

## **The Myth and Reality of Womens' Political Marginalization In Nigeria**

<sup>1</sup>Mohamed M. Wader, <sup>2</sup>Tanko Yusuf Dahiru , <sup>3</sup>Mukhtar Imam

<sup>1</sup>*Department of Political Science and International Relations, University Of Abuja, Abuja-Nigeria,*

<sup>2,3</sup>*Department Of General Studies, Federal Polythenic Nasarawa And Department Of Political Science And International Relations, Nigerian Turkish Nile University, Abuja-Nigeria*

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**ABSTRACT:** *Women represent 50% of the Nigerian Population, but in spite of this, their level of political participation and representation is very poor, being largely noticed at the level of voting and latent support. Men are found to have dominated the political arena to the point of total exclusion of women, yet all groups (women inclusive) seek to influence dispensation of power. The research therefore sets out to analytically x-ray the issues and challenges surrounding the political marginalization of women in the society. The research implores the use of empirical data to make sound and logical arguments on the plight of women in the political sphere of the polity. Using variables such as religion cum cultural belief system, virility deficiency syndrome, lack of adequate finance, lack of effective means of implementing the affirmative action and so forth, the researchers conclude that women marginalization in the political cum economic domain is in fact a reality and not a myth. It therefore recommends amongst other things that, it is imperative to develop and enhance the capability of women in the political and economic terrain by uplifting them financially and morally, so as to drastically reduce if not totally eradicate arm-twisting or marginalization of women in the society.*

**Keywords:** *Myth, Reality, Women, Political, Marginalization, Nigeria.*

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

The role of women in national development need not be over emphasized. The United Nation's declaration that the full and complete development of any country requires the maximum participation of women in all fields has proven to be a catalyst to the prominence women development has come to acquire in recent times. World governments, international agencies, non-government organization and other key policy makers have all stressed the need for women to adequately participate in the politics, in the economy, government and overall growth of the countries. Even in traditional societies where women are accorded domestic recognition, women had at one time or the other taken time out to engage in activities relevant to the stability and continuous existence of their various communities. Women had also exhibited appreciable managerial and organizational skills in their roles as mothers, homemakers, character molders and sustainers of humanity. Their supportive roles through engagement in pottery, weaving, spinning and other socio-economic activities were indispensable to the existence of their families and societies by extension. Chinsman (2005) summarizes the role of women thus: women constitute the foundation of any society. History testifies to the proves of women like; Nigeria's Queen Amina of Zaria, Emotan of Benin, Indira Ghandi of India, Gold meir of Israel Benazir Bhutto of Pakistan, Margret Thatcher of Britain just to mention a few. These skills and ability have grown astronomically in recent times given the improved educational and employment opportunities. Nigerian politics is predominately politics of men, men dominate the political arena, men formulate the rules of the political game and men define the standard for evaluation. Political life is based on male norms and values and in some cases even male lifestyle. Women are marginal to national and state politics, and more generally, to the public and private life of our nation. Women are not considered as equal partners in the homes to be allowed to make or share decision with their male counterparts in the family. This gender discrimination against women has been extended to public life where women experience marginalization even in the electoral process, according to McClosky (2010), Political participation implies "those voluntary activities by which members of a society share in the selection of rulers and directly or indirectly in the foundation of public policy", Political Parties, in this liberal tradition, reflects a condition which entails the voluntary involvement of the citizens in the choice of their leaders and in the policy formulation and implementation process of their society.

This affords the people a sense of belonging and a say in how they are governed. Therefore, the concept of political participation either in the liberal or Marxian tradition, frowns at any attempt, whether writing or unwritten to exclude any segment of the society on the basis of sex, religion or any other socio-economic variables. Nigerian women have been involved in Nigerian politics mainly as voters, after which they retire to

their kitchen with insignificant number of them appointed or elected in to offices. Notwithstanding, the drive to promote women in decision making position worldwide gathered momentum during the 1980's and early 1990's through a series of international conference. The climax of it all was at the Fourth women's conference held in Beijin, china in 1995 which called for at least 30 percent representations by women in national governments. In September 2000, world leaders again at the UN Millennium summit in New York adopted the goal of gender equity. As a result of this development the number of women in leadership position has been on the rise. Corroborating this, the then UN-Secretary General, Kofi Annan stressed that when women participate in development and in the political sector, the benefit are immediate: families are healthier, better fed and better off financially. And what is true of families is also true of communities and in the long run, the entire country. The international organizations have picked up this challenge in the struggle for liberation of women. The Nigerian government and non-governmental organizations (NGO's) have been involved in this struggle. They have been involved in organizing conventions, seminars and several paper presentation and summits. Some of the conventions include; Wollstonecraft M. (1985), the women's right convention at Worcester (1980) with; Paulina W.D of Rhode Island as the vice president, Hannah M.D. and Joseph C.H of Pennsylvania and New York respectively as the secretary. The convention had its aims to consider rights duties and relations of women and secondly to know the right of the governor to the governed and the right of the governed to choose their governor.

### **Women in Electoral Politics in Nigeria: 1960 -2011**

The role of Nigerian women in the post-independence politics has not been reflected sufficiently, in terms of appointment in policy-making posts. In spite of massive support given to various political parties by women, women organizations, market women movement among others, until recently, very few women benefited from political patronage. This is because more often than not, men constitute larger percentage of the party membership and this tends to affect women when it comes to selecting candidates for elections since men are usually the majority in the political party hierarchy, they tend to dominate the political hierarchy and are therefore at advantage in influencing the party's internal politics (see leadership, 2010:24). In southern Nigeria, women were already franchised by 1960, thus in 1960, Mrs. Wuraola Esan from western Nigeria became the first female members of the Federal Parliament in 1961, Chief (Mrs) Margent Ekpo contested election in Aba Urban North constituency under the National Council of Nigerian Citizen (NCNC) platform and won. Becoming a member of the Eastern Nigerian house of Assembly until 1960; Mrs. Janet, N. Mokelu and Miss. Ekpo A. Young also contested elections, won and became members of Eastern Houses of Assembly. In Northern Nigeria, however, women were still denied franchise even after independence. As a result, prominent female politicians like Hajiya Gambo Sawaba in the North could not vote and be voted for. It was only in 1979 that women in northern Nigeria were given franchise, following return to civilian rule. During the second republic (1979-1983), there was further progress, A few Nigerian women won election in to the House of Representative at the National level, some of those women are: (Mrs.) J.C. Eze of the Nigerian People's Pary (NPP) who represents Uzo Uwani Constituency in former Anambra state, Mrs. V.O. Nnaji also of NPP who represented Isu and Mrs. Abiolu Babatope of Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) who represent Mushin central 11 of Lagos state. But on the whole, very few women won election into the house of Assembly during the second republic. During the same period only two women were appointed Federal ministers. They were chief (Mrs) Janet Akinrinade, who was minister for internal affairs and Mrs. Adenike Egun Oyagbola, minister for National planning. Mrs. Francisca Yetunde Emmanuel was the only female permanent secretary (first in the Federal Ministry of establishment and later Federal ministry of Health. A number of women were appointed commissioners in the state. In 1983 Mrs. Franca Afegbua became the only woman to be elected in to the senate. Also, very few women contested and won elections in to the local Government Councils during this time, with return of military rule in December 1983, the first formal quota system was introduced by the Federal Government as regard the appointment of women in to government.

The Buhari administration directed that at least, one female must be appointed a member of the Executive council in every state. All the state complied with this directive; some states even had two to three female members. In the early 1990's two were appointed deputy governors. These were Alhaja Latifa, Okunu of Lagos state and Mrs Pamela Sadauki of Kaduna state; Chief (Mrs) D.B.A Kuifori Jiolubi served as a Chairperson of a bank, the United Bank for Africa Plc. Later on, Dr. Simi Johnson and Eniola Fadayomi served as Chairpersons of Afribank International Nigerian and Allied Bank Nigeria Plc., respectively. There was also no female member of the defunct supreme military council or the later Armed forces Ruling council. In the 1990 elections into local governments heralding the Third Republic, very few women emerged as councilors and only one woman Chief (Mrs) Titilayo Ajanaku, emerged as chairperson of a local government council in the southwest. During the gubernatorial elections, no female governor emerged in any of the states. Only two female deputy governors emerged namely; Alhaja Sinatu Ojikutu of Lagos state and Mrs. Cecilia Ekpevong of Cross-river state. In the senatorial election held in 1992. Mrs Kofo Bucknor Akerele was the only woman who won a seat in

the Senate. Very few women won elections in to the House of Representatives. One of these few was Chief (Mrs) Florence Ita-Giwa who won in the Calabar constituency under the banner of the National Republic convention (NRC). Amongst the members of transitional Council appointed by president Babangida in January 1993, only two were women, namely; Mrs. Emily, Aik Imlokuede and Mrs. Laraba Dagash. In the Interim National Government (ING) of Chief Ernest Chonekan, two Female Ministers were appointed in to the cabinet. General Abacha had a number of female ministers at various time in his cabinet; Including Chief (Mrs) Onikepo Akarde and Ambassador Judith Atta. During the military Regime of General Abdussalami Abubakar (June 9, 1998, - May 29, 1999) there were two women in federal executive council Chief (Mrs) Onikepo Akande (minister for commerce and Dr. Labara Gambo Abdullahi (of women Affairs). In the Fourth Republic which started on May 29, 1999, the Nigerian political terrain witnessed an increase in the number of women political appointees, even though women did not perform well at the elections. In the election held before May 29, 1999, few women emerged as chairpersons of local government councils. A number of women won elections as councilors. There was no female governor in any state of the federation. Only Lagos state produced a deputy governor in the person of Senator Bucknor Akerele.

In the National Assembly, there were only three women in the senate, namely; Chief (Mrs) Florence Ita Giwa representing cross river state South Senatorial District, Mrs. Stella Omu from Delta State and Hajiya Khairate Abdul-Razaq now Hajiya Gwadabe representing the Federal Capital Territory. Only 12 women made it to the House of Representative and these are Barister Iquo Minimah, Mrs. Patience Ogodo Lola Abiola Edewor, Patricia O. Etteh, Dorcas Odujinrin, J.F. Adeyemi, Binta Garba Koji, Gbanmi Saraki, Florence Aya, Linda Ikpeazu, Femi Harrinnan and Mercy Almona Isei. In the state House of Assembly, very few women emerged as members. While in some states, one or two women emerged in the Houses, most other states had virtually no female in their legislature. States like Cross Rivers, Akwaibom, Lagos and many others did not have female members in their state legislature. Women have been appointed as commissioners and therefore members of the Executive Council in all the State have one female, others have two females in the Executive councils. President Olusegun Obasanjo appointed a number of women in to the Federal Executive Council when he served as president, they are Dr. (Mrs) Kema Chikwe, (Minister of Transport), Mrs. Dupe Adelaja (minister of state for Defence), Dr. (Mrs) Amina Ndalolo (Minister of Technology), Mrs. Aishatu Ismail (minister of women Affairs), Chief (Mrs) Titilayo Ajanaku was the special Adviser to the President on women Affairs. During the 2011 general elections an increased number of Nigerian women defied the odds, stepped into the murky waters of politics, aspired and contested elections won the parties primaries and contested for elective positions in the various political parties in the 2011 general election in Nigerian. Female candidates constituted 9.1% of the total number of candidates who contested elective positions in to the National Assembly in the 2011 general elections across all the political parties. There were 3306 candidate with men accounting for 3004 (90.9%) and women 302 (9.1%) (Irabor, 2011) Despite the many Female aspirants, only few emerged as candidates and fewer of them emerged as winners at the polls. Unfortunately, the number and percentage of women who were successful at the polls in 2011 was less than the figure in 2007. Whereas, 2007 figure was higher than the figure in the 2003 general elections; and the figure in 2003 is higher than the figure in the 1999 general elections. In 1999, the overall percentage of women was 2%, in 2003, it was 4% and in 2007 it was 6% (Eme, et. At 2008). Although the number of female candidates increased for most of the elective positions, there was only 1 female presidential candidate in the person of Mrs. Ebiti Ndok of the United National Party for Development. It is doubtful if she eventually voted given issues she had with the administration of justice system. It should be noted that Sarah Jubril (NCAA, 2011) was a presidential aspirant under the platform of the people's Democratic Party (PDP). She lost at the Party's primaries. There were 4 female vice-presidential candidates, namely; Rose Yakubu of the African Renaissance Party (ARP), Kadijat B. Abubakar of the Better Nigeria Progressive Party (BNPP), Binutu Fela Akinola of Fresh Democratic Party (FRESH) and Bilkisu Ismo Magogo of the National Transformation Party (NTP) (sun Editorial 2011). Whereas, there are 36 governorship seats less than 36 states were due for governorship elections at the April 26, 2011 governorship elections. This was due to the fact that some governors did not commence their term on May, 29 2007 as they had to wait for a court order to declare them winners of the 2007 governorship election (Eme, 2008). The court's decision was pronounced some years after other governors took their oath of office. Consequently, their 4 year tenure started running on the day they took their oath of office which was not May 29, 2007. Amongst these states were Edo, Ekiti, Osun and Anambra States (Eme, 2008). Governor Peter Obi's Second term as governor of Anambra state started running in 2010 because he took the oath of office as governor in 2006, in respect of the governorship election he contested in 2003. Only after the court of Appeal declared him winner of the election in 2006, he won a second term in the 2010 governorship elections for Anambra state. Consequently, the independent National electoral commission (INEC) (EME, 2008) did not conduct elections in such states. There were 348 governorship candidates contesting election for governorship seats across the federation. 13 (3.7%) out of the 348 governorship candidates were women and they contested in 10 states namely; Benue, Delta, Ebonyi, Enugu, Imo, Kano, Kebbi, Kwara, Oyo and Plateau. Their names are parties were "Emilia Uba, Omaliko African Democratic

congress (ADC); Victoria Azaber Pausu, All Progress Grand Congress (APGA); Dame Gloria Obi, African Democratic Congress (ADC); Princess Esther Nwodo-Agbo, People Redemption Party (PRP); Nkechi Offor, African Liberation Party (ALP); Scolastica Emerole Action Party of Nigeria (APN); Okoronkwo Precious, Better Nigeria Progressive Party (BNPP); Hauwa Muhammed, African Democratic Congress (ADC); Gbemisola Saraki Fowora, Mega Peoples Progressive Party (MPPP); Paulen Tallen, (Labour Party) "(Ibor, 2011). None of these women were successful at the election which means that to date Nigeria is yet to produce a female executive governor of a state except for the brief period that Dame Virginia Etiaba held forth for governor Peter Obi of Anambra State when he had some political challenges that led to Dame Virginia Etiaba being sworn in as governor. Dame Virginia Etiaba was the deputy governor to Governor Peter Obi. It appears some parties agreed to adopt Female deputy governorship candidate. Consequently, there was generally an increase in the number of male governorship candidates that had women as their deputies. At least, Four parties in Lagos state had an elected Female deputy governors in the person of Mrs. Kofowurola Akerele-Bucknor although she was removed and replaced by Femi Pedro, as a result of party intrigues probably informed/influenced by patriarchy. In 2003 the number of deputy governors increased to 2 (5.5%), in 2007, it is increased to 6 (6.6%). The 2011 general elections produced only a female deputy governor in the person of Mrs. Adejoke Orellope Adefulere of Lagos state who contested under the platform of Action of Nigeria (CAN). The PUNCH. (2011). some of the female candidates contested against heavy weights. A case in point is Plateau state where Paulen Tallen (Labour Party) contested against political heavy weight Joshua Dariye who was governor from 1999 -2003 (Eme, Efal, 2008), Ibrahim Mantu who was once Deputy Senate President Fidelis Tapgun and the incumbent governor Jonah Jang. Senator Gbemisola Saraki-Fowora (ACPN) who contested for the governor seat in Kwara state had ethical and religious issues to contend with in addition to contesting against the PDP's candidates which also pitched here against her brother who is the incumbent governor of the state also of the PDP. Quite a number of women won their parties Primary ticket for the National Assembly and the various states House of Assembly. In Lagos state all the female candidates from ACN won at the polls in the election in to the National Assembly and the states House of Assembly, women contested for only 7 (17.5%) seats of the 40 seats at the Lagos state House of Assembly. Adamawa state which had 23 women vying for political offices managed to produce only three female winners; they include Hajiya Aishatu, Mrs. Wale FWG and Mrs. Wilbina Jackson. Out of the 109 senators who emerged winners at the 2011 polls, only 7 (6.4%) were women. The successful candidates are Nkechi J. Nwaogu, Mrs. Helen U. Esaen. Nenadi Usman, Aisha Jummai all of PDP. Others include Christiana N.O. Anyanwu (Ibor, 2011), Joy Emordi both of APGA and lastly Chief (Mrs) Oluremi Tinubu of ACN. The notable causalities included Senator Iyabo Obasanjo – Bello, Senator Daisy Danjuma and Kema Chikwe. The decrease in the percentage of female candidates that won at the polls is disturbing given the increased in the number of women who contested and the figure dropped significantly when compared to the performance of women in previous elections. In the 2007 general elections, 9 (8.25%) female candidates won the senatorial seats. They are Gbemisola Saraki – Fowora (Kwara State), Christiana Anyanwu (Imo State), Zainab Kure (Niger State), Grace Bent (Adamawa State), Joy Emodi (Anambra State), Eme Ufot Ekaete (Akwa Ibom state), Patricia Akwashiki (Nasarawa state), Joy Emodi (Anambra State), Eme Ufot Ekaete (Akwa Obom State), Patricia Akwashiki (Nasarawa State), Iyabo Obasanjo –Bello (Ogun State), Nkechi Justina Nwaogu (Abia State). In the 2003 elections, there were 4 (3.6%) female senators. Whilst in the 1999 general elections there were only 3 (2.75%) female senators namely chief (Mrs) Florence Ita Giwa who won on the platform of ANPP representing Cross River State south Senatorial District; Mrs. Stella Omu who won on the platform of PDP from Delta state and Hajiya Kharat Abdul-Razaq (now Hajiya Gwadabe) who also won on the platform of PDP representing the Federal Capital Territory. The drop in the number of successful female contestants is worrisome. Senator Grace Bent, an indigene of Ilesha, Osun State, South West Nigeria but married to an indigene of Adamawa State and elected into the Senate in 2007 under the platform of PDP, could not pick the parties ticket at the parties' primaries in 2011. First timers like Prof. Dora Akunyili could not sail to the senate as she lost to Dr. Chris Ngige whilst Ms Jumoke Akinjide also lost in Oyo state. Whereas another first timer Chief (Mrs) Oluremi Tinubu won the Lagos Central Senatorial Seat under the platform of Action Congress of Nigeria a (ACN). Chief (Mrs) Oluremie Tinubu is the wife one of the chieftain of ACN, Asiwaju Bola Ahmed Tinubu. It is believed that any candidate in Lagos State contesting under the platform of ACN should consider the election a walkover because Lagos is a profound traditional stronghold of ACN. Out of the 360 available seats women won only 19 (5.27%). This is an abysmal drop in the light of the success recorded in 2007, 2003 and 1999 where the figures were respectively 27(7.5%), 21(5.8%) and 12 (3.3%). The table below captures the position of women in electoral positions from 2000-2011.

**Table 1: Comparison of Women Representation in 1999, 2003, And 2011 General Elections**

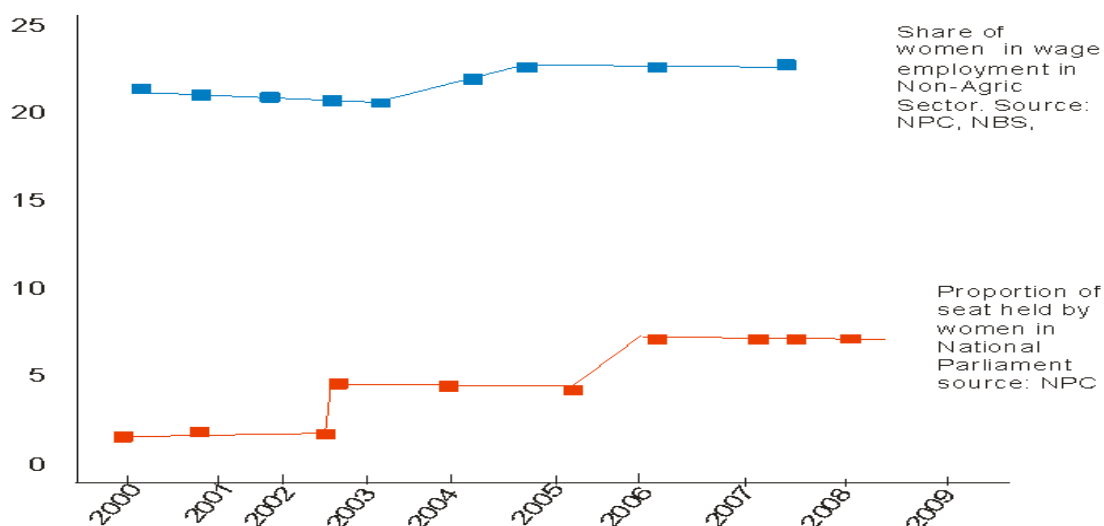
S/N	Position	No of seats available	No of women elected and % of total in 1999	No of women elected and % of total in 2003	No of women elected and % of total in 2007	No of women elected and % of total in 2011
1	Presidency	1	-0%	-0%	-0%	-0%
2	Senate	109	2(2.75%)	4 (3.7%)	8 (7.33%)	7 (6.4%)
3	House of Rep	360	12(3.33%)	21 (5.83%)	23 (6.38%)	26 (7.2%)
4	Governorship	36	-0%	-0%	-0%	-0%
5	Deputy Governorship	36	-0%	-2(5.55%)	-6(16.6%)	1 (90.09%)
6	State of House of Assembly	990	12(1.21%)	38 (3.84%)	54 (5.45%)	68(6.9%)

Source: Centre for Democratic Studies (CDS) 2010

From the foregoing, it is evident that only very few Nigerian women have participated and emerged in Nigeria's political landscape, in spite of the pioneering efforts of women like Funmilayo Ransome Kuti and Margaret Ekpo. Till date the number of women in top jobs is still insignificant as at the 2011 election.

**The Political Marginalization of Women in the Nigerian Political System**

Twelve's years of democracy in Africa's most populous nation and women are still secondary in Nigeria's male dominated political sphere. Over the years gradual gains have been made in women's political participation but female political participation needs to go beyond numbers. The proportion of seats held by women in the national parliament increased from 3.1 percent in 2000 to 7.5 percent in 2008. After the 10<sup>th</sup> May 2007 General election, data from the (National Center for women development; 2010) showed that there were 9 female senators compared to 4 in 2003, also there were 26 female members in the house of Representatives, compared to 23 in 2003. Between 2006 and 2009, 2 women were appointed to the Supreme Court bench, while female Deputy Governors increased from 2 in 2003 to 6 in 2007.



Source: National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) 2010

Despite these improvements, women are still under-represented at most levels of government and have made little progress in attaining positions at decision-making levels. Data from April 2007 elections shows that high level of female marginalization in Nigeria politics. For examples, of the 7160 candidates that contested in April 2007 elections, only 628 were women; 25 candidates vied for the office of the President and only 1 woman, while 5 women contested for the office of the vice president, also, only 9 of the 109 senators were women, while 25 of the 360 House of Representative members were women and there were only 54 female member of the state Assemblies. In 2011 General Election 0% of women were elected into the office of the president, in the senate out of 109 Senators only 7 (representing 6.4%) of women were elected into the senate. In the House of Representatives out of 360, only 26 of them were women (representing 7.2%) of the total. In Governorship seat no woman was elected as a governor, while only 1 deputy governor was elected representing (0.09%) while in the state House of Assemblies out of 990, only 68 (representing 6.9%) were women. (National Center for women development; 2010) Looking at 2011 presidential election, Sarah Jubril was the only female amongst the

three presidential candidates for the 2011 People's Democratic Party (PDP) presidential election primary. The other two were President Goodluck Jonathan and Former Vice President Atiku Abubakar. While her single vote cast reaffirms the patriarchal nature of the Nigerian political system, what was even more interesting was the discourse surrounding the only female presidential candidate. One in particular stood out, with the writer asking 'just why Sarah Jubril bothers? Nigeria is a male-dominated, chauvinistic country stifled by culture, tradition and social ranking that make the Indian caste system look feeble. There is simply no place in Nigeria today for a woman to head a country of 170 million including men who often see women as second-class citizens or simple objects of desire. Today, Nigeria is a man's country. Live with it! For all her determination and forthrightness; Sarah Jubril has the audacity to hope that the major political parties, all headed by men, and would willfully sign up to the prospects of a female president. Nigerian women continue to oppose their continued marginalization in the political sphere. Rabi Musa, coordinator of the women's Right Advancement and protection Alternative (WRAPA) told IPS News Agency that "although it has been a decade of uninterrupted civilian rule, Nigerian women are still battling political marginalization where they are not given the chance to hold political offices". In the same vein, female politician Maryam Jari told IPS that while "we women constitute the majority of voters during elections we are hardly given a level playing ground to actualize our dreams of active involvement in the politics of our country through elective offices". In a bid to implement the 35% affirmative Action provided for in Nigeria's national gender policy, gender activist and civil society organization, such as the National Coalition on Affirmative action; have organized programmes of advocacy, training and research on affirmative action to encourage female political participation. Social, economic, cultural and religious factors are largely responsible for women's marginalization in politics, particularly in the Muslim dominated part of the country where politics is seen as men's exclusive preserve. Women such as Liberian president Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and Ngozi Okonjo Iweala, Former Managing Director of the World Bank and a current Nigerian minister, are usually cited as evidence of African women in political positions and signs of gender equality, but they are a minority in a male dominated sphere. In some African countries, quota systems are being used to ensure women's political appointments and institutional integration. The classical example is Rwanda, which had 48.8 percent of seats in its lower house of parliament held by women in 2003. Women in the Rwandan upper house are also guaranteed 30 percent of the seats. In Nigeria, shortly after Goodluck Jonathan became president in May 2011, the first lady Dame Patience Jonathan Launched women's participation in the political sphere, amongst other things. It isn't without its critics, but to emphasize its need to mainstream Nigeria's political sphere, Goodluck posted this statement on his face book wall:

'I promised women 35 percent slot in my cabinet and I fulfilled that now, because it is my desire to ensure a level playing field in Nigeria by heading an administration where ethnicity, gender and religion do not hinder qualified persons from fulfilling their potential. It is also the reason I ordered the admission of women to the Nigerian Defence Academy (NDA) a first in Nigeria. Women should brace up to be all they want to be in life as this administration will be an enabler of your progresses. Although headlines like Jonathan and his many women, while this increased in female political (or leadership) positions should be applauded, gender equality in terms of female political representation is beyond numbers. Equality in numbers does not automatically translate in to better policies for female citizens. The emphasis on quantity of women ought to be shifted to the quality of women's participation in politics. Focusing on increasing female political participation is important, but so are women's effectiveness in political positions and their impact on decisions making. Simply having female in the appropriate positions is not enough, as once in these positions women face a variety of obstacle when promoting women's interest. On the surface, equal political representation in numbers indicate a sense of gender equality, but women in Nigeria, as in the rest of sub-Saharan Africa, still face many struggles in this male-dominated sphere, such as discrimination, both in voting for candidates and in allocating political offices, lack of adequate finance to effectively participate, and views that stigmatize female politicians are loose. Ahead of the 2015 General Elections the Democratic Governance for Development (DGD) Project of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has tasked the Federal Government to step-up initiative that would enhance women, Youth and persons with disabilities participation in the electoral processes. Senior Gender Expert of the UNDP/DGD Anne Ikpeme made the appeal while speaking on "Understanding Gender / persons with disability (PWD) perspectives to political participation" at a two-days capacity Development for officials of the Federal Ministry of Youth Development on Electoral issues and Election Programme implementation. She said that despite the better imperatives and opportunities, Nigeria is lagging behind countries like Uganda, South Africa and Tanzania among others in degree of participation of women and PWD in elections and governance. "The Marginalization of Nigerian woman in politics and decision making is as old as the Nigerian Society. It actually predates the advent of colonialism in Southern and Northern Nigeria. Marginalization of women is reinforced by patriarchy, poverty, illiteracy, religious and cultural norms. The long years of military, rules in Nigeria further worsened the position of women in political participation yet; the development of any country requires the participation of both men and women. "Women make up 48.79 percent of Nigerian's total population. The constitutional history of Nigeria shows that this exclusion dates back to the colonial times when women were

not allowed to vote in 1954 and preparatory in to independence, the constitution introduced universal adult suffrage except for Northern women, while men started voting in Nigeria in 1922, women in all parts of the country started voting in 1979, a difference of 57 years. Thus in the first republic although there were prominent female politicians in the northern part of the country like late Hajiya Gambo Sawaba but they could not vote and could not be voted for", she said. Ikpeme said that despite the sensitization programmes of NGOs and development partners, the percentage of women occupying elective and appointive positions has not been encouraging, even section 15 (20) of the 19 constitution prohibits discrimination on the grounds of sex, ethnicity or religion. She said that in Uganda, affirmative action was introduced in favour of marginalized people, particularly women and that the new Ugandan constitution entrenched the rights and dignity of women, and guaranteed equality and social justice and development which increased presence of women in the parliament to 24.5 percent. While saying that South Africa has embedded a National Framework for women's empowerment and gender equality in every facet of the society leading to achievement of 33 percent women representation at the parliament, she added that Tanzania emphasize on the girl child as a key way to promoting gender equality and women empowerment and had amended the constitution to include affirmative action providing for up to 30 percent representation of women in parliament, with 50% representation by 2010. Other factors responsible include; low participation in politics, inadequate knowledge of written and un-written rules protecting women's political rights and religious Doctrine. Some religious doctrines militate against the active participation of women in politics and position of authority. As millet puts it; "Patriarchy has God on its side" furthermore, it is held that the origin of gender discrimination began from their sins. Islamic Doctrines strictly bar women from some political Endeavour – public speaking especially the married women etc. that can facilitate their political ambitions in recent times, however, there have been a number of movement to the commitment, both to the personal and social change of women in their status in public life. Through series of women enlightenment, emancipation and conscious rising of groups on women movement, women subordination in politics have been reduced to an extent. Women through several of these platforms have played influential roles and this has further spurred more women into politics.

#### **Myths and Realities of Political Marginalization of women**

There is no doubt that the traditional African Society assigned women a nurturing role. Due to its paternalistic orientation, social, religious, political and cultural activities revolve around the male adults to the detriment of the African women. The woman in Africa, in the real sense of it was seen as Part of the man's property. This maintains similarity in orientation in various tradition including religious believe and practice which makes woman an appendage to the man's total picture of authority and influence. The nurturing role assigned to women because of its accompanying demands (for example, upbringing of children, creating conducive home environment, etc.), inflicts a lot of strains and pains on them. These strains and pains have since succeeded in stunning their political aspirations or large scale economic pursuit compared to their male counterparts who are not bogged down by domestic considerations. This unfettered freedom accorded the men gives them ample opportunity for the pursuit of matters of religion, social, economic and political activities with vigor to the detriment of their female counterparts. That aside, there are other major obstacles and challenges to women's meaningful participation in politics in Nigeria. These challenges and obstacles:

- **Issues of Leadership:**  
The woman is usually caught in between two opposing interests depending on the issues at hand or the convenience of the agitators. A woman is usually and often accepted as coming from or as an indigene of her husband's state of origin depending on the issue at stake. In most cases, a woman is declared non-indigene in her husband's state whenever political office holding is at stake.
- **High Registration Fees of Political office:**  
This is usually disadvantageous to the women in Nigeria.
- **Money Politics:**  
This, like the high registration fees militates against women in Nigeria considering their economic backwardness and marginalization etc. And other points are security, election rigging, low-level of political consciousness, inter and intra-party conflict, financial budgetary constraints/stringency undemocratic political parties and finally male dominated party executive. These put the women in a subordinate positions compared to men. There is no doubt that the foregoing constitutes major obstacles to women's political relevance in Nigeria.

#### **The Myth Surrounding Marginalization of Women in Nigerian Politics**

The tendency to see or accept women's participation in politics as a myth is not only wrong but ill-conceived. This is particularly so, looking at the conceptual meaning of the term "Myth" and, it's not – applicability to the true – life situation of women's political marginalization in Nigeria and the world over. A myth means anything that is opposed to reality. It connotes fictitiousness that has unscientific account. It is an unscientific theory or

belief and, an imaginary thinking spoken of as though existing. From the foregoing, it is not only out of place but totally untenable to conceptualize or refer to women participation in politics as a myth. In fact, the only thing that is mythical about women's role in politics is the non-realization or non-acceptance by men and even women, that women are their equal partners in politics and, that they (that is, the women) are as relevant (if not more relevant) as men to political participation or practical politics, despites the man-made or created inhibitors. Obstacles and challenges already examined above. Without doubt, it is our unequivocal contention in this research paper that women's role or participation in politics is a reality today and not a myth. In fact, it has long been so across the world. In the United State, as Barber Kellerman (1986), noted "American women won, after generations of efforts, the right to vote". By this they reversed the practice which for a long time made in right to vote the preserve of the men. There are instances of women's bold political moves and actions that have actually demythologized the myth about women's role in politics and, their relevance in the political process. The Fumilayo Ransom Kuti, Margret Ekpo Crusades, Queen Amina Zazzau, Madam Tinubu activism, Nwaobiala Movement of 1925, Aba women riot of 1929 are examples of women's Bold Political moves in the face of stiff male opposition and systemic oppression. Other women movements and personalities that have struggled for women's relevance in Nigeria during pre-colonial and post-colonial periods includes Lagos market women movement between 1927 and 1947, Mrs. Oyinkan Abayomi, Mrs. Ekpo Young, Mrs. Wuraola Esan, Mrs. Janet Mokelu, Mrs Henrietta Lawson, Mrs. Keziah Fashina and Mrs. Mary Ededem among others. Currently in the continent of Africa, a woman president, the first of its kind, in the continent, has emerged in Liberia in person of President Helen Sirleaf – Johnson. In Philippines, a woman, Mrs Margret Arroyo is the current President. Not only this, women had been presidents and prime ministers in Indonesia, Britain, India to mention only a few.

### **The Realities of Political Marginalization on Women**

It is reality that Nigerian women have been marginalized in political participation despite the essential social and economic roles they have played over the years. African women especially those from Nigeria Capitalism and Globalization started seeking to influence the dispensation of power online with their articulated interests, needs and issues as fundamental motives for political participation in order to create and ensure sustainable democratic governance in Nigeria. Since the inception of the current democratic dispensation in Nigeria from 1999, conceited efforts have been made by women's groups, women advocates and activist, civil society organizations, Nigerian government and international agencies and donor community to increase women's participations in both political and public life, however statistics reveal a very low and disproportionate representation of women in governance. This situation falls way with the recommended 30% of the Beijing Platform of Action and 35% recommendation of National Policy on women adopted in July 2000. Although the adoption of democratic rule in 1999 in Nigeria provided opportunity for women's participation in politics, the reality is that the position of women in governance Sixteen years later has only slightly improved. This very low representation of women in governance can be argued as responsible for the slow pace of democratization process in Nigeria.

**Table 2: Women in the Nigerian National Assembly (1980-1992) Figure from 1980**

Gender	Women	Men	% of women	% of men
Senate	1	56	1.8	98.2
House of Representative	3	442	0.7	99.3

**Source: National Center for women development; 2010**

In 1980 only 1 woman was elected to the Senate, while 56 men made it to the same Senate, in the same year 3 women were elected to the house.

**Table 3: Figure from 1992**

Gender	Women	Men	% of women	% of men
Senate	1	90	1.0	99
House of Representative	14	575	2.4	97.6

**Source: National Center for women development; 2010**

In 1992 the story was not different, 1 woman to the Senate while 90 men went to the same Senate. 14 women and 575 men were elected to the House of Representatives.

**Table 4: Women in the National Assembly (1999-2007)**

Senate	Total Number of seats	Men	Women	% of men	% of women
1999	109	106	3	97.2	2.8
2003	109	105	4	96.3	3.7
2007	109	100	9	91.7	8.3

**Source: National Center for women development; 2010**

**Table 5: Women in the National Assembly (1999-2007)**



House of Representatives	Total Number of seats	Men	Women	% of men	% of women
1999	360	347	13	96.4%	3.6%
2003	339	318	21	94%	6%
2000	358	333	25	93%	70%

Source: National Center for women development; 2010

The situation of women at states and local levels are not different; Women in the state House of Assembly (1999-2007).

Table 6: Women in the States Houses of Assembly

House of Assembly	Total Number of seats	Women	Men	% of women	% of men
1999	978	12	966	97.2	2.8
2003	951	39	912	96.3	3.7
2007	990	54	9	91.7	8.3

Table 7: 2003 Figure

Chairperson of Local Govt.	Total no of seats	Women	Men	% of women
Chairmen	774	8	765	1.2
Councilors	8810	143	8667	1.6

Source: National Center for women development; 2010

The April 2011 elections in Nigeria led to election of 32 women to the National Assembly, a shortfall from 2007 performance which does not reflect the considerable resources put in by women groups, CSOs, and donor agencies in addressing the barriers to women's participation as candidates in elections. The position of women's participation in the executive arm of government is alarming, no woman president and no woman governor from 1980 to 2011. The best women have enjoyed so far is four deputy governors in 2011 April elections. Although there is a slight enjoyment for equal participation in civil and political liberties that democracy avails them. The marginalization of different kinds women have suffered in Nigeria over time has undoubtedly deterred them from taking a big shot in the public/political realm. In fact the situation of women in Nigeria is precarious and this cannot be divorced from various practices which have limited them from realizing their potentials.

### Sidelining Women in Electoral Process and Party Politics

In spite of the guarantee of equality in convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against women and other treaties which Nigeria is a signatory, there are glaring inequalities at all level of decision making. The limited participation of women in the political sphere which is glaring since post-independence in Nigeria is due to a number of factors such as; the socio-cultural determinants, this established women's domain in the private sphere. In the words of Oby Nwanko: Women were discouraged from seeking political offices by discriminatory attitudes and practices, family and child care responsibilities, and the high cost of seeking and holding public office, socialization and negative stereotype, reinforcing the tendency for political decision making to remain the domain of men (Nwanko, 2009:60). Oluchi Ikemefuna adds: Women in Nigeria face a lot of odds when they contest with men. The parties often want those who can match violence than women (Leadership Sunday Editorial, 2010:4).

Thus, the gender specific unevenness of electoral politics manifests itself in the following forms:

- ✓ The persisting Social resistance and / or lukewarm acceptance of women's participation in political leadership. This is in spite of the spectacular performance of the few women who held sway as heads of ministries and parastatals in the dispensation.
- ✓ Culture of electoral violence that tends to be harsher towards female than male candidates:
- ✓ Feminization of poverty that renders women more financially constrained to manage a campaign than men.
- ✓ Lack of Adequate political socialization for leadership that manifests itself in women's exclusion from access to strategic political information and general inability in the art of public oratory and populist campaign and;
- ✓ Women marginalization in mainstream political party hierarchy and hence inability to shape rules of engagement (especially) at the nomination stage, which are defined and organized around male norms and values (Nzomo 2003; Nwankwo 2009: 63).

### Factors Responsible for Women's' Political and Economic Marginalization

**a. Religion/Cultural Belief System:**

Most societies in Nigeria, just like many other African States prohibit women from taking part in active politics and economic activities based on religious beliefs. Politics in this part of the world is seen as a dirty game and sacrilegious and so, has the capacity of defiling any spiritual individual who is conscious of eternity, considering that there is life after death. There are however very many uncanny things that go with politics in underdeveloped societies such as vote buying, ballot box stuffing, arson, assassination of political opponents, violence and the like. Therefore, engaging in this kind of misdemeanors by adherent of true worshipers of God is a bad process. It therefore becomes a critical element in scaring away persons or group from politics

**b. Virility Deficiency Syndrome:**

Politics generally is a game of wit and the strong appears to take it all in the political gaining that follows, it therefore follows that man by nature are stronger and virile enough to play the game of politics. As earlier painted out in this study, women are physically weak and hence, have no ego to complete favorably with men in the turbulent activities. Agbalajobi (2010) opined that winning public election in Nigeria is a matter of force or "do-or die" affairs. Therefore, those who possess physical stamina and strength to use brutal force are men. Hence, women would have to give way for the men to take whatever is available by force.

**c. Lack of Finance:**

The dominant philosophy in Nigerian politics is money. The "money" factor plays very vital role in the conception, mobilization and winning of political office either at presidential, Governorship Senatorial local council elections and even age grade meetings. Money is very critical in the shaping, making and unmaking of public office which is supposed to be on trust thus, the higher ones financial capacity, the higher one's chances of winning public office. Tor and Terkula (2011) opined that the system of corruption that has infiltrated the Nigerian system has practically put women on edge and everything seems to be working against them (women) in favour of men, women generally appear to have little or no financial backing and hence, aspiring for public offices to enrich themselves is very rare. However, men who are virtually blank have taken little sympathy for the suffering mosses, in the event that they are in charge of public coffers, steal massively to build their political empire in the future. This Scenario is evident in many cases of corruption scandals witnessed in Nigeria among top bureau crafts and politician in recent times

**d. Lack of Effective means of Implementation of Affirmative Action:** According to Agbalajobi (2010) affirmative action is usually a measure intended to supplement non-discrimination. It is a broad term encompassing a host of policies that seek to support weak groups in society, especially women. They include policies where deliberate action is used to stop discrimination. Thus, a policy process of this kind, according to him allows for rules that have the objectives of enhancing equal opportunity for the individuals and the improvements in the situation of marginalized groups. Accordingly, argues Agbalajobi (210) the United Nations General Assembly in 1979 adopted the convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women (CEDAW). The convention has been aptly described as the singular article of gender empowerment and women's international Bill of Rights. Thus, the convention has seen been a reference point in the demand for the equality of women. The convention largely reflects the depth of neglect of the fundamental rights of women arising from biological differences by calling for equal rights for women notwithstanding their social status in virtually all aspects of life. The convention provides clearly that: Adoption by state parties of temporary special measures aimed at accelerating defacto equality between men and women shall not be considered discrimination as defined in the present convention, but shall in no way entail as a consequence the maintenance of unequal or separate standards; these measures shall be discontinued when the objectives of equality of opportunity and treatment have been achieved (Article IV, CEDAW). It is however instructed to not that the framing of the specification of the Affirmative Action is not the problem in the elimination of gender bias. It is however the critical question of lack of implementation. And this appears to be a mosaic affecting virtually all nation states of the world in terms of the place of women in both elective and appointive offices. The experiences and evidence from the previous public election in Nigeria, specifically, those of 2003, and 2007 generally elections are worthy of illustration. The table below depicts the aforementioned.

**Table 8: Showing Women Representative in 2003 And 2007 General Election in Nigeria**

S/No	Position	No. of available seats	No. of women elected and % total in 2003	No. of women elected and % total in 2007
1.	President	1	0	0
2.	Senate	109	3 (2.27)	9 (8.25)
3.	House of Rep.	360	21 (5.83)	25 (6.98)
4.	Governorship	36	0	0
5.	State House of Assembly	990	38 (3.84)	54 (5.45)

Source: Centre for Democratic Studies (CDS) 2010

### **The 1999 Constitution and the Place of Women in Nigerian Politics:**

The right to democratic governance is an entitlement conferred on the entire citizen by law. The Nigerian 1999 constitution (as amended) spells-out this privilege very clearly in section 40 v12:

Every person shall be entitled to assemble freely and associate with other persons, and in particular, he may form or belong to any political party, trade union or any other association for the protection of his interest: provided that the provisions of this section shall not derogate from the powers conferred by this constitution on the independent National Electoral Commission with respect to political parties to which that commission does not accord recognition. Similarly, section 42 (1) of the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended) stated inter-alia that: A citizen of Nigeria of a particular community, ethnic group, place of origin, sex, religion or political opinion shall not, by reason only that he is such a person by subjected to any form of discrimination. The above excerpt show that any man or women can proceed to court to seek redress if his or her right to franchise is being violated and that the constitution in its entirety prohibits discriminations of any kind of basis of sex or otherwise. Furthermore, section 77 of the constitution states that:

1. Subject to the provision of this constitution, every senatorial district or Federal Constituency established in accordance with provisions of this part of this chapter shall return a member who shall be directly elected to the senate or the House of Representatives in such manner as may be prescribed by an act of the National Assembly.
2. Every citizen in Nigeria, who has attained the age of eighteen years residing in Nigeria at the time of the registration of voters for the purpose of election to the legislative house, shall be entitled to be registered as a voter for that election.

The foregoing analysis shows that the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, which of course is the reference point for social co-existence amongst groups and persons has not by any means discriminated against any one, man or woman in the socio-political scheme of things. It is therefore unjust for men to want to dominate the Nigerian political scene and hence, push women to the corner. Available statistics however show that since the inception of democratic governance in 1999. Women have been scantily represented in public offices either as president (which of course is an impossible fact to try by the female folk), or senate and members of the House of Representatives and state house of Assembly. Agbalajobi (2010:78) once again corroborated this shortfall in the representation of women in Nigerian politics when he argued that: Following two decades of military rule, statistics revealed that women only secured 3% representation in contested positions in 1999, 4% in 2003, while in 2007 they made only 6%. This survey shows a poor representation and marginalization of women in 1999, 2003, and 2007 election. In 2003 in states like; Adamawa, Cross river, Ebonyi, Jigawa, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Nasarawa, Oyo, Sokoto, Yobe and Zamfara, no woman was elected member of the house of Assembly, they are very few. The very many reasons presented by scholars of Nigerian politics as being responsible for low level of participation and marginalization of women in Nigerian politics forms the theoretical and ideological basis for analysis of a society that is largely unfair to a section of the same society even when the constitution is very clear on matters of gender equality. This is one issue that has raised critical questions of morality and rationality in the affairs of societies around the world, whether developed or developing. It therefore, calls for serous debates as to how the calamity of misrepresentation of women in politics can be readjusted and amended to put women on the same scale with men as partners in progress considering the critical role of women in global socio-economic and political affairs.

### **Factors Leading to the Rise of Women Participation in Nigeria Political Cum Economic Activities**

#### **i. Women Empowerment Programs:**

Sand Brook and Halfari defined women empowerment as a multi-dimensional process involving the transformation of the economic, political, social, psychological and legal circumstances of the powerless with its aim of dismantling the cultural, traditional and social norms, which disvalue, disempowered and dispossess women with its central objectives tied to the needs of women to

opportunities, facilities, skill acquisition and position of authority, especially within the political sphere this recent development accord women the opportunity to develop their individual talent and contribute more meaningfully to societal development, helping subvert cultural as well as the societal norms which have been of disadvantage to the women folk. Forum of Nigerian women in politics (FONWP) is an example, whose central objective is to promote women employment and eradication of all forms of violence and discrimination against women. It supports women in decision making in both public and private. The group organizes seminars on empowerment and inequality among other things. It is influential in its agenda, it requested that government should yield to 30% female representation in government appointment, made several attempts to increase official awareness on gender issues in public policies and conduct of workshops for women who aspire to run for public office.

**ii. Action of UN and other International Organizations:**

The principles, policies and actions towards ending gender inequality in Nigerian Politics have been advanced and undertaken with the influence of international organizations by both government and non-governmental organization. On its part, the United Nations (UN) has fostered several Declaration and conventions aimed at ending all forms of political marginalization among women.

**Strategies for Enhancing the Status of Women in Electoral Politics in Nigeria**

The challenges female politicians encounter on their way to political participation could not daunt, but they are encouraged as citizen not to be dissuaded and to insist that they have a voice. As generally practiced across the globe, patriarchy gives ascendance to him in politics, authority and decision making in and outside the home. It is significant to note that these male-centered structures should be softened to ensure equal access to politics and decision making. There is a need for mass mobilization campaigns about the need to break traditional attitudes and stereotypes of women's role and in equity with men in order to ensure egalitarian principles to promote early socialization. Few women in top political and administrative positions need to exhibit role modeling and mentoring to encourage upcoming women in politics and administrative positions. These few women should use their positions in the organizational hierarchy to promote legislation, policies that will enhance access of other women to politics and decision making positions. Also there is a need for affirmative action across a broad front to remove the continuing obstacles to the career progress of women as well as reduce a historic imbalance in politics, decision-making, economy, recruitment, staff development and promotion. Furthermore, international and national non-governmental organizations and funding agencies across the globe should exhibit more interest in promoting collaborative research on various dimensions of women's citizenship to attain genuine equality between men and women to the policy process. Also Nigerian governments should commit themselves to establishing the goal of genders balance in political parties, governmental bodies and committees, as well as in public administrative agencies with a view to achieving equal representation of women and men in politics and decisions-making. The Nigerian constitution and Electoral Act should be arranged to incorporate affirmative action principles by inserting a new subsection that will provide for at least thirty (30%) percent affirmative action for women which will address the imbalance and injustices against women.

**Conclusion**

Nigerian women, like their counterparts, around the world face a lot of political and economic marginalization that limits their opportunities to develop their full potential politically and economically on the basis of equality with men. They are far from enjoying equal rights in the labour market, due mainly to their domestic burden, low level of educational attainment, poverty, and biases against women's employment in certain branches of the economy or types of work and discriminatory salary practice. In some establishment women are not allowed to get married or pregnant because it is thought that it will reduce their productivity and of course profit. Some women particularly the young ones are only employed as long as they are ready to use their bodies to woo customers for their business organization "Corporate Prostitution". This is the extent to which Nigerian women are marginalized in our society. Politically, various parts of the Nigerian constitution guarantees the right of women to active politics, however, the last decade has witnessed a relative increase in women's political participation. This is only when we measure increase in participation with certain standard like the number of women who vote in elections; the number of key public offices held by women in our society; the number of women related policies implemented by government etc. there is always a pronounced level of underrepresentation of women in politics when compared with their male counterparts (Nkechi, 1996). The 1999 Nigerian constitution by virtue of section 40 states that; Every person shall be entitled to assemble freely and associate with other persons, and in particular he or she may form or belong to any political party, trade union or any other association for the protection of his or her interests: provided that the provisions of this section shall not derogate from the power conferred by this constitution on the independent National electoral

commission with respect to political parties to which that commission does not accord recognition. Yet when it comes to actual practice, there is extensive discrimination. Few and almost insignificant number of women were elected into various posts in the 1999, 2003, 2007 and 2011 general election held in Nigeria. Men dominate most public offices till date. Economically, the economic sector of our society is one area where marginalization against women has been richly pronounced. According to the CEC Report (2007), the role of women in employment and economic activities is often underestimated because most of women work in the informal sectors, usually with low productivity and incomes, poor working conditions, with little or no social protection. It observe the female labour force in Sub-Saharan Africa in 2005 was about 73 million, representing 34% of those employed in the formal sector, earning only 10% of the income, while owing 1% of the assets. However, the denial of women's inheritance and land rights has made the economic participation considerably constrained and by implication, their educational aspiration (Nmadu 2000). Politics is increasingly becoming commercialized, more and more money is needed to participate in politics. Women lack access to and ownership of productive resources, limiting the scope of their political work, low economic base has been discovered as a constraint to women's active political participation and most women do not participate in politics because of psychological problems and ideological inclinations they have within themselves about politics.

The right of women and female folks in the political and economic space of Nigeria on her democratic agenda has been a matter of public debate and, hence attracts serious concerns by individuals, academic, public analysts and the wider international community as a whole. The plight of Nigerian women like their counterparts in other parts of developed countries, have been characterized by lack of adequate representation, lack of access to well-developed education and training systems for women's leadership in general; undue dominance of men in the economic and political scheme of things; poverty or lack of money or resources; lopsided political appointments and the general imbalance associated with very unjust treatment of the female citizen in its entirety. There is no doubt that this trend negates the collective interests of human fundamental rights and the rights of equality, freedom and personal dignity of women in society. This attitude also falls short of all and the Beijing conventions on the inalienable right of women. This tradition also poses very serious threats on Nigeria's path to democratic consolidation and sustainable development in this country. Therefore, in order to address the women question and transform gender relations, there is the need to empower women politically and economically. The paper opined that underdevelopment is a serious development problem often rooted in a long standing globalization of inequality and marginalization in which more women than men are at risk. It has been shown in Nigeria like in many societies of the world, more women than men are facing problems such as poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, inadequate educational and vocational training opportunities, unfriendly socio-economic environment, occupational segregation and lack of access to credit among other problems too numerous to mention. These problems are sustained by traditional gender norms, which condone male domination thereby feminization of underdevelopment in which women are denied the opportunity to enjoy a full productive life especially with respect to health, education, politics, economy work opportunities and general social well-being, this occurs more frequently in countries like Nigeria and other Sub-Saharan Africa. The marginalization and subjugation of women are as old as human species on the surface of the earth and it is common feature shared by women all over the world. In Nigeria today women are often relegated to the background. Patriarchy is the order of the day. Every culture in Nigeria defines the role of women in line with traditional norms and expectations and it is often a huge challenge to break out of this mould (Chinzea and Njoku 1991). Generally as Okagbue (1996) opines, women rights are human rights, the fact remains that the female half of humanity remains subjected to distinctive and continuous abuse, injustice and violence as well as too enormous range of legal disabilities and discrimination against women simply because they are female and these practices have either been ignored or have not generally been viewed as violation of the human rights and freedom of women. Against this background therefore it became imperative to note that women had in all culture and ages been subject of discrimination against politically, economically and socially in Nigeria. With reference to these findings, women remain a politically marginalized society in Nigeria. Not only that they have been subjected to inter-sexist biases powered by socio-cultural, economic and general systemic violence, they are also victims of self-immolation fueled by intra-sexism arising from fear factor, cynicism, lake of gender completive consciousness and gender complex. Nigerian women like many others in Africa, are also hindered by their lack of education, lack of economic independence and often domestic violence as well. These factors combine to derail the campaigns of many women who would participate in politics. The negligible presence of women in institutionalized politics thus apparent in their low participation as party executives, elected officers and political appointees. Despite, their under-representation in political leadership positions, their involvement in the federal cabinet is invaluable to efforts made in strengthening and reconstructing the democratic principles of Nigeria's Fourth Republic. The ratio of 43 males to 6 female ministers in the executive cabinet during the Obasanjo's fourth Republic Administration underscores the high-level of gender imbalance. However, women in public life are not necessarily ideological agent of reconstruction, individually; they may just be as renal as

men in power. The place of women in relation to men at all level of human organization has always been the concern of many people, in the family, economic, academic and in the political sector of our society. Men and women demand more equitable treatment. Equal political economic participation of men and women means an empowerment of the people to effectively engage in creating the structural and designing policies and programmes in order to serve the interest of all as well as effective contribution to the development process and ensure equity in its benefit. Obianyo (2000) observed that despite all these efforts, women are still worried that in an increasing democratic world, democracy is yet to be fully reflected in many affairs, women complain of marginalization in key political structure and decision making in the society. Nigerian women are already incapacitated by these obstacles. The poor economic power is of significant importance in the pursuit of political powers in Nigeria; according to Olaminde (1993) money has become a dominant factor in the political arena. The electorate whose economic power has been battered by the structural adjustment program many years of military vandalization of the economy and dehumanization are enticed by the highest bidder. According to Aondo-Akaa (2000) right from times of old, girls (eventually women) have been discriminated upon. They are denied the right to education which is the bedrock of leadership and development; women are disadvantaged in the educational sector. This limits their ability to lead and influence policies with sound decision for long, women have been deceived, but now and today they are conscious of the political area dominated by men who only come when they need their roles and disappear after getting them, leaving a little or empty promise behind.

### **Recommendations**

In recognition of the grave implication of political and economic marginalization of women in Nigeria and their relation with the underdevelopment of women; Development of women abilities and capabilities is urgently needed to enhance development process and minimize marginalization of women in Nigeria. Thus, the sustainable human development can be achieved through bridging gender gaps in politics, economy, social security and other facets of human lives. In addition to bridging gender gaps in education, unemployment, social security and leadership positions and for sustainable development of women in Nigeria to be endangered. The Nigerian government should give women and men equitable priority in the present implementation of poverty alleviation programme. For instance, it is not in doubt that better educated women would be more able to make fundamental contributions to resources management and economically empowered women would be more interested in participating in decision making on development programmes. More importantly, potentials of women as agent of change should be tapped and developed to improve upon the present level of socio-economic situations in Nigeria.

Recommendations are presented in appreciation of the notion:

- ✓ “If you empower women you empower a nation, but if you empower a man you empower an individual” it is imperative that sustainable human underdevelopment may continue to flourish unless women are fully integrated into all aspect of development programme.
- ✓ Nigeria is a signatory to the convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women (CEDAW). Therefore CEDAW recommendation as contained in it’s Article 1-16 should be implement immediately by Nigerian government. This will expunge the conflicting and discriminatory provisions in Nigeria statutory, customary and perpetuate patriarchal system in Nigeria.
- ✓ There should be a reformation of customary and religious institutions in Nigeria so as to avoid discrimination against women’s involvement politically and economically. The patriarchal structure that reinforce power imbalance between women and men should be eliminated. Government should therefore integrate all statutory, religious and customary laws and practices that subordinate women to men.
- ✓ An electoral bill explicitly, specifying and clarifying guideline for modalities and implementations of affirmative actions that enhance women’s empowerment should be passed into law in the country. For instance, 50% of financial cost of registration as a candidate for political positions and election campaign should be done by government. Every national political party should be done by government. Every national political party should reserve 30% of all elective position for women. The independent national electoral commission (INEC) should ensure that this policy is obeyed and any political party that fails to follow it should be disqualified.
- ✓ Government should partner with women’s movements, NGOs, the mass media and the civil society to embark on aggressive awareness and enlightenment campaign against women subordination, discrimination, marginalization, stigmatization and societal perception that women are inferior to men. The ministry of women Affairs should have a periodic campaign program in this regard.

- ✓ Education of women is useful to destroy inferiority complex and to give aspiring women courage and confidence to compete with men. Women education should target the adult population both in the cities and rural areas.
- ✓ Economic empowerment strategies such as loan scheme with minimal interest rate should be made available for women particularly in the grassroots to enable them embark on small and medium scale business enterprise. Commercial and microfinance banks should be mandated to remove the stringent regulations that make loans inaccessible to women.
- ✓ Lastly the creation of a political environment supportive of and conducive for women's participation is a responsibility of the Nigerian government. Government must curb the culture of electoral violence and the use of political thugs and gangsters to suppress and witch-hunt political opponents in the country.

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