

## GENDER EQUALITY AND THE PROMOTION OF WOMEN IN POLITICAL OFFICES IN NIGERIA'S FOURTH REPUBLIC

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### Abstract

Women in Nigeria today are facing challenges in holding elective and appointive positions. Democracy involves a commitment to avail both men and women equal opportunity to develop their individual capacities. This paper examined gender inequality in political offices in Nigeria since the return to democracy in 1999. The sources of data for the study is mainly secondary and the feminist perspective is used as our framework of analysis. Findings revealed that the under representation of women in both elective and appointive positions is as a result of political, socio-economic and psychological factors. The paper therefore recommended that there should be general progress in the design of political and electoral systems and the level of institutionalization of, and transparency in political decision making in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** Gender equality, Women's Representation, Political Office.

### Introduction

Equality between men and women is recognized by both national and international laws as a fundamental Equality between men and women is recognized both national and international aspect of just, secure and democratic society. Gender needs to be considered at each and every state of policy formulation and decision making processes at all governance around the world. As a matter of concern, two important international agreements were ratified by national governments in which they committed themselves to integrate gender perspectives in the functioning of their institutions and policies. They are the International Convention for the Elimination of All Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the provisions of Convention on the Political Right of Women in 1952 as restated in Article 7 of the document whereby women are guaranteed the right to vote, to hold public office and to exercise public functions. The Beijing Platform For Action (BPFA) was aimed at promoting a set of principles concerning the equality between men and women. As rightly observed by Barmilla (2001), these agreements have been very important because they introduced a gender perspective in government institutions and policies.

Nigeria was one of UN member states that adopted the International Convention for the Elimination of All Discrimination Against Women and Beijing Declaration which support gender equality and women participation. But the country is far from implementing many of these agreements, as the political terrain remained male-centric. All registered political parties in Nigeria at present are not imbibing a credible gender framework in its party structure or promoting women participation in both elective and appointive positions.

A systematic analysis of women's political participation in Nigeria since 1999 when the country returned to democratic rule, reveals the same pattern and trend of engagement and outcome. The National Assembly in 1999 had three (3) (2.8%) female Senators and twelve (12) (3.3%) female House of Representatives members. In 2003, four (4) (3.7%) and twenty-one (21) (5.8%) female members were elected respectively into the Assembly. In 2007 the National Assembly had nine (9) (8.3%) female Senators and twenty-six (26) (7.2%) female members of House of Representatives. In 2011, the National Assembly had seven (7) (6.4%) female members and twenty-five (25) (6.9%) female

members in the lower House. In 2015, the National Assembly has seven (7) (6.4%) female members in Senate and (19) (5.2%) female in the House of Representatives. Moreover, as the playing field has not been even, well structured. Attempts to redress this imbalance should be welcomed. Positive action strategies, designed to facilitate women access to elected office, expand the voters choices at the ballot box should be encourage. This strategy also contributes to more inclusive and legitimate government. As observed by Leshie, and William (2005), government is more democratic if it include a substantial proportion of women and the proportion of position held by women in various tiers of government is a common yardstick used to judge national progress towards gender equality in public life as well as in the political empowerment of women.

Women in Nigeria today are not only under-represented in all top-level of government positions, but they also encountered additional difficulties even when they are in political positions. As argued by Adereti (2004), democracy involves a commitment to give both men and women equal opportunity to develop their individual capacities. However, women are at low level in the pursuit of this democratic principle.

Therefore, examining the status of Nigerian women in the politics cannot be divorced from the consideration of the entire political system in the country. We can argue that the lower status of Nigerian women in comparison to men is basically due to gender-imbalances that arise from unequal opportunities and access to control over productive resources and benefits. However, despite the fact that Nigerian women constitute almost half of the population and the constitutional guarantee of equality exists, women in Nigeria still constitute less than 4% of these in decision making, politics and governance. They are the most enthusiastic about politics yet they are the most marginalized in politics. Therefore, the objective of this paper is to examine Gender equality and the promotion of Nigeria women in political offices in Nigeria's fourth republic 1999-2015.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The underpinning theoretical framework for this paper is the Liberal Feminist theory. This theory is

based on the idea that women's ability to maintain their equality through their own actions and choices. Liberal feminist argued that society holds the false belief that women are, by nature, less intellectually and physically capable than men; thus it tends to discriminate against women in the academy, the forum, and the political arena. Liberal feminists believe that female subordination is rooted in a set of customary and legal constraints that blocks women's entrance to and success in the so-called public world and they strive for sexual equality via down to earth political and legal reform (Tong, 1989).

As observed by Ako-Nai (2004), the inequality created is the bedrock of the feminists ideology which attempts to liberate women from the undemocratic family and society. He submits that the feminist movement is moving away from welfare, concerns, but determined to champion women's participation at the gladiatorial level, including politics and governance. Taken from the above, we can argued that in the face of Nigeria, transition from military to civilian rule from 1999 till date at least a number of women have strive to liberate themselves from men domination and subordination in both administrative and political positions thereby leaving no doubt about the ability and capacity of women to perform when saddled with responsibilities at all levels.

In this 21<sup>st</sup> century no society can developed without inclusion of women in decision making process. In order to access the success or otherwise of Nigeria political process, gender equality or balance need to be taken into consideration. Therefore, Nigeria political elites should devoid from the belief in the dominance of men and the subordination of women which is rooted in power relations and dynamics that gives authority to men.

Bruce (2004) cited in George-Genyi (2010), rightly observed that the new directions in the theory and practice of representative democracy is the issue of gender mainstreaming in key decision-making within the public and private arena for sustainable development. Gender is mainstreamed when the development process and frameworks are transformed in ways which ensure the participation and empowerment of women as well as men in all



aspects of life and especially in decision-making structures. This is to say that gender equality in a democratic system creates room for equality, justice and fairness.

### Review of Related Literature

#### Political Parties as a Platform for Women Participation in Politics

In its resolution on women and political participation the UN General Assembly urged all states parties to strongly encourage political parties to remove all barriers that directly or indirectly discriminate against the participation of women, to develop their capacity to analyze issues from a gender perspective, and to adopt policies to promote the ability of women to participate fully at all levels of decision-making within those political parties (UN Resolution of the General Assembly 66/230 on Women and Political participation, 2012).

The level of women's representation in political office in any given country is determined by a wide range of factors. These include the general progress towards achieving equality of rights and opportunities among women in the public and private spheres, the design of political and electoral systems and the level of institutionalization of, and transparency in, political decision-making. It is within this complex set of factors, however, political parties are increasingly seen as the gatekeepers of the democracy and of women's political participation in politics.

According to Wilson (1992) a political party is a group that seeks to elect candidates to public office by supplying them with a label – a party identification by which they are known to the electorate. Therefore, political parties act as an instrument based on the unique and fundamental role they play in the democratic process. Parties all over represent the views and perspectives of citizens – both men and women. They also serve as a source in which women and men emerge as elected representative, therefore, how political parties functioned and their functions regulated can have significant impact on opportunities for women's political advancement. Laws governing political parties can directly or indirectly discriminate against women. For instance, high candidate deposit cost can stipulate requirements that many women are

unable to fulfill due to their unequal political and socio-economic power vis-à-vis men.

It should be stated that, political parties should ensure that quota system for women is considered to enable them promote equity and fairness in terms of gender balance. The rationale behind the quota system is to recruit women into political position and ensure that women do not remain at the bottom of the list. Quota system aims at ensuring that women constitute a large minority of 30 – 40% or even achieve a true gender balance of 50-50%. For instance, women encounter a lot of hurdles in getting nominated at the party primaries, there is always a lot of contentions with party leaders and delegates mainly composed of men. To this, quota will aid in achieving gender balance. As observed by Olabisi and Kehinde (2015) most political parties do not have specific quotas for Affirmation Action policies in favour of women. The few parties that showed some level of understanding and appreciation of women concerns in Nigeria are National Conscience Party, Democratic Alternative (DA), and All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA). The People Democracy Party (PDP) has been accused of being gender insensitive. In the party hierarchy or leadership structure, although there is the position of women leader from ward to national level, including the senatorial level, there is no provision for women in the caucus at different levels and National Executive Committee that forms the engine room of the party.

Factually, the marginalization and discrimination of women can be addressed by political parties through gender budgeting to support women in politics, this will enhance their participation in politics, thereby promoting their chance of occupying elective offices and strengthen the funding for women politicians.

The then Acting INEC chairperson Amina Zakari, speaking at the launch of stop 'Violence Against Women in Election' (VAWIE) campaign, observed that the constitution of most political parties in Nigeria lacked recognition for women participation in the electoral process, and the level of disregard by political parties to women's active roles in their activities as lamentable, this she attributed to absence of internal democracy in the parties. She further

Position	No. of Men and percentage (%)	No. of Female and percentage (%)	Total
State Houses of Assembly	966 (98.8%)	12 (1.2%)	978
House of Representative	347 (96.47%)	13 (3.6%)	360
Senate	106 (97.2%)	3 (2.8%)	109

Source: European Journal of Social Science Volume 14, Number 4(2010).

Table 2: Women in the State Houses of Assembly and National Assembly 2003

Office	No. of Men and percentage (%)	No. of Female and percentage (%)	Total
State Houses of Assembly	912 (96%)	39 (4%)	951
House of Representative	318 (94.7%)	21 (6%)	339
Senate	105 (96.3%)	4 (3.4%)	109

Source: The Nigeria CEDAW NGO Coalition Shadow Report (2008). New York, United Nation Committee on the Elimination of all Discrimination against Women.

Table 3: Women in the State Houses of Assembly and National Assembly 2007.

Office	No. of Men and percentage (%)	No. of Female and percentage (%)	Total
State Houses of Assembly	936 (94.5%)	54 (5.5%)	990
House of Representative	333 (93%)	26 (7%)	359
Senate	100 (91.7%)	9 (8.3%)	109

Source: European Journal of Social Science Volume 14, Number 4 (2010).

stated that the fear of violence, intimidation and blackmail are other factors that don't allow women to participate in the electoral process (Daily Trust, Tues. 06, 2015).

### An Overview of Women Representation in Nigeria Fourth Republic (1999-2015)

Nigeria is one of UN member states that adopted the International Convention for the Elimination of All Discrimination Against Women and Beijing Declaration which support gender equality and women participation. But its political landscape is still shrouded by inequalities, injustice, patron-clientele relationships, and political bigotry (Nnorom and Adisa, 2008). The money culture dominates the contemporary Nigerian politics; dictating choices of leaders at both the national and state levels party politics. Thus, political leadership in Nigeria is decided by might, strength and class and not by population. Therefore, women's experiences are determined by a multiplicity of factors. Even when the Nigerian constitution prohibits gender-based discrimination in party politics. These are presented using simple

percentage, table and frequencies below.

Table 1: Women in the State Houses of Assembly and National Assembly 1999

Table 1 shows that, women were underrepresented in the year 1999, out of 978 contestable seats in 36 State Houses of Assembly, men occupied 966 leaving 12 seats for women representing 1.2%. While in the House of Representative, out of total of 360 seats, women occupied 13 representing 3.6% and out of 106 seats for senate women only occupied 3 representing 2.8%.

Table 2: Women in the State Houses of Assembly and National Assembly 2003

Table 2 shows that there was increase of seat occupied by women in 2003. Out of 951 seats women occupied 39 seats representing 4% in State Houses of Assembly. While in the House of Representative out of 339 men secured 318 seats leaving women with 21 seats representing 6%, and in the senate men secured 105 seats out of 109 seats with women securing 4 seats representing 3.7%.

Table 4: Women in the State Houses and National Assembly 2011.

Office	No. of Men and percentage (%)	No. of Female and percentage (%)	Total
State Houses of Assembly	921 (96.5%)	69 (4.5%)	990
House of Representative	326 (9.4%)	19 (6%)	345
Senate	102 (93.6%)	7 (6.4%)	109

Source: National Bureau of Statistics (2009:63-65) in British Council Report, (2012).

Table 5: Women in the States House of Assembly and National Assembly 2015.

Office	No. of Men and percentage (%)	No. of Female and percentage (%)	Total
State Houses of Assembly	935 (96.5%)	55 (3.5%)	990
House of Representative	342 (96%)	14 (4%)	356
Senate	101 (94%)	8 (6%)	109

Source: (Hyperlink <http://www.feministafrica.org>) 2015.

Table 6: Gender Statistics of Fourth Republic Presidency 2011-2015 May 29.

Office	Male	Female
President	1	–
Vice-President	1	–
Ministers	40	7
Head of Service	1	–
SGF	1	–
Special Advisers	14	2
Permanent Secretary	40	8
Accountant General of the Federation	1	–
Chief of Protocol	1	–
Auditor General of the Federation	1	–
Senior Special Assistants	11	2
Total	112	19

Source: National Bureau of Statistics (British Council Report, 2015).

In 2007 general elections, women occupied total of 54 seats out of 990 representing 5.5% in the states assembly, while in the House of Representatives, the number of seats secured by women increased to 26 seats representing 7%. In the senate, there was an increase to 9 seats secured by women representing 8.3%.

Table 4 clearly indicated that women occupied 69 seats out of total of 990 representing 4.5% at the State House of Assembly.

While in the House of Representative the number of women decreased compared to 2007 with very high percentage. In the senate, women were able to

secure only 7 seats showing a drop of 2 seats secured in 2007.

Table 5 presents a summary of elected women representatives in 2015. The table indicates that women occupied 55 seats in the State Houses of Assembly in the 36 states representing 3.5%, 14 seats in the House of Representative representing 4% and 8 seats in the senate representing 6% respectively. Despite the acclaimed free, fair and credibility of the 2015 general elections, women are still underrepresented. This may be adduced from the activities of party leaders that did not created a conducive platform for internal democracy in the various political parties.



Table 7: Gender Statistics on State Governors in the Fourth Republic (1999-2015)

State	1999-2003		2003-2007		2007-2011		2011-2015		2015 to date	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Abia	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-
Adamawa	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-
Akwa Ibom	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-
Anambra	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-
Bayelsa	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-
Benue	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-
Bauchi	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-
Borno	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-
Cross River	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-
Delta	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-
Ebonyi	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-
Edo	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-
Ekiti	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-
Enugu	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-
Gombe	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-
Imo	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-
Jigawa	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-
Kaduna	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-
Kano	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-
Katsina	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-
Kebbi	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-
Kogi	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-
Kwara	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-
Lagos	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-
Nasarawa	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-
Niger	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-
Ogun	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-
Ondo	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-
Osun	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-
Oyo	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-
Plateau	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-
Rivers	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-
Sokoto	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-
Taraba	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-
Yobe	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-
Zamfara	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-

Source: (Hyperlink <http://www.feministaca.org>) 2015.

Table 8: Gender Statistics on State Deputy Governors in the Fourth Republic (1999-2015).

State	1999-2003		2003-2007		2007-2011		2011-2015		2015 to date	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Abia	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-
Adamawa	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-
Akwa Ibom	1	-	1	-	-	1	1	-	1	-
Anambra	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-
Bayelsa	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-
Benue	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-
Bauchi	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-
Borno	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-
Cross River	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-
Delta	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-
Ebonyi	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-
Edo	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-
Ekiti	1	-	1	-	-	1	1	-	1	-
Enugu	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-
Gombe	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-
Imo	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-
Jigawa	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-
Kaduna	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-
Kano	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-
Katsina	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-
Kebbi	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-
Kogi	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-
Kwara	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-
Lagos	-	1	-	1	1	-	-	1	-	1
Nasarawa	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-
Niger	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-
Ogun	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-

Tables 6, 7 and 8 shows how women are marginalized in appointive positions in Nigeria.

Conclusively, it could be stated that the reason why women are marginalized in Nigerian and elsewhere in the world are as a result of so many factors, which include; political, socio-economic and psychological. These challenges are examined in the next section.

#### **Obstacles to Women activeness in Nigeria Politics**

It is a fact that women around the world, at every socio-political level find themselves under represented and far removed from decision-making levels. The exclusion of women from decision-making bodies limits the possibilities for entrenching the principles of democracy, hindering economic development and discouraging the attainment of gender equality.

Multiple factors contributed to women participation in politics and access to elective and appointive political offices. This may be linked to different structural and functional constraints which differ across countries. Women's absence in the political arena is mostly due to political, socio-economic, ideological and psychological obstacles. However, political structures rather than social factors play a critical role in women's recruitment processes. For instance, women are often marginalized at the critical stages of party formation, men dominate the party structures and set out rules that marginalized women in active positions within the party.

Another factor hindering women involvement in politics in Nigeria is lack of party support. Women play important roles during campaigns and mobilizing support for their political parties, yet they rarely occupy decision making positions in the political party. Moreso, political parties possess resources for conducting electioneering campaigns, women rarely benefit from these resources.

In addition to men dominant of the political arena and lack of party support, other obstacles that hinder the effective participation of women in politics as identified by Aituage (2015) are:

- Limited financial support for women candidates;
- Fear of violence and intimidation;
- Lack of capacity and weak constituency

base;

- Limited access to political networks, and the prevalence of double standards;
- The lack of contact and cooperation with other public organization such as women's groups and civil society organizations.
- Absence of well-developed education and training systems for women leadership in general and for orienting young women toward political activities.
- The nature of political life which may or may not be favourable to women candidates;
- Traditional practices that deny women a voice in the society;
- Gender ideology and patriarchal structures which assign specific social roles to women and men;
- Women's perception of politics as a "dirty game" and men's perception of politics as a game for women of easy virtue;
- Negative portrayal of women in the media (Aituage, 2015:75).

Lastly, there is this argument that women themselves are disinterested in politics in Nigeria. Observers believed that the dominance of an all male military in governance for over 30 years, were women was hardly represented may had accounted for this. However, Hafsat (2014), also argued that, it might be the result of as an innate reason which has to do with the imbued disdain for politics among women.

Despite these obstacles, the numbers of women in elective and appointive positions in Nigeria in the Fourth Republic vividly show how women have struggled and continue to strive through civil societies organization and women NGOs towards achieving the gender parity target of 35%.

#### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Democratic elections require that citizens can choose freely from among competing political parties and candidates. The reluctance of party leaders in Nigeria to nominate equal numbers of female and male candidates limits voters (both women and men) ability to vote for women interested in elective offices.

It is a fact that the proportion of women



representation in government is a common yardstick used to judge national progress towards gender equality in public life as well as the political empowerment of women. As Ann (2010) rightly stated that this indicator has been adopted to monitor how far the UN member states will achieved the 2015 target set by the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) now UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

There is no doubt, that Nigeria women have encountered a number of problems while venturing into politics. There is serious discrimination and marginalization from men folk, both in elective and appointive political offices. Political life is organized according to male norms and values, and in some cases even male styles. For instance, politics is often based on the idea of winners and losers, competition and confrontation rather than on systematic collaboration and consensus especially across party lines. It may often result in women either rejecting politics altogether or rejecting male-style politics. Thus, when women do participate in politics, they tend to do in small numbers. So, the media has a lot of responsibility to play as a fourth branch of power – because of their influence on public opinion and public consciousness. The way media portray women, how they deal with issues of special concern to women, and whether they convey effectual voter education messages can have a major impact on women and thereby promote their political representation. The role of the mass media in an election process cannot be emphasized enough, practically speaking, if there is lack of proper converge of women's issues and the activities of women can contribute to lack of public awareness about them, which in turn translates into lack of constituency for women.

Furthermore, Education of girl-child should be taken with seriousness why because the girl-child are our future politicians who may one day aspire to be a female politicians. Prospective women politicians therefore, need to adopt Jerry Gana's three Bs: Be – economically empowered; Be politically aware and Be socially liberated.

Finally, excluding women from positions of power and from elected bodies impoverishes the development of democratic principles in public life and inhibits the economic development of a society.

Men, who do not necessarily support women's political participation, dominate the majority of governing institutions. Thus it remains imperative to emphasize that women must lead the process to organize and mobilize their networks, learn to communicate their interests with their male counterparts and different organizations, and push for mechanisms to enhance their representation.

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