
WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN NIGERIAN POLITICS AND ITS CHALLENGES FOR NIGERIA'S CENTENARY

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Abstract

Nigerian women have encountered a number of problems while venturing into politics. There is large scale discrimination from the men folk, both in voting for candidates and in allocating political offices. This paper examines women political participation in Nigeria and the challenges facing them. Descriptive survey was used to illustrate how women were involved in politics and decision-making in Nigeria. The paper observes some of the challenges facing women in politics; lack of resources or finance, large scale discrimination from men folks, conflict in multiple roles of women. The paper submits that the prospects of Nigerian women in politics are bright; if women are adequately empowered, if women could fight against discrimination from the men folk, and if there would be internal democracy in the political parties. It concluded that the government should establish a women's political institute and promote girl-child education in Nigeria.

Keywords: Political Participation, Marginalization, Discrimination

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Introduction

In many countries especially in Nigeria, women have been practically absent in politics. This is not because of their lack of interest or will but because of their marginalization in the society. Women constitute about 56 percent of the total population (NPC, 2011), yet they are discriminated against in the political process. It would appear that the marginalization of Nigerian women is more pronounced in the democratization process. Women in Nigeria constitute more than two-thirds of the country's 70 percent adult non-literate population while they hold less than five percent of the important decision making positions (UNDP HDI, 2009). The present national assembly in Nigeria has an appallingly low average of 0.05 percent of women in both Senate and House of Representatives. This limited conception of the political relevance of women is responsible for their political marginalization.

The marginalization of women in the parliaments' leadership manifests deep bias in their in-house politics. Besides competitive elective positions, women have also been reduced to sideline actors in appointive posts at all levels of governance. At the federal level, Obasanjo's second-term cabinet had only 6 or 12 percent women out of 49 ministers, the rest were men. And out of 11 senior special Advisers to the president, only 1 or 9.1 percent was a female. Appointment to ambassadorial positions and into the 36 states' cabinets and boards of public parastatals and corporations at the Federal and State levels were also lacking in gender justice and consciousness (Ajayi, 2005). The composition of the National Conference on Political Reform constituted by former President Obasanjo was deeply gendered. The 400 delegate conference had only 30 or 7.5 percent women in both elective and appointive political and decision making positions. This is far less than the 35 percent affirmative action recommended by the International Women Conference held in Beijing in 1995 (Esuene, 2014).

Politics is about power and influence, it is a struggle of contending viewpoints on the allocation and distribution of resources. It determines who gets what, when and why. The contest for political power in Nigeria is driven by the contrasting imperatives of ethnicity and regionalism which by implications is devoid of any sustaining

unifying theme or ideology. The history of Nigerian politics is replete with individuals who have consistently violated the people's trust and have lost credibility in the system. Nigerian politics is mostly dominated by men leaving little or no space for women. It is obvious that the participation of women in decision making, particularly in politics, education and other public office, is very minimal. However, women involvement in politics is essential because it is through politics that they can determine their priorities, values and the allocation of their resources (IDEA, 1997).

It is against this backdrop, that our discussion here would be centered on the issue of women participation in Nigerian politics. The paper, therefore examines the interface between women and Nigerian politics and the extent to which, women are involved in party politics since the creation of Nigeria to date. The paper will also look into the challenges of women in politics and the way forward.

The interface between Nigerian Politics and Women

In Nigeria, many women register as party members but do not regularly participate in party meetings and caucuses where important decisions are taken. They dreaded such party congregations because of fear of violence and the nocturnal character of the meetings, which they believe, only dirty and irresponsible women could attend (Mainman in Fatile, O.J., Akhakpe, I., Igbokwe-Ibeto, C.J. and Oteh, C.O. 2012). Consequently, most female politicians vying for political offices in Nigeria, do so in relatively unknown and unpopular political parties, For instance, in addition to the unpopularity of the parties, in 2003, only one of the three women Presidential contestants, Dr. (Mrs) Sarah Jubril, was relatively heard of before the election, others were politically unknown personalities.

Prior to the elections in Nigeria, women often seem to dominate campaign rallies. Women often made such political fora very much lively and colourful as they were the most active in terms of adorning the occasion with beautiful attires, dancing, shouting party slogans. They also, sing endlessly the praises of electoral candidates and party leaders who are invariably men. Nonetheless, despite the active participation of women in the electoral processes, women's marginality has been sustained in the elections as they remain victims

of traditional gender violence and discrimination (Ajayi, 2005).

In spite, of all the inter-sex violence and discrimination on women, they still have ample electoral opportunity to acquire power and effect change by virtue of their greater (60 percent) electoral capacity. However, at the end of the elections, women voters hardly convey their electoral strength to political victory by not voting women contestants in elections (Ajayi, 2005). Instead, they sustained their traditional electoral behaviour of overwhelmingly voting for the men.

A cursory look at the pattern of women who contested the 2007 election revealed that most of those women who contested and won are those who have powerful political connections with powerful politicians by reasons of birth or marriage (Olojede, 2009). Maryam Ali, who contested the 2007 senatorial elections in Delta North Senatorial constituency, is the wife of the then National Chairman of Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), (The Punch cited in Olojede, 2009). Zainab Kure, representing Niger South Senatorial Constituency, is the wife of the former Niger State Governor. She was at the time referred to as political "green horn" (Saturday Punch cited in Olojede, 2009). Emen Ekaette is the wife of the former secretary to the Government of the federation. She represented Akwa-Ibom on the platform of the PDP. Iyabo Obasanjo-Bello is the eldest daughter of the former President Olusegun Obasanjo; she represented Ogun Central Senatorial Constituency. Gbemisola Saraki-Fafowora, who represents the PDP Kwara Central Senatorial Constituency, is the daughter of the strongman of Kwara politics- Dr. Olusola Saraki (Olojede, 2009). We also have Benny Lar who represented Langtang North and South at the Federal House of representative on the platform of PDP. She is the daughter of Chief Solomon Lar who was the first National Chairman of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP).

Women Participation in Politics (1914 - 1960)

The period of 1914 to 1960 witnessed a great devastation, deterioration and degradation of women's rights in Nigeria. The policy adopted by the British Colonial Government was based on English culture and traditions which were greatly opposed to Nigeria culture and

traditions. It contrasted greatly with the concept of the traditional place and role of women in Nigeria. The British Victorian concept of the place and role of women in their society was a system of single-sex political system which was opposed to the dual-sex political system operated in traditional Nigerian society (Olugbemi, 2011).

The colonial government did not appreciate the important contributions of women and their sense of independence in certain matters such as education. They failed to recognize the traditional participation of women in the public affairs of their society. This stance informed the educational programme of the colonial government which did not give room for the status of women. The policy was based on the home policy which did not enfranchise woman until British Act of 1918 (Warner in Olugbemi, 2011). Even then, there was disparity between men and women; the franchise was given to women of the thirty years and to men of twenty one, and this remained until 1928. However, the reforms by King George VI in 1936 gave women full citizenship and equal right with men. Prior to this time, women could not enter into any male – oriented profession, such as medicine, law, engineering, etc.

The British women were not as economically empowered as Nigerian women at this period. As earlier stated, Nigeria women were implementing men's roles on the social, economic and political fronts. In fact, the participation and immense contribution of women in the family made men in Nigeria to be polygamous in nature. But in Britain's traditional system, women were treated as a weaker vessel hence they could not contribute effectively to Britain's social, economic and political system. Therefore, Nigerian women cannot be placed on an equal pedestal with their British counterparts. In spite of the colonial government's opposition, Nigerian women did not relent in their efforts in being involved in politics, like their male counterparts. They formed the women wing of the National Council of Nigerian Citizen (N.C.N.C.) (Olugbemi, 2011).

In 1959, Mrs. Funmilayo Ransome Kuti, in a bid to regain and restore the lost political power of Nigerian women, contested as an independent candidate when the N.C.N.C. refused to adopt her. Unfortunately she lost. Her failure did not deter other women from participating in politics. Another woman, called Adunni Oluwole,

from Ibadan took a bolder step than others by forming her own party – Nigerian Commoners Party, at Mushin in 1954 (Arifalo in Olugbemi, 2011). One Mrs. G. Olateju, a pensioner and a cocoa farmer, also formed the 'Nigeria Liberal Party' in the same year. She merged her party with that of Adunni Oluwole to become Nigerian Commoners Liberal Party and they were affiliated with N.C.N.C. Adunni also contested elections into the House of Representatives in 1956 but lost (Onabamiro, 1983). Apart from individuals in Lagos, market women organized themselves as a formidable group, thus enabling women in western and the eastern parts of Nigeria to acquire the right to vote and be voted for in the 1950s. The Nigerian women were united in agitating for the same enfranchisement for the Northern Nigeria women.

In Northern Nigeria, women, in spite of the introduction of Islamic religion, responded to the politics of the time. According to (Arifalo, in Olugbemi, 2011) " Alhaja Malama Gambo Sawaba was under the tutelage of the late Mrs. Funmilayo Ransome Kuti, and acquired political education under the late Malam Aminu Kano at the NEPU School of Agitation and Propaganda". She also was a woman organizer who founded the women's wing of NEPU in Kano and had confrontations that led to her being jailed by the British Government.

From the foregoing, Nigerian women struggled and did not relent under the repression of British colonial rule. Despite opposition from the British colonial government, it is noteworthy that Nigerian women contributed a lot to nationalism and the attainment of independence. In fact, in the words of Afigbo(1980)... "what is known is that it is the riot organized by women that shattered the complacent British belief that their rule was welcome by an overwhelming majority of Nigerians". Again, Nigerian women, however, were less influenced by the Western world in their agitation for political participation and rights until the end of British rule in Nigeria.

Women Participation in Politics (1960 – to date)

After nearly a century of British over lordship, Nigeria finally secured her independence on the 1st of October, 1960. Thus, women in Nigeria ought to have started participating in politics, regained their political participation because at the period of decolonization, Britain had

granted full participation and citizenship to women. Only inadvertently was the Victorian concept of women's place in the kitchen removed. Thus, the barrier against women in Nigeria collapsed. The Western world, therefore, started the campaign for women's liberation.

Nigeria women did not form any party on sex-basis, but having recognized that political parties were essential ingredients of democracy, they became members of the various political parties in Nigeria. That was between 1960-1964. They even emerged as officers of these political parties. For example, the late Mrs. Funmilayo Kuti was the treasurer of the National Council of Nigerian Citizens (N.C.N.C.) Western Committee. The various women associations were to ensure political victory during elections. Apart from not forming their own political party, women at this period in Nigeria did not also contest any elections (Olugbemi, 2011).

The real emancipation of Nigerian women was made (about) after the First Republic as a result of global action by the United Nations to improve the lot of women. The United Nations Declaration of 1967 stipulated in Article Three thus: "All appropriate measures should be taken to educate public opinion and direct national aspirations toward the eradication of prejudice and the abolition of customary and all other practices which are based on the idea of inferiority of women". Thereafter, Nigeria women stepped up agitation for full participation in politics.

The period between 1979 and 1983 witnessed rapid and increased women participation in politics. Women were involved in the running of the parties at the local, state and the federal levels. Women wings of the parties were strengthened and women leaders elected into the executive committees of parties. The increased awareness and active participation of women were buttressed by the events of the preceding years. The declaration that 1975 was the International Women's Year also helped to stress a policy of equality, development and peace in the World. However, the involvement of women in political matters at this time made tremendous impact on the constitution which was re-written to remove some obstacles inhibiting women's full participation. At this period, the Islamic women were given the rights to vote and be voted for. During the 1983 elections, a female member, Franca Afegbua, was elected into

the Senate from Afemai Senatorial District of the then Bendel State. In 1983, eight women were elected into the House of Representatives from the eastern, northern and western parts of Nigeria. The geographical spread was an indication that women in Nigeria had actually spread the gospel of active participation in politics to the Fourth Republic. Nigerian women did not relent in their efforts to develop on equal terms with men, especially in the political field. The slogan "what a man can do, a woman can do better" became the order of the period. Also, the slogan "behind every successful man, there is a woman" was substituted with "beside every successful man there is a woman". It was all in the attempt at bringing more women to the political field.

Between 1990 and 1993, under Babangida's transitional arrangements, Nigerian women became very politically conscious and involved. Indeed, Mrs. Sarah Jubril contested as a candidate among a total of thirteen presidential candidates – the first of its kind in the history of Nigeria. Chief (Mrs.) Titi Ajanaku, a nurse by profession, floored all the male contestants to emerge as the Chairman of Abeokuta Local Government, Ake in Ogun State. She had contested and won on the platform of Social Democratic Party. Mrs Bola Ogunbo ran as a Vice-presidential candidate to Alhaji Yusuf. Women were so involved that many were appointed to government parastatals, and commissions. Mrs. Osinatu Ojikutu was picked as Deputy Governor of Lagos State while Prof. Mrs. Abba Sagoe became the Secretary to Government under Governor Michael Otedola in Lagos State (Olugbemi, 2011).

NIGERIAN WOMEN ELECTED TO POLITICAL POST (1999 - 2015)

Position	No. of appointments	1999	2 0 0 3	2 0 0 7	2 0 1 1	2 0 1 5
President	1	0	0	0	0	0
Senate	1 0 9 3	3	3	9	8	7
House of Representatives	3 6 0	1 3	2 1	2 5	1 9	1 4
Governor	3	0	0	0	0	0
Deputy Governor	3 6	2	2	6	3	5
State House of Assembly	9 9 0	1 2	3 8	5 4	1 0	N . A

Source: www.nairaland.com. Apr. 13, 2015. [http:// www.inecmigeria.org/gubernational-election-winners-2011](http://www.inecmigeria.org/gubernational-election-winners-2011).

NIGERIAN WOMEN APPOINTED IN THE MINISTERIAL LIST (1999 – 2015)

Position	No. of appointments	1 9 9 9	2 0 0 3	2 0 0 7	2 0 1 1	2 0 1 5
Minister	4 2	8	8	7	1 3	5

Source: www.nairaland.com. Nov. 11, 2015. www.thenews.ng. Nov. 11, 2015.

In 1999, Nigeria women had been sensitized for full participation. More women were involved in politics, many contested but only few won elections into the Senate, House of Representative and houses of assemblies. For the first time, in the history of Nigeria, a female speaker emerged at the House of Representatives. Also, two Deputy Governors emerged both at Lagos and Benue States. Out of the twelve female candidates, Mrs. Lola Fagbemi won the election to the Ondo State House of Assembly on the platform of P.D.P via her Ondo constituency. The Obasanjo led government assented to the bill on 'Policy on Women'. The policy, if fully implemented according to the United Nation's specifications, will give 30 percent of parliamentary seats to women. This is a step forward for women's development in the areas of politics. Nigerian women participated in this civilian government than ever before. During 1999 to 2003, under the leadership of Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, six female ministers were appointed.

A review of women participation in politics in Nigeria from 1999 to 2007 reveals that the number of female legislators in the state Houses of Assembly also increased from 21 to 116 between 1999 and 2007. At the executive level, women had not fared badly, between 1999 and 2007; women recorded one executive governor, one state

house of assembly speaker and held many ministerial appointments, special advisers and other political positions. These can be viewed as an arithmetic progression. With the high level of participation and awareness in government, women are challenged to lift up the society above its present moral state. In spite of the high turnover of the Senate presidency, which changed five times between 1999 and 2007, no woman was deemed fit to occupy the position. Indeed, in 2007 Mrs. Patricia Ette was elected Speaker, House of Representatives which was short lived as a result of corruption charges leveled against her.(Fatile, et al 2012).

In the 2011 general elections, an increased number of Nigerian women defied the odds, stepped into the murky waters, aspired and contested for party's primaries; many lost and only few emerged as candidates. However, fewer of them emerged as winners. The number and percentage of women who were successful at the polls in 2011 was less than the figure in 2007, 2003 and 1999. The 2011 general elections could be described as the year of the might falling. There was indeed the whittling down of the influence of political god fathers as their candidates performed woefully at the elections. However, it seems patriarchy, religion, ethical issues, party intrigues and absence of internal democracy of political parties could be some underlining reasons for the poor performance of women at the polls in addition to the new wave of democratization in the country as well as the awareness by the electorate that they have the final say on who should represent them through their ballots. The fate of Senators Gbemisola Saraki and Iyabo Obasanjo-Bello, who respectively contested for governorship and senatorial elections in Kwara and Ogun States, are typical examples (Uhuo, 2011; Irabor, 2011).

Under Jonathan's administration, Nigeria ranked 23rd or 28.1 percent in the ministerial appointment. Esuene (2012) regretted that in the elective segment Nigeria scored only 6.8 percent taking the 125th position in the world. She also regretted that out of the 146,916 elected party positions in People Democratic Party (PDP) nationwide, only 9,606 or 6.53 percent were female compared to 51,421 or 35 percent affirmative Action.

Under the Buhari administration, five or 13.8 percent female ministers was appointed out of 36 slot, which is relatively lower than

Jonathan administration. In the 2015 General Elections, out of 109 Senatorial seats, only seven or 6.4 percent were female. Fourteen (or 3.8 percent) females were elected into the House of Representative out of 360 seats. Out of 36 Deputy Governor seats, only five (or 13.8 percent) females were elected.

Challenges of Women in Politics

Nigerian women have encountered a number of problems while venturing into politics. First and foremost, there is large scale discrimination from the men folk, both in voting for candidates and in allocating political offices. In the political arena, throughout the world, women, according to Walters (2005), face obstacles to equal participation in political decision-making processes. Women in Nigeria have always been grossly underrepresented in party membership as well as in the decision-making structure of the party. This emanated from the exclusion of women from political governance and leadership in the colonial rule which introduced the British single sex model of administration as practised in other British colonies. The basic promise of the colonial gender ideology was based on the principle that women were not to function in public domains as men but to be domesticated.

The conflict in multiple roles of women is another limiting factor. It has been established that multiple roles of women as caretakers of homes and office workers tend to divide women's attention in different directions, with negative consequences on performance at work and promotion. Corporate culture was yet another problem identified. It was discovered that employers prefer to recruit and promote men rather than women on the premise that women are less achievement oriented and are often distracted from their jobs by domestic duties, thus, denying them of economic prosperity (Olojede, 1996).

Another problem confronting women from active political participation is lack of adequate education. Women constitute a larger percentage of the illiterate group in Nigeria. This could be attributed to the fact that in most families, parents prefer to send their sons to school, instead of their daughters, whom they feel would eventually get married and thus get incorporated into another family (Nwagwu and Ifeanacho, 2009). Lack of adequate finance is yet, a

crucial hindrance to effective female participation in politics in Nigeria. Large portions of the Nigerian female population are not as financially strong as their male counterparts.

Also, political instability arising from frequent and uncoordinated changes of government hinders political participation of women. The prevailing intra-party politics makes it difficult for women to get party nomination to contest elective posts because there are few women party members; even the few party women are unable to capture significant party offices. Consequently, the very low level of representation at the party executive level impacts negatively on them as decisions and shadow elections are made at those levels. Some parties even refuse the candidature of women and thus, after campaigning with their resources, they are dropped at the nomination level in favour of male candidates. Women usually constitute a smaller percentage of the political party membership because of the social, cultural and religious attitudes of different Nigerian societies which often tend to relegate women to the background. As a result, only very few men, even among the educated, allow their wives to participate in politics. In Northern Nigeria, an important factor inhibiting women's participation is the purdah system (i.e. house seclusion of women) (Adamu in Fatile, et al 2012).

Concluding Remarks

The performance of women at the 2011 general elections calls for sober reflection and an urgent need to re-strategize for the 2015 general elections. There is urgent need for internal democracy in the political parties to whittle down male dominated party executives. There should also be examination/assessment of parties' primaries with a view to formulating and implementing reforms that will support a more level playing field.

The establishment of a women's political Institute where parties and all female aspirants and candidates would be equipped with relevant skills that underpin the positions should be desirable. The outcome would inform necessary remedial steps aspirants should take to address gaps to reposition them for exigency of electoral campaigns and elective office.

Women in Nigeria should also develop positive attitudes to

politics. It is by taking up leadership positions that can institute reforms in favour of women. Nigerian women should learn to assert themselves right from home by fighting discriminatory and sexist practices; even in the wider society they should not nurture patriarchy but fight it. Nigerian women need spiritual reawakening in order to rediscover themselves and have lofty dreams that will take them to greater heights (Madunaga, 1985).

Government should promote the education of girls by making education free for girls from poor homes; this will improve female literacy in Nigeria. Accidental pregnancy should not make a young lady to drop out of school. Such a victim can still make it academically if she is not discriminated against in the society. (Nwagwu and Ifeanacho, 2009; Acholonu, 2001; Iwerieber, 1996).

Women empowerment according to Bergriffswelt (Acholonu, 2001) means providing resources to people in disadvantaged situations, so that they can strengthen their own capacities in order to fully participate in the community and to articulate their interests. This requires the full participation of all affected people in the formulation, implementation and evaluation of decisions that determine the well-being of societies. Empowerment of women is a "bottom-up" process of transforming gendered power relations as well as social, economic, legal and political institutions. Increasing women's participation and improving their shares in resources, land, employment and income relative to men, are necessary and sufficient for lasting changes in their economic and social position. This cannot be achieved in the absence of the existence of good gender relation and interaction between men and women.

Esuene (2012) suggested that, there is a need to engage relevant stakeholders in the decision making process for the Nigerian states to develop. Also, the political parties in Nigeria should consider more women for the elected positions within their parties in order to instill confidence in both gender, as well as change the social psyche towards female participation in governance.

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