: A Century of Contact with Britain 1860 -1960* London: Hodder and Stoughton.
- O' Barr, J. (1984) "African Women in Politics", in Hay, M.J. and Stichter, S. (eds) *African Women South of Sahara*, London: Longman Groups.
- Okwuosa, A. (1992) "Sources of Women's Political Power Lessness in Nigeria", In Ayoade et al (eds) *Women and Politics in Nigeria*, Lagos: Malthouse Press Ltd.
- Quinn, N. (1977) "Anthropological Studies of Women's Status" Annual Review of Anthropology, 6.
- Rosaldo, M. and Lamphere L (1974) eds. *Women, Culture and Society*, Stanford, California.
- World Health Organisation (2002) *Integrating Gender Perspectives into the work of WHO Switzerland*.
- United Nations, Platform for Action and Beijing Declaration (1995) New York: United Nations Department of Public Information.
- Women Advocates Research and Documentation Centre (WARDC) (2003) "Gender Audit of the 2003 Election", Lagos: WARDC.
- Marxist Feminism,. Retrieved from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/marxist-feminism.called> on 26/10/2009.