

Women's active participation in politics and the drive for gender equality in nigeria

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Abstract

This paper examines the potentials for women to participate actively in Nigerian politics and its prospects for actualizing the drive towards achieving gender equality in Nigeria. It is observed that the active participation of women in the act of governance in Nigeria has the potentials to mitigate marginalization and obnoxious policies which constrain women's role to kitchen or the other room. The study is hinged on the assumption that women naturally have passion for leadership and if given them opportunity to play more active role in governance in a multicultural society like Nigeria would no doubt, contribute significantly to the socio- economic and political development of the country. The paper operationalizes active participation of women in politics to include; free party nomination forms for elective positions, full implementation of women's 35% affirmative action, including appointment as heads of electoral commissions and chairpersons of election tribunals. The paper underscored the fact that the few women who have been given opportunity to serve in various capacities for the purpose of achieving development in a democratic sitting in Nigeria, have exceeded expectation with their performances. The journey so far in women political strive in Nigeria was conceptualized. It therefore recommends that constitutional amendment should be deployed in order to reserve certain percentage of elective positions at both Federal, States and Local Governments for women contestants as a possible way of actualizing gender equality in Nigeria in line with one of the goals for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Keywords: Development, gender equality, governance, women participation in politics and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

INTRODUCTION

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Globally, women's have potentials which are seen as driving forces for Socio-economic and political development of their various countries. The women potentials are hardly being demonstrated as ought to be, due to some cultural beliefs that women's role is limited to kitchen or the other room which seems fundamental, especially in the continent of Africa and Nigeria toping the chart regarding this belief. Nigeria as a country, has relegated women's to the background in all facets of life, on assumption that they have nothing to contribute to the development of the country (Idyorough, 2005). On different occasion, Nigeria women came out of their shield to prove their relevant in the society educationally, economically and politically, which of course, they have exceeded expectations with their performances in affirmative to the saying that "what a man can do, a woman does it better".

As at 1986, the administration of General Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida lifted women from darkness to lightness in their quest to contribute their quota to governance with the establishment of "gender diarchy" office (first lady) (Agbalajobi, 2010). The office of gender diarchy, paves the way for women passion for leadership to be subjected to a pilot test in order to ascertain their level of activeness in terms of policies formulation and implementation. Mrs. Mayam Babangidahas the First Lady, introduced "Rural Women for Better Life Programme in 1986" which proved women competent in governance and made many of them bread winners for their various families.

The advocacy for women to be given a status in the society beyond kitchen was in respond to United Nation Organization (UNO) article 8 and 10, which specified that there shall be no restriction on the eligibility of men and women in power and decision making (UNO, 1975). In other words, women can compete favourably with their men counterparts in all fields of human endeavours and Nigeria is not an exception.

The Beijing Conference of 1995, held at China, particularly on improving the status of women globally as policy makers yielded the desirable result in 2003, as women in Africa Union (AU) were elected as commissioners (Gumisai, 2005). In Nigeria situation, women are still marginalized and subjected to all kinds of abuse despite the global agitation for them to have equally opportunity like their men counterparts towards extrapolating their potentials for socio-economic and political development of the country.

Gender equality as one of the fifth goals for a country to meet the target of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by the year 2030, seems a mirage in Nigeria, hence, women passion for elective positions keep dwindling on daily basis due to lack of constitutional amendment to reserve certain percentage of elective positions across the three tiers of government for women contestants in election. It is against this backdrop that this paper addresses some measures to be taken as the drive for actualizing gender equality in Nigeria in line with the yearning for realizing Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

OPERATIONALIZATION OF WOMEN'S ACTIVE PARTICIPATION IN POLITICS

The operationalization of women's active participation in politics in Nigeria focuses on creating a political platform that encourages women generally to rise up from their slumber and showcase their leadership potentials at all levels of governance. The task to get the dividends of democracy to citizenry in Nigeria is stupendous and so, women inputs should be seen as olive oil to achieve the needed development which is a true reflection of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

According to Izugbora(2008) women's participation in politics implies that women in the act of governance should be more proactive and made useful contributions to government blue prints in the areas of planning, implementation, supervision and evaluation of budgetary allocation to tackle the socio-economic challenges and the needs of the grass rooters.

Lopsidedness of government policies emanated from the Federal and States legislators in the deliberation of both exclusive, concurrent and residual lists that may not address the needs of women beyond kitchen managers will be squarely fine-tune to earn them a voice in the political permutation of the country towards actualizing gender equality in Nigeria. This signifies that government policies that

were lifted directly from the cultural practices of some major ethnic groups in the country and cause diminishing returns on women potentials as machineries for driving government policies will be argued for, tantamount to a clarion call for constitutional amendment to urgently expunge obnoxious clauses from the document (Glick & Sahn, 2003).

In view of operationalization of women's active participation in Nigeria politics, serves as a mouthpiece and dragon to dialogue with the Federal Government to establish more institutions that will be anti-gender violence for women political history in Nigeria to be rewritten. This is in relation to definition of politics as aggregation of interest and allocation of resources, on who takes what, when, where and how (Lasswell, 1951)?

As much as nobody is a reservoir of knowledge, males should not see politics as their birth rights and marginalized females and should not take advantage of the political office ego and oppressed their female's counterparts. Women's are therefore, encourage not to leave any stone unturned for those who are politicians and learn how to speak the political jargons, gibberish's and parlance as well as be actively involved in policies formulation and implementation in any democratic dispensation towards achieving socio-economic and political development of Nigeria as a target for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

DRIVE FOR GENDER EQUALITY IN NIGERIA

The concept of gender equality cannot be over emphasized, hence, it is as old as human society and not peculiar to Nigeria alone. Gender equality has gone viral and became an issue of global concern to be addressed for the women's to be treated with all amount of fairness and equality in their quest to control machineries of government. As such, for gender equality to be actualized in Nigeria on or before 2030 as a world agenda for achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), some of the drives are stated and discussed as follows:

(i) Free political parties' nomination forms for women seeking elective positions: Political parties' nomination forms are internal democratic guidelines of all political parties for all their aspirants to be duly nominated by card carrier members of the party to achieve the elective positions they are vying for. This process which of course is tedious, is parties in-house political permutations to select aspirants with charismas as the party flag bearer in a particular election. It is worthy of note that, political parties' nomination forms are quite different from parties "expression of interest forms". The expression of interest forms in most cases, are affordable by aspirants as compared to parties' nomination forms. Eke (2005) sees parties' nomination forms and expression of interest forms as a way testing the ability of aspirants' seriousness on the election positions they are contesting for.

Political parties' nomination forms are consequential documents of political parties that give details of all the aspirant information such as names, date of birth, educational qualifications, sex, Local Government of origin, State, nationality, ward, polling unit and so forth (Adele, 2011). The aspect of aspirants given details of their information on the nomination forms, is not even the bone of contention, but the cost effectiveness which ranges from millions of naira hinders women appetite to take active parts in politics. The point to be driven home is that the financial implications for obtaining parties' nomination forms for any elective positions should unambiguously be free for women as a motivational factor and propeller for them to actively participate in politics in order to balance the imbalances in the country political hegemony on women. The amount of money from N500,000, N1000 000, N2000 000 and so on to be paid into political parties Bank account as a condition to pick expression of interest forms for elective position in Nigeria becomes a political gimmick of refusing women's of extrapolating their political potentials towards contributing to the socio-economic development of Nigeria.

A little flashed back to the 2019 General Election, All Progressives Congress (APC) nomination form for those who sought Governorship position was pegged at N22.4 million, Senate N7 million,

¹Unimke, Sylvester Akongi PhD, ¹Unimna, Fidelis Abunimye PhD, ²Udeme, Akanniyene U.

House of Representative N3.85 million and States House of Assembly N850,000 (Dailytrust, 2018). The amount of money stated above for the purchase of parties' nomination forms which is a tradition across the various duly registered political parties' in Nigeria is indeed a calculated attempt to frustrate women political feature and instrument of retrogressing their existence political potentials. It takes the heart of a Lioness for any woman to cough out such colossal amount of money for nomination forms in any elective position. It therefore means that if gender equality must be achieved in Nigeria as one of the Goals of Sustainable Development Goals, all registered political parties in the country should be compelled by the existence law to waive nomination forms fee for all female aspirants seeking elective positions at all levels of representation.

As such, tables below demonstrated the indices of women active participation in politics across the three tiers of government.

Table 1: 1999-2003

S/N	Dispensation	Elective position/ office	Number of seat allocated	Number won by women	Number won by men
1	1999-2003	President	1	0	1
2	1999-2003	Vice president	1	0	1
3	1999-2003	Senate	109	3	106
4	1999-2003	House of Representative	360	12	348
5	1999-2003	Governors	36	0	36
6	1999-2003	Deputy Governor	36	1	35
7	1999-2003	State House of Assembly	990	12	978
8	1999-2003	Local Govt. Chairpersons	774	9	765
9	1999-2003	Councilors	8,810	267	81,543

Source: (Hundred years of Nigeria women centenary report, 2013)

Table 2: 2007-2011

S/N	Dispensation	Elective position office	Number of seat allocated	Number won by women	Number won by men
1	2007-2011	President	1	0	1
2	2007-2011	Vice president	1	0	1
3	2007-2011	Senate	109	8	101
4	2007-2011	House of Representative	360	23	337
5	2007-2011	Governors	36	0	36
6	2007-2011	Deputy Governor	36	6	30
7	2007-2011	State House of Assembly	990	52	938
8	2007-2011	Local Govt. Chairpersons	774	27	747
9	2007-2011	Councilors	8,810	235	8,575

Source: (National Bureau of statistics Abuja, 2019)

Table 3: 2015-2023

S/N	Dispensation	Elective position office	Number of seat allocated	Number won by women	Number won by men
1	2015-2023	President	1	0	1
2	2015-2023	Vice president	1	0	1
3	2015-2023	Senate	109	5	104
4	2015-2023	House of Representative	360	12	348
5	2015-2023	Governors	36	0	36
6	2015-2023	Deputy Governor	36	4	32

7	2015-2023	State House of Assembly	990	61	929
8	2015-2023	Local Govt. Chairpersons	774	37	737
9	2015-2023	Councilors	8,810	278	8,532

Source: (Unimke & Unimna, 2019)

(ii) Full implementation of women's 35% affirmative action: As a drive towards achieving gender equality globally, various countries have put measures in place to gradually eliminate discrimination against women to attain political height and Nigeria as one of those countries following her National Gender Policy (NGP), has constitutionally allotted 35% of political positions in both elective and appointments for women. The question now is; has the ratio for women's in elective positions and currently holding political appointments reflects the 35% constitutional provision and National Gender Policy (NGP)?

A critical look at the 9th Senate of the Federal Republic of Nigeria which consists of 109 Senators, has just 6 Female Senators instead of 37 to reflect the 35% affirmative action and National Gender Policy (NGP). In the house of representative, 35% of 360 Members, women should have not less than 116 Honourable Members, but the revised is the case (Mfam, 2016). In the same direction, Segger (2004) opines that given women's the 35% affirmative action in the political pace of Nigeria, helps to revamp the lost glory of the country leadership.

The political index card of Nigeria shows that the 35% of women's elective positions and appointments are yet to be filled as demonstrated in table 1, 2, and 3, of this write up, thus, negatively skewed Nigeria determination in the attainment of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In respect of gender equality, Mastilla (2006) asserts that avenues for good governance and accountability in any developing country like Nigeria, women's active participation in governance is a conduct pipe to get to the downtrodden, hence, women themselves constituted the most vulnerable people in the society. It is indeed high time for Nigeria leaders to be morally upright and ensure that in all the third tiers of government elections, women's 35% affirmative action should be enforced. At the state level, stakeholders should support women to emerge as Governors, Senators which of course, will trigger them working with all their alimentary canal to sponsor bills that will mitigate abuses on women and improve the general wellbeing of the citizens (Unimke & Unimna, 2018).

Nigeria as a nation is still faced with numerous leadership challenges' which are myriad in nature, perhaps, because we have not been able to allow women to champion certain key positions in the country democratic and bureaucratic setting. The advocacy for full implementation of women's 35% affirmative action seems to be a kingpin for Nigeria to be rebranded; hence, there is a saying that "in every successful man there must be a woman behind him". It implies that the Federal Government should take the bull by the horn to ensure that all the components of government do not sweep under the carpet the 35% of women's elective positions and appointments to make Nigeria a truth democrat nation.

(iii) Appointment of women as heads of electoral commissions: The appointment of women's as heads of electoral commission in Nigeria should be considered as one of the drives to actualize gender equality in the country. This is because the stability of any country democracy depends squarely on the transparency nature and capacity possessed by heads of various electoral commissions. A question is therefore posed; how many women have served as Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) Chairman or Resident Electoral Commissioners (REC) across the 36 States of Nigeria? In Nigeria, any time election is conducted and been marred by irregularity, it would be attributed to incapability of the commission and this has become a tradition. Obuforobu (2000) observes that right from the

¹Unimke, Sylvester Akongi PhD, ¹Unimna, Fidelis Abunimye PhD, ²Udeme, Akanniyene U.

amalgamation of the northern and southern protectorates as at 1914, by Lord Fredrick Lugard, Electoral Commissions have been manipulated by men politically to the detriment of women.

The point of emphasis here is that transparency among heads of Electoral Commissions enhances the following;

- (i) gender balances;
- (ii) rapids development;
- (iii) credible leaders;
- (iv) stabilizes democracy;
- (v) Strengthens the country foreign policy.

It is indeed high time for Nigeria to be dynamics and try as much as possible to create a paradigm shift in the country way of politicking and underpin the interest of the women's to be the arrowheads of Electoral Commissions at Federal, State and Local Government Areas. Between the period of Nigeria imperialism and the struggled for territories in West Africa to this moment, what the country has achieved in terms gender equality and development is less than what is ahead of the country with a robust population of over 150 million males and female (Akpan, 2016). Be it that as it may, much is needed in the country Electoral Acts, besides the COVID 19 Pandemic that has exposed the country emptiness as less than a developing nation and its state of shamble among the comity of nations as it relates to development and gender equality.

Woman's potential however, should not be subverted, undermined and neglected at this critical time that ideas need to be agglomerated to actualize Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). As at the birth of Nigeria prior to 1914, as earlier pointed out, it was a woman, Mrs. Flora Shaw, in 1890 that suggested the name "Nigeria" and the name was adapted which is in used officially till today (Wikipedia, 2020). This is justification that in the face of draconian and obnoxious policies, women are needed to proffer solution and put smiles on the people faces, hence, history revealed that women have built high degree of moral capital to rekindle Nigeria socio-political repertoire This is exactly the situation Nigeria has found herself and so, the country should collapse some key areas in governance, especially heads of Electoral Commissions into women hands for a new history to be re-written about Nigeria as earlier stated.

(iv) Chairpersons of Election Tribunals: Chairpersons of election tribunals are some of the roads map for a country like Nigeria to achieve gender equality. Laver (2002) believes that appointing women's into sensitive offices like chairperson of electoral tribunals mitigate to a barest minimum social problems and issues in the contemporary society. Chairpersons of election tribunals are established in the country to hypnotize election contestants to seek legal approaches of reclaiming their stolen victory, rather than, carrying weapons against one another.

From the foregoing explanation, chairpersons of election tribunals are groups of judges appointed by the government to constitute panels and ensure that justice prevail in a situation where opponents in election dragged themselves to court with a prayer point of reclaiming a stolen victory. Steiner (2011) opines that tribunals are set up shortly after a country General Elections to work assiduously and ensure that those whose mandates are stolen and godfather's-free take their rightful place in their various respectful political positions. This is in affirmation to the saying that "judiciary is the last hope of a common man and the watch dog of the society".

All along in Nigeria, heads of election tribunals have been dominated by male Judges and have discharge and acquitted election cases on multiple occasions. Women juries might be more competent in election tribunal's cases as compared to their men counterpart records.

Considering women with the necessary credentials and dexterities to occupy the position of heads of election tribunals, become a signal that Nigeria is gender equality friendly country and one of the pro-Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) nation in Africa.

According to Audu and Idyorough (2014) the influx of female Judges in Nigeria courts have made tremendous inputs as arbiters in election tribunals witnessed so far and have convinced both plaintiffs and defendants beyond reasonable doubt that entrusted heads of election tribunals in the hands of a women's Judges, will add value to democracy in Nigeria. This is an indication that the zenith for Nigeria Socio-economic and political development needs at least 50% of women's intellectual horizon. It has been trending that heads of election tribunals who are predominately male Judges have compromised the standard, procrastinated and adjourned litigated cases of election for selfish interest and in many instances, changed white to black as the case may be. The issue of saying that "Justice delayed is justice denied" is a good epitome of election tribunals headed by male Judges in the court of competent jurisdiction and these attributes of cases being adjourned has tarnished the image of the country internationally. Women Judges by virtual of their potentials are anti-arbiter dictum when it comes to quick dispensation of justice on election matters, therefore, individual(s) with such ethos are hubs for sustenance of democracy and navigators for achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Nigeria.

THE RESPOND SO FAR IN THE DRIVE FOR GENDER EQUALITY IN NIGERIA

The respond so far in the drive for gender equality in Nigeria is a bit commendable and appreciable in theorizing and quite demoralizing in the implementation of National Gender Policy (NGP). Mezieobi (2008) affirms that policies formulation in Nigeria to address a particular pressing issue is not a problem, but the challenge lies in the implementation and at the end, those policies are made subject of caricatures. The above statement is not far from the truth; hence, there is a saying that "It is easy said than done". Many policies in Nigeria have died a natural death and never saw the light of the day due to the fact that our leaders don't strike when the iron is still hot. It is on this note that the implementation of 35% of women affirmative in politics to actualize gender equality has suffered a setback.

However, the respond so far is commendable thus; on 3rd November, 2006, history was made as Virginia Etiaba emerged as the first female Governor in Nigeria in Anambra State. The circumstances that resulted to her emergence for her to be addressed as Her Excellency, the Governor of Anambra State for 3 months are irrelevant here. The important thing is that a woman has broken a record to become the Governor of a State, which of course, is a consequential score card ever recorded in history of democracy in Nigeria. It is worthy of note that the administration of Virginia Etiaba which lasted for 3 months was laudable and focused on the development of Anambra State (Wkwikipedia, 2020). One of the achievements was her ability to peacefully transit power to Mr. Peter Obi who was impeached by the State House of Assembly on 9th February, 2007.

Also, in 2011, Ngozi Okonjo Iweala was appointed a Minister of Finance in the administration of Goodluck Jonathan, then President of Federal Republic of Nigeria as a drive to make women outstanding in governance. Her Ministerial appointment gingered women's to see their role beyond kitchen or the other room as societal beliefs. Nigeria monetary policies and exchanged value took a different dimension towards improving the wellbeing of the citizens (Nnabue, 2011). Her wealth of experience from the World Bank rebranded and resuscitated the economy policies in government financial leakages in compliance to the achievement Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

In relation to the respond so far in Nigeria, in April, 2010, Ruquayyah Ahmed Rufai was appointed Minister of Education as at Goodluck Jonathan administration. Rufai's proactive efforts in governance made the government to prioritize education. Abdullahi (2010) asserts that a woman minister was able to overhaul education sector in the areas of access and equality, standard and quality assurance, technical and vocational teaching training, funding and resource utilization as part of meeting

¹Unimke, Sylvester Akongi PhD, ¹Unimna, Fidelis Abunimye PhD, ²Udeme, Akanniyene U.

Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which was changed to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) on 1st January, 2016 by United Nations Organization.

Education does not thrive in the country bedeviled with security challenges and so, the massive building of Almjiri schools in the Northern part of Nigeria to Woo Streets children to embrace western education curriculum at all levels of our educational system that was becoming moribund, encountered unprecedented reforms for citadel of knowledge as at Rufai era as a Minister of Education. The counterpart funds from the Federal to the States towards effective implementation of States Universal Basic Education (SUBE) curriculum, were released as at when due to achieve quality assurance in the education sector as another crucial goal of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Ajayi, 2016). This is a vindication that women inputs in the process of governance may revive the country glory and become a tunnel for a country to achieve any enormous task ahead of time.

Dogmatically, women passion for leadership is becoming worrisome in our contemporary time. Many women have stepped out several times to surmount the stigmatization that they are incompetent to lead their men counterparts. In 2019 General Elections, Oby Ezekwesili took a bold step and contested for the post of the president of Federal Republic of Nigeria and her efforts was eulogized from all nook and cranny of the society .In view of Mora phobia and the country anti-gender equality truncated her ambition to some large extent and decided to honourably stepped down as the flag bearer for Allied Congress Party of Nigeria (ACPN) and aligned with other political parties to defeat All Progressives Congress (APC) and People's Democratic Party (PDP) (Ibekew, 2019). This symbolizes that women's have made efforts and attempt in multiple occasions to take their place in the society beyond kitchen role, but their curiosity to climb the political ladder in the 21st Century is always being thwarted by their men counterparts (Unimna, Essien, Opoh & Unimke, 2021).

CONCLUSION

Government Policies formulation in Nigeria seems to sabotage the efforts of women's in their desired to wrestle political powers with their men counterparts. A ban has been lifted for women's active participation in governance with 35% affirmative action and many women's are yet to rise up to their challenges and compete favourably with their men counterparts in the formulation of public policies to step-up their profile and status in the society. Therefore, it entails that a lacuna exists between the status quo and anticipation. Status quo implies that where women were politically, nothing much has been done to improve on their public out cried, perhaps, due to politics of calumny which is the order of the day in Nigeria. The anticipation in this context, is a driving force to achieve the 35% affirmative action in both elective positions and appointments, thus; optimistic that government policies reformation will occur soonest in favour of women to take active part in politics as the derive towards achieving gender equality in Nigeria in line with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations were made:

1. The outstanding women politicians should organize seminars on regular basis with palliatives for their fellow women and dialogue with political party's stakeholders to waive party nomination forms fee for all women with ambitions to contest elections.
2. Orientation and awareness should be created among men in the society that women role is beyond kitchen, as motivational factor for them to swing into political activities and woo into the country foreign investors for rapid development.
3. Women's 35% affirmation action should be fully enforced across the three tiers of government, thus; becomes a requirement for State and Local Government to access their monthly grants.
4. Above all, the constitution of the country as a supreme document should be amended and reserved certain percentage of elective positions at Federal, States and Local Governments for

women contestants as a way of actualizing gender equality in Nigeria in consonance with one of the goals of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

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