

Rethinking Women Participation in Nigeria's Politics

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Abstract: *Despite the United Nations Declaration on Women's right in politics and governance and the specific pegging of 35% of positions for women in governance and affirmative action, the lot of women in politics remains poor and abysmal. This paper seeks to unravel and characterize the obstacles in the way of Nigerian Women's participation in politics and governance. Specifically, in rethinking the problematic, the paper demonstrates dialectically that not having women everywhere in Nigeria politics and governance is like a contradiction in the country's quest for speedy growth and development. After all, there is a woman in every home that make progress in this country. The paper uses secondary data and case histories of women who have successfully lead their countries even in good and bad times. Radical feminist theory is used to undergird the central discourse of the paper which seeks to rethink the current damnable position of women in Nigeria politics and governance. The conclusion demonstrates that women have the capacity to lead Nigeria out of its current parlous politics and economic quagmire. The paper recommends a redistribution of positions in the nation's leaderships hierarchy.*

Keywords: *Governance, Women's Participation, Growth and Development, Distribution, Affirmative Action.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

The struggle for women participation in leadership, decision making and policy has been a topical issue not only in Nigeria but all over the World. Some cultures which tend to perpetuate inequality between male and female populations have persisted in our society, Nigeria where [1] describes women activities ascribed by the culture as insignificant and unimportant and was not fair. This perception of course must be reversed now.

This paper is divided into five portions:

- ✓ Brief historical perspectives on women leadership in pre-colonial and post-colonial periods.
- ✓ Women leadership in the Highly Developed Countries (HDC).
- ✓ Nigeria's Gender Problems and Solutions.
- ✓ Why Nigerian women should participate in Decision Making and Governances.
- ✓ Conclusion and Recommendations.

BRIEF HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES ON WOMEN LEADERSHIP IN PRE COLONIAL AND POST COLONIAL PERIODS.

During the period of pre-colonialism, females played prominent roles in leadership and governance in the different societies that now make up what is called Nigeria. The females held important positions among the majority of the ethnic groups particularly among the Hausa, Yoruba and the Igbo.

In the Hausa society, females had high status before the colonial rule. The Hausa people belong to a civilization that is characterised by matrilineal succession in the ruling class. That is why women held high political posts. For instance, the 15th Century history of Zaria had it that Queen Amina succeeded the father and conquered all the towns around Zamfara and Nupe and dominated those regions for 34 years. She introduced fortification and changed the entire Zaria society for the better.

In the West, which is the Yoruba, the leadership system was hierarchical and was based on checks and balances so that no Kings or Chiefs could exercise more power than they traditionally deserved. In this society, the females were not excluded in the governance of the empire and their positions were very sensitive because they performed very important roles. The females political positions were namely;

- a. Iya Oba
- b. Iyakere
- c. IyaLagbon
- d. Iya Mode
- e. Iya Lode

During this period in Yoruba Society, the Alafin's many wives acted as the "eyes" and "ears" of the king. The wives were his secret service agents in the course of their trading activities and also they contributed to the smooth running of the palace and empire.

For instance, the Iya Oba was the King's official Queen mother who gave her advice and words of wisdom to the King. The Iya Kere wielded the greater power and authority in the palace. She was the custodian of the palace treasury including Royal Insignia and the King's Paraphernalia of office. Iya Kere was as well responsible for crowning the King during the coronation ceremony. Her position was of great political significance because she could sabotage any of the Oba's public appearance by refusing to allow him the use of the garment of office [2]. The Iya Lagbon was mother of the crown prince who wielded great authority and ruled over a part of the capital city. The Iya Lode was responsible for the Oba's spiritual well-being and also looked after the women's trading interests.

These groups of women formed the effective class of spokes women for political stability and humane rule as well as for the interest of females at the highest political level in the kingdom. The high socio-political status of females in the traditional Yoruba society was also evident among the Edos [3].

The Igbos are modern day Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo States, as well as Anioma in present Delta State and the Igbos of Niger Delta. These States occupied part of the old Eastern and Western parts of Nigeria. Leadership among the Eastern Society was achieved and ascribed. In the pre-colonial period the Igbo females had their market and village groups where through their representatives, matters affecting them were discussed at the village meetings. These females in their positions were recognised as leading representatives of the Market Women, "Umuada" and age grade leaders.

During this era, females in the various parts of the colonial society formed powerful associations to enable them present united forces when they elected their leaders to articulate their interest for them.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Radical Feminist Theory.

Radical feminist theory is a perspective within feminism that calls for a radical reordering of society in which male supremacy is eliminated in all social and economic contexts. The primary pioneers of this theory are Ellen Willis and Shulamith Firestone, in 1969. Radical feminism views society fundamentally as a patriarchy in which men dominate and oppress women.

It seeks to abolish the patriarchy in order to liberate women from an unjust social structure by challenging the existing social norms and institutions. According to [4] radical feminism beliefs are based on the idea that the main cause of women's oppression originates from social roles and institutional structures being constructed from male supremacy and patriarchy. This theory wants to get rid of traditional gender roles. This theory sees no need to compromise with existing political perspectives and agenda of men.

This is because it sees the oppression of women as the most fundamental and universal form of domination and aim to end it. It also insists that male power is not confined to the public worlds of politics and paid employment but rather extends into private life. This means that traditional concepts and extended to such "personal" areas of life as the family which is seen as the instruments of patriarchal domination.

In application, contemporary women have broken traditional barriers in the areas of education, economic, social, political and business. Traditionally women were not allowed to go to school, women who are social pioneers have broken gender traditional roles boundaries that is destroying the status quo.

The recent world population shows that of the 8 billion people on earth, women are 5 billion and men are 3 billion (2019 World population). The demographic challenge from such a frightening statistics is for women all over the world to redefine and rethink their relevance in the new world order.

WOMEN IN COLONIAL PERIOD

For most African and Nigerian women, their political participation was characterised by significant losses in both power and authority. The Colonial Officials propagated Western female stereotypes which assigned women to domestic domains, leaving economic and political leadership to men. This era diminished their leadership and economic rights, responsibilities and authority.

The colonial masters ignored female candidates for possible appointments. Many traditional female institutions were destroyed. The colonial policy made it possible for males to receive salaries while their female counterparts received nothing. For example, this loss of political power was also associated with diminished access to land and labour for females.

The colonial development policies focused on men, who were in the eyes of the White colonial officials, as the cocoa, groundnut, tea, coffee, cotton and kernel and other palm produced by farmers and producers of Nigeria and Africa. Many women lost their land inheritance when new property laws reduced women's right to ownership of land. This obnoxious colonial "reform" resulted in the transfer of women's land to men. Colonial Authorities assisted male farmers while dismissing female farmers as mere subsistence food producers. They offered male farmers technical training and assistance and ignored female farmers.

Women continued however to work on the land without assistance, but their control over the products of their labour declined. Many formerly rich women lived like paupers. Colonial authority policies furthermore

constrained female's advancement by limiting their access to education and wage employment. The women automatically lagged behind in Western education and failed to acquire the needed training but were encouraged to learn domestic skills in preparation to being better wives and mothers. Few women became qualified for wage labour and little or none for professional positions. Employed women performed low paying, unskilled jobs connected to domestic areas. As these regulations took force, the status and potentials of males and females increasingly diverged. The franchise to education and wealth was denied the women. In the earliest constitutions, there was the provision only for adult male suffrage.

With continued growth of party politics in the 1950s, the Yoruba women became active politically, organizing female wings of parties. Each of these female wings had its party leaders who mobilized them for campaigns to assist male leaders. For instance, they were such party leaders as Late Oredola Fadoju (Akure), Mrs. Esther Adejowon (Akure), Mrs. Fabunwa (EfonAlaye) and Madam Jane Dago (Ikare) in the ACTION GROUP party.

POST COLONIAL PERIOD

In the First Republic of 1960-1966, very few women contested for elections and none won a seat in the House of Representatives. There was no woman in the Federal Cabinet either. However, one female was appointed to the ceremonial senate seat in 1960 and the second one was appointed also in 1964. In the 1961 Regional elections, three females were elected to the Eastern House of Assembly. This period did not have any female minister. The Military struck in Jan 1966.

This period encountered the military regimes because of national political crises. During the military regimes from Major General Aguiyi Ironsi (1966) to General Yakubu Gowon 1966-1975 and General Murtala Mohammed / General Olusegun Obasanjo of 1975-1979, no woman was appointed into Federal Ministerial or Federal Commissioner positions.

In the Second Republic of 1979-1983, under Shehu Shagari, there was only one-woman senate member out of 445 members of the Federal House of Representatives. Among the Ministerial appointees, six women were appointed. During the Constitutional Drafting Committee which produced 1979 Constitution, no female was either elected or appointed out of 50 (wise) members [5].

The year 1985 marked for the Nigerian female, the beginning of unprecedented upsurge in the involvement of females in the facet and affairs of National Development. This is as a result of the adoption by consensus the Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies (NFLS) for the advancement of women. The (NFLS) set up four concrete measures to overcome the obstacles to achieving the goals and objectives of the UNDAW (United Nations Decade for Action on Women). Ibrahim Babangida was Head of the Military Junta that ruled Nigeria by force from 1985-1993. However, his wife late Mrs. Maryam Babangida promoted the Nigerian Women by the "Better Life for Nigerian Women" Programme.

Between 1994 and 1998 Nigeria was still under the military jack boot but now manned by Sani Abacha. His wife Mrs. Marian Abacha floated the Family Support Programme for Nigerian women. However, it was Maryam Babangida that built the Women Development Centre at Abuja, formerly headed by ONYEKA ONWENU.

From the Third to Fourth Republic, there has been progressive increases in the trend of women participation in politics in terms of appointment and elections. But the participation level is very still low considering the International recommendation of 35% benchmark. In 1992 for instance, under the Babangida Administration, out of 300 gubernatorial aspirants, there were only eight women representing 2.6% and none of these women was elected as governor; [6]. All this while the election of women into the National Assembly had not gone beyond 8.3%. At the senatorial level, one female was elected out of 56 contestable seats in the 2nd Republic. In the House of Representatives as well, 3 women were elected out of 442. However, in 1992, the story remained the same where out of 90 Senators, only one was a woman and 14 females out of 575 House of Representative members.

In 1999, out of 978 contestable seats in the Houses of Assembly, men occupied 966 leaving only 12 seats for women representing 1.2% in the 4th Republic. In the same year, in the House of Representatives, out of 360 seats women occupied 13 seats representing 2.8%.

There was upward movement in 2003 where women occupied 39 out of 951 seats representing 4% in the State Houses of Assembly. In the House of Representatives, in the same year, women occupied 21 seats out of 339 which represented 3.6% and Senate had 4 seats for women out of 109 which represented 3.7%.

In 2007, the 36 States Houses of Assembly were occupied by 54 women out of a total of 990, representing 5.5%. At the House of Representatives, the number of women increased to 25 seats representing 7%. The number of women also increased in the Senate in the same year by 9 women out of 109 seats, representing 8.3%.

At the Local Government levels, it indicated that out of 774 Local Government Chairmen elected in 1999 only 8 were women representing 1%. However, there has been a progressive increase in the number of

appointive positions occupied by women from 1999 till date. Prior to 1999, women representation in the Federal Executive Council never exceeded 5% [7]; [8]. From 1999 to date, there has been a clear departure from the past, in terms of the increase in the number of female Ministers. However, Ekiti, Osun, Ogun, Anambra and Lagos States produced female Deputy Governors within the period under consideration.

WOMEN LEADERSHIP IN THE HIGHLY DEVELOPED COUNTRIES (HDC)

Although no country in the world has yet achieved gender participation equality, yet the Nordic countries have consistently stood out in the World. Finland, Norway, Sweden, Denmark and Iceland have close to over 80% of the gender gap filled up. These countries are now both the role models and benchmarks to the World. So what is the secret of their success?

THE NORDIC SECRETS (SCANDINAVIAN COUNTRIES)

1. Wealth: Their Nations income, resources and opportunities are distributed equally to men and women.
2. Education: All Nordic countries have reached 99 percent to 100 percent literacy for both sexes for several decades now. Girls fare just as well as boys in terms of access to Primary and Secondary education and even up to tertiary levels.
3. High skilled work force: Women now make up the majority of their highly skilled work force .There are over 1.5 women for every man enrolled in the university system; therefore women also make up the majority of those in the tertiary institution.
4. High female labour force participation: Salary gaps between women and men are among the lowest in the world.
5. There are abundant opportunities for women to rise to positions of leadership.
6. Parents combining work and family: As a result of this, more women are in the work place, since there is more shared participation in childcare, more equitable distribution of labour at home, better work -life balance for both women and men and in some cases, a boost to their waning fertility rates.
7. Favourable policies for women: These policies are mandatory paternal leaves in combination with women maternity leaves. State mandated parental leave benefits are provided by a combination of social insurance funds and employer's tax incentives and post maternity re-entry programmes.
8. Policies aimed at promoting women's leadership: In Norway, since 2008, publicly listed companies have been required to have 40% of each sex on their boards, and all other Nordic countries are adopting similar measures.
9. Women Voting before others: Historically, the Nordic countries gained a head start by giving women the right to vote before others (Finland 1906, Sweden in 1919, Norway in 1913, Iceland and Denmark in 1915).
10. Voluntary Gender Quotas: In Denmark, Sweden and Norway, Political Parties introduced Voluntary gender quotas in the 1970s, resulting in high number of female political representatives over the years. Today, Sweden has among the highest percentage of women in parliaments in the world (44.7%). Indeed, all the Nordic Countries are in the top ten for the number of women in the parliaments and high percentage in ministerial level positions. Finally, Iceland, Finland and Norway are among the top ten countries that have had female Heads of State.

The UN (2015) study shows that only 22% of all national parliamentarians were females as of January 2015, a slow increase from 11.3 % in 1995. Globally, there are 38 countries in which women account for less than 10 percent of parliamentarians in single or lower Houses as of 2015. Rwanda has the highest number of women parliamentarians worldwide. Their women won 63.8% of the seats in the lower House (Inter Parliamentary Union, 2015). Furthermore, as at 2015, by UN WOMEN (2015), 10 women served as Heads of State and 14 served as Heads of Government.

In Summary, for women leadership in the Highly Developed Countries, 30 percent is widely considered an important benchmark for women representation as at January 2015, while 41 Single or Lower Houses were composed of more than 30 percent women. These include 11 countries in Africa and 9 in Latin America (Inter Parliamentary Union and UN WOMEN, 2015). In the Nordic Countries both the Upper and Lower Houses have women up to 41.5% while America has 26.3%. Europe, (EU) excluding Nordic countries has 23.8 percent and sub Saharan Africa was 22.2 percent. Asia 18.5 percent; Middle East and North Africa have 16.1 percent and the Pacific 15.7 percent; [9].

NIGERIA'S PERSPECTIVES, PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS.

This paper has traced the historical background of women participation in leadership and decision making in Nigeria and has shown the statistics of women participation. The statistics presented shows that Nigeria is still very far from the 35 percent women quota widely agreed by the UN WOMEN and Beijing Platforms as a bench mark for women's representations.

Several impediments have been identified as limiting the participation of women in leadership in Nigeria. One of the core obstacles is the non-domestication of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of

Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). It is an international treaty adopted in 1979 by the United Nations General Assembly and described as an International Bill of Rights for women. It takes positive measures to advance gender equality and although 188 Nation States have ratified it, Nigeria is one of the signatory countries that still find it problematic to implement. ObyNwankwo, the Nigerian representative to CEDAW said that although in 1985 CEDAW was ratified by Nigeria but as at 2013, it had not been domesticated (Vanguard 2013). Up till this moment it has not been domesticated either, in 2019. Art.12 says that even when a government has ratified an international treaty, such a treaty cannot be enforceable unless it has been domesticated. If it is not domesticated it cannot be applied in Nigeria.

The question becomes why has it not been domesticated for about 30 years since ratification? This is 2019. Some of the answers ObyNwankwo gave were as follows:

- 1a. Some male legislators also have issues with some articles on the basis of religion and culture.
- b. The male legislators are dilly-dallying on its domestication because they are afraid of equality.
- c. Ours is a male dominated Parliament because female legislators are few. Absence of or the unequal representation of women from political life and leadership has undermined democracy and women empowerment in Nigeria.

It is a core problem because if it had been domesticated, its legal implications would have suppressed other infringement factors.

2. Cultural Practices: The cultural roles of women include cooking, child rearing, farming, washing and housekeeping. Men on the other hand are the decision makers and leaders of the society and are still not ready to yield some grounds.

3. Economic Factors: Funding and high cost of election campaigns is a big obstacle of which women are victims. The minimum cost of gubernatorial elections is as high if not more than Five Billion Naira. Women constitute about half of the 200 million population of Nigeria yet they are the poorest in wealth and the weakest in strength mobilization.

4. Women's Perception of Politics: "Politics is a dirty game" always rings a bell in every woman's ear. Also female politicians are therefore seen as prostitutes or as evil women.

5. The Demands of Party Politics: It is also time consuming and demands great mobilisation and use of thugs. Nocturnal meetings are held at very odd hours of which women's traditionally ascribed roles are against. Married women need permission to play politics.

6. Violence and Thuggery: The do-or die nature of politics in Nigeria has made politics become crude and deadly. Paid assassins and destruction of properties and threats to life are on the increase. These women fear.

7. Discrimination: Structural barriers through discriminatory laws and institutions still limit women's choices and options to run for public offices.

8. Low Levels of Education: United Nations (1995) posits that education is the basic tool that should be given to women in order to fulfil their roles as full members of the society. Sustainable human development cannot be effective if half of the human race (women folk) remain ignorant, illiterate, discriminated and marginalised; [10].

9. The Issue of Indigeneity: Women married outside their constituencies of birth who wish to contest elections in their marriage constituencies are usually regarded as non-indigenes. Such women contesting election in their husband's constituencies, are regarded as over ambitious and may be discouraged or freighted away.

III. SOLUTIONS TO NIGERIA'S WOMEN PROBLEMS

From the discussion so far, it can be seen that the Nordic countries, South Africa, North America, the Europeans and some parts of Asia are advantaged and developed in terms of women participation in politics. Indeed, the Scandinavian countries have adopted advanced methodologies for enhancing women participation in decision making. However below are some information from the organisations and institutions campaigning against discrimination of women in leadership and political participation;

❖ The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) upholds women's right to participate in public life.

❖ The Beijing Platform for Action calls for the removal of barriers to equal participation and;

❖ The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) measure progress towards gender equality in politics of women occupying Parliamentary Seats.

❖ UN Women advocates for legislative and constitutional reforms to ensure women's fair access to political spheres of participation as voters, candidates, elected officials and Civil Service members. They also collaborate with UN country teams and work with civil societies on programmes so that elections uphold women's right, including to vote and campaign freely from electoral violence.

Furthermore, solutions will be providing;

- Training for women political candidates to help build their capacities.
- There should be civic education and sensitization campaigns on gender equality.
- Politicians, political parties, governments and other stake holders should do their part in empowering the women.
- Young men and women are encouraged to engage in advocacy around making gender equality measures central to public policy making.
- The interest of women should be taken into account in the area of policy making in all countries of the World. This should eliminate gender stereotypes and prejudices.
- Quota system in the party leadership structure, new laws in parliaments that specify at least the level of 40% chances for women, should be canvassed and encouraged in Nigeria, and the rest of Africa, South of the Sahara.

REASONS WHY WOMEN IN NIGERIA SHOULD PARTICIPATE IN LEADERSHIP.

1. Natural Justification: According to Aristotle, man by nature is a political animal and can only secure the good life and satisfy his needs in association with nature. Hobbes on the other hand, argues that man originally existed in a condition of warfare, a condition in which man is a wolf to man. This flows from the fact that human beings by nature are equal such that even the weakest "women" has sufficient hope of achieving her needs and she has passion and desire to live better and be secured; which results to her struggle for survival; [11]. Ebonyi women are daily struggling for survival.

2. No proof for superiority of men over women: In terms of old assumptions of large differences between men and women's IQ, a new study by Ben Ambridge, a British psychologist, has demonstrated that male and female IQs or what he called Psy Qs, are now similar on all scores. Similarly, in choosing marriage partners, recent psychological studies now show that men are fickle as they choose based only on physical features but women are more deeply motivated as they base their choices of partners on Power, Strength, Influence, Education and Finance.

3. Qualitative change will occur if women participate in politics. Women introduce qualitative changes in leadership, right from the home.

4. Agriculture: Since the ancient times, women and their men partners have been feeding the population despite the lack of mechanised farming equipment. Women today represent 70 percent of the agricultural labour force in the 3rd World. (Inter Parliamentary Union 2000, Geneva). So, they would succeed equally, in leadership if allowed to participate since a nation that feeds its self is developed. The 3rd World is still engaged primarily in primitive, manual agriculture, of course. And this involves more women than men.

5. Women have inherent talents which could be used to develop a nation: For instance, even traditional women do run their homes and families successfully, feeding and bringing up their children by taking decisions appropriately and acting on them. Women already have the Skills of leadership, let the society help to bring these out to their full functional capacity.

6. Projects oriented: Women's political representation in their areas has made a little more difference than the men. For instance, a study in India, discovered that the number of drinking water projects in the areas with female-led councils was 62 percent higher than male-led councils.

7. Men admire and respect women who wield influence and power, whether it be economic or political; [12]. This fact dismantles the confusing and often misleading notion that successful women are abhorred because such women constitute a threat to the society and especially to their husbands and associates.

8. Women are highly responsible and committed to the advancement of the nation's socio-economic development: For instance, Mrs. Maryam Babangida's "Better Life for Rural Women" helped to transform the Nigerian women politically and economically; between 1985-1993. Between 2001-2015, Dame Patience Jonathan also helped in transforming Nigerian women too.

9. Transparency in Governance: There is a noticeable increase in the transparency of women leadership. For instance, Dr Ngozi Okonjo Iweala introduced the practice of publishing each State's monthly financial allocations from the Federal Government in Newspapers; which has increased transparency in governance [6]. Late Prof Dora Akunyili, made away with several awards in her efforts to eradicate counterfeit drugs and unsafe food items in the Nigerian Society.

10. Dedications to deal with issues that men do not want to address: Prof Dora Akunyili for instance, a former DG of NAFDAC, at the risk of her life, fought an uncommon battle to achieve results. Her work is indelible in Nigeria. The Aba women riots of 1929 must always be mentioned. Their heroic actions and struggles led to the abolition of unfair tax laws in colonial Abia.

11. Accessibility of Democracy: It will make democracy become more accessible because of women's soft approach to problem solving. Being a mother, wife, teacher, adviser and decision maker, women's contributions to the democratic process will be manifold. For their deliberations and prowess will be seen in the art of

governance and in the introduction of some mechanisms, leading to lasting peace, non violence and actions against the population, thereby creating a culture of tolerance.

12. Sustenance of Nations: Womens participating in governance would allow the sustenance of the nation's developmental strides.

IV. CONCLUSION

Women must adjust their mentality for participating fully in leadership and decision making in Nigeria. This is because the frustrations and discriminations of the past had led to the majority of them pegging their aspirations and ambitions very low. They should grant themselves intellectual liberation, cast away timidity, speak authoritatively and not allow complain and murmur. Furthermore, the women should be informed, lettered, enlightened in boldness and be confident. They should match aspirations with abilities and ambitions with qualifications. That is the way forward for Nigerian women.

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