

**GENDER ISSUES: WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN GOVERNANCE OF NIGERIA****\*Yusuf, L. I., Dauda, G., Ahmed, F.F., Phineas, T. P**

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**Abstract**

Nigeria is a patriarchal society characterized by acute discrimination, exclusion; inequality and impunity. These features relate to issues of gender imbalance. This study discusses the need for full participation of women in Governance of Nigeria, an issue that has been denied consideration in the Nigerian polity especially in Adamawa State. This study presents various strategies that may be applied by both government and/or decision makers and women themselves for full integration of women into the mainstream of politics in Nigeria and Adamawa State in particular. It is appropriate to focus on this important aspect of development in the Nigerian polity. The researcher also gave a theoretical framework and reviewed some related literatures that are in line with women and democratic governance. The contribution of women to the socio-economic and political development of any modern democratic state is essential and indispensable. This paper examines the extent of women participation in politics and national development in Nigeria. The study adopted secondary data as sources of information. The constraints of women participation in politics pose as hindrance to national development in Nigeria. It is discernible from this study that cultural, environmental, educational and gender factors are major barriers to active women participation in politics. It is part of the objectives of this work to realize active women participation in National political life for a sustainable National development. Government at all levels should embark on enlightenment campaign to sensitize the public on the need for more women to embrace and pursue education as this is a catalyst for active women participation in politics. It is also recommended that coercive legislations should be made at all levels against every form of discrimination against women.

**Keywords:** Gender Issues, Women and Governance.

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**INTRODUCTION****Role of women in development of Nigeria since pre-colonial times**

Throughout the ages, the sharing of power, wealth, influence, employment etc. between men and women has never been closer to equality. This notwithstanding, the role played by women in all facets of human endeavor has been quite noticeable. Osuala, (2000) grouped the role of women into seven categories, namely; mother, worker or producer outside the home, worker or producer inside the home (of goods and services), wife, kinswoman, community member and individual woman. These roles or degrees of their performance vary among culture and from time to time, even within the same culture. These seven roles can be said to be interdependence. Traditionally, the woman's role was confined to child-bearing, domestic work and wife. Olutayo (2006) argues that women are imprisoned indoors into traditionally restricted areas such as agriculture and "domestic work". In the agricultural sector, both Adesina, (2000) and Afonja, (2007) have highlighted the role of Nigerian women in agriculture. As highlighted by the authors, Nigerian women have worked side by side with men in agriculture with some marked division of labor between them. Men perform the tedious tasks such as felling trees, gathering and burning of bush and making ridge while women were involved in planting of seeds particularly food crops, harvesting, transportation, processing and selling farm products. In Nigeria, there were significant regional difference in women's participation in agriculture, for instance,

Hausa women did not work in fields, whereas Kanuri women did, but both helped in harvesting and were responsible for all household food processing. A study of women in the country revealed that on an overall basis, 40 percent of the rural women regarded farming as their major occupation in modern times Ahern and Paul, (2000) Commenting on the role of women as producer outside the home, Azikiwe, (2000), in directing attention to the invisibility of women in development planning, opined that women are a productive force in the Nigerian economy, though they may not be statistically identified as part of the "economic active population". According to the author, women will take work wherever they find it while they combine domestic work with wage labor. Most often, these roles are enacted while other traditional roles of wife and mother also make demand for time and energy. At the extreme of the family, the woman dominates cultural activities that are aimed at producing visibility of motherhood in terms of domestic basic needs such as food, care, socialization, education of children and so on. At the public extreme, they dominate the market place, buying and selling products of sustenance of their families and in times of communal conflict, they take a positive position to see justice done (Afonja, 2006). In Igbo cultural tradition, women are seen as the first producer and reproducer of all in human society. Motherhood is hence adored as the "goddess of all souls". The comparison between women and fruit-bearing trees lies at the root of certain aspects of indigenous social and ethical philosophy. Firstly, just as one cannot in the interest of human beings joke with the survival of fruit-bearing trees, one could not joke with the fate of women. Given this indigenous social and ethical philosophy of motherhood status, women were better suited by nature (God) to attain leadership position or be in control of economic and political spheres in society

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than men. Put differently, women, unlike men have been 'programmed' by God and Nature as child bearers, loving and caring, food providers, reformers and managers of human affairs. Such, women as child-bearers were responsible for the continued existence of the society (Eze, 2003). These and many socio-cultural values like loyalty and obedience to her husband according to Oyewunmi (2002) became part of the roles women especially in Igbo culture. In the pre-colonial, no woman is seen as a poor mother irrespective of her marital status. What follows from this is that, poverty is not culturally attached to the woman in Hausa society. Ityavyar and Ityaavyar, (2002) observes that the woman's role in food production and agriculture was important. They carried out ritual purification, fixed a date for the planting of women's crops which include cocoyam, vegetable, cassava and the protection of their crops from theft and damage. The women were responsible for feeding their families not only during the planting season but also throughout the rest of the year. Fanning, (2000), observes that besides producing food, women also prepare it. Women, according to the author, are naturally born to be scrupulous and hardworking, that is why they are called home builders and since they have the qualities to build, women should be given a bigger space to build and develop the nation. It becomes encouraging if the Nigerian government could enact rules that would ensure the full participation of the female gender in building the nation. Ifayose, (2001) argues that womanhood is multi-dimensional concept which involves dynamics of ordering, re-ordering, creating structures and building in co-operation with "Mother Nature" at all levels of human endeavor. She asserts that there is no true development, nation or environment without the full participation of women at least at the grassroots.

In the informal sector, women are in full participation. Here agriculture is excluded and the emphasis is on rural and urban informal sector of the economy Hartman, (2006). These covers activities such as trading, domestic service, construction work, sewing, hair dressing as well as involvement in crafts and cottage industries like weaving, soap making and pottery. Women in the informal sector are involved in self-employment (own account workers) which allows for flexibility of roles (that is, it enables women to combine both family and job responsibilities fairly easily) Ifiok, (2007). Women also participate in the formal sector of the economy. The level of female participation in the federal and state civil service over the years shows the contribution of women in the development of Nigeria since precolonial times. Women are found in universities as academic staff, we have doctors, dentists etc. which have increased considerably in recent years. Women can now be found in virtually every occupation. By and large, Nigerian women who have had the opportunity to be involved in the formal sector have performed quite well in the professions both in the public and private sectors of the economy Inoni, (2004). Despite all these contributions of women to national development, Nigerian women and women of Adamawa State in particular still lack the opportunity of men. But the above structures or contributions represents a good model of how women participate in and contribute to the country's development agenda with a sense of ownership-hence, the sustained spirit of voluntarism in which they serve. Women also come together in associations to address issues that affect them, creating self-help groups and cooperatives to assist the less privileged, their communities, themselves or simply to meet the everyday needs of providing for their families there are over one thousands of these groups in Each

community Madubuike and Solomon, (2007). They may be informal or formally registered with the government. Hundreds of thousands of the less privileged, orphaned children etc. were brought under their care and protection. Women join microfinance credit programmes to address the needs of their families and implement socioeconomic initiatives at the community level. The income-generating activities they initiated become important entry points for economic empowerment (Mba, 2005). The creation of awareness about gender issues is one of the tools of promoting greater participation of women in decision-making organs and other political programmes.

### Women and Governance in Nigeria

The governance debate in development policy, according to Okomo, (2000) took off with different influences and interpretations of the issues. According to the author, narrow definitions of governance center on economic and administrative governance (i.e. providing an enabling environment for private sector activity and reform of public administration); broader definitions encompass political governance, including the promotion of democratic political structures and human rights. In UNDP's definition, governance is the 'exercise of economic, political and administrative authority to manage a country's affairs at all levels. It comprises the mechanisms, processes and institutions through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise their legal rights, meet their obligations and mediate their differences' Saliu, (2001). Before the advent of the colonialists in Nigeria, women were performing various roles in the various societies that later became Nigeria. Each particular society had its own defined roles for women which were often than not made their exclusive preserve. Women also held political leadership positions and participated actively in the decision-making process. Ujo, (2004) and Ityavyar (2002) have traced the historical participation of Nigerian women in politics to the pre-colonial era. They went further to mention Oba Orompo, a female Oba, who was an influential figure who restored dignity, peace and stability in Oyo Kingdom and Princess Moremi, a prominent politician of Ile-Ife. Uku, (2003) mentioned other women of high profile like Madam Tunubu of Lagos, who rose to become a prominent and commercial elite of her community in Lagos and later settled in Abeokuta where she organized its defense against the Dahomeian invasion in 1863 Aliyu, (2006).

According to Ibrahim, (2006), Tunubu was rewarded with the title of Iyalode (First Lady), earning her constitutional right to influence the affairs of the community. Archibong (1852-1863) was the political head of Calabar and developed sophisticated strategies to protect Calabar from the colonial invasion. Omu Nwagboko was a political leader in Onitsha, who helped the missionaries promote Christianity there. She successfully lobbied to prevent women from holding market on Sundays. She signed a treaty between Queen Victoria of England and Onitsha in 1884. In the 1860s, Ojedi Umodie emerged as a powerful leader of the Igalas during the colonial invasion of the land (Ityavyar and Ityavyar, 2002). According to National Gender Policy, (2006), the pre-colonial Hausa of Northern Nigeria and pre-Islamic society shows a record of women who held political offices and titles like the Magajiya (Queen), and Iya (Queen Mother) before the Jihad. In addition to Queen Amina, opines the author, there were notable women such as Bazoa Turunku, Daurama of Daura. In Borno, powerful female

politicians include the Magira (Queen Mother), who was one of the principal field-holders in the state and possessed a full complement of administrative staff including men-at arms whom she used to impose her political authority. Through the Magiram and Dogoma, she decided and judged cases among the Harem and also extended her political control to other territories Onah, (2005). Madubuike and Solomon (2007) opined that during the colonial administration, Nigerian women played very prominent roles in the struggle for independence. The authors argued that one cannot forget the role played by the courageous Aba women of substance who dared the colonial regime. They resisted government encroachment against their sphere of influence by using their tradition of collective sex solidarity to push for influence in society. This they did in spite of colonial constraints against the visibility, representation and participation of women in public sphere. Otite, (2006) argues that there were also women of substance who discharged themselves honorably during the struggle for independence and after. These include Mrs. Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti, Mrs. Margret Ekpo, Hajia Gambo Sabawa etc.

Restituta (2007) opined that there is a general consensus among academics, political practitioners and feminists that the colonial era has a very negative impact on Nigerian women's participation in governance and politics and greatly reversed the historical political gains by women. Situation where women are still trying to reduce the gender gap thus created with limited success. She further explains that the British administration introduced Victorian standards which relegated the woman to domestic production. In pursuance of this Victorian values, when the British introduced electoral politics, Nigerian women were excluded Ciroma, (2006).

Since independence, the prospects of the Nigerian women have greatly improved politically, yet their contributions remain marginal especially in the elective arena. Ciroma, (2006) opines that participation of the Nigerian women in the appointive position is more obvious, most importantly because, Nigerian politics since independence has been more of military dictatorship rather than representative democracy Okwechino, (2004). However, the author also argues that different administrations have at various times come out with policies that sought to enhance the participation of women. But most of these parties followed the colonial administrative pattern of excluding women in politics Afonja, (2007).

According to Ityavyar and Ityavyar (2002), the common character of these parties is that they exclude women and there were no constitutional guarantees for women's political participation. In the authors' observations, women of the Southern part of Nigeria got right to vote and be voted for in 1954 while Northern women got their universal franchise in 1976 and were able to vote in the 1979 elections. The Southern women had a head-start of 22 years, giving them a political edge. During the first Republic, argues Otite, (2006), women's participation was at very low ebb. In Northern Nigeria, the Northern People's Congress (NPC) as the ruling party did not allow women to participate at all. The explanation of this was that women's place was in the home and Islam injunctions were cited. Progressive parties like Northern elements Progressive Union (NEPU) and the United Middle Belt congress (UMBC) in principle, wanted women to participate but lacked the legal and constitutional framework for implementation.

## The Concept of National Development in Nigeria

The word "National" according to the Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary is anything connected or shared by a whole nation. It has to do with a phenomenon that relates to a whole nation which could either be an event or a subject. The Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English also sees "National" as a phenomenon that embraces a whole nation. Development on the other hand, in this context, is social and material advancement of a country or people in some chosen areas or in all aspects of a national life. Development has been defused in different ways by different scholars. Development is a continuous process. It has to do with some qualitative changes in the living conditions of the people. According to Allen, (2006) any structural change that does not impact the living conditions of the mass of citizens positively in spite of rise in per capita income is questionable and lacking in human content of development. Development is a relative and continuous process to a very large extent, Obikeze and Obi, (2004) sees development as involving the improvement of all facets of human endeavor. The politics, the economy, the culture, and social life of the society must improve before we can comfortably talk of development in such a society. Development is multidimensional, as it has to do with the eradication of poverty, inequality and the reduction of unemployment within the economy. National development therefore is the collective and overall development of the country. This entails the socio-political, socio-economic and religious advancement of the state though used in this context as socio-economic development tool. This could be achieved through a collective implementation of policies that are carefully planned by the government to actualize set goals. As Nnamdi, (2008) rightly puts it, the concept is used to depict the increase in the location of industries and the provision of infrastructures for massive production and equitable distribution of goods and services to the citizens of a country to enhance their standard of living. National development is encompassing, as it requires not only the kind of modern technologies in the development world and industries but also the moral capacity to sustain them. It requires collective efforts both on the path of citizens and the government. It means improved standard of living, greater awareness and increase in goods and services.

## The Contributions of Women to National Development

Nigerian women have made invaluable contributions to National development from the precolonial period era to post independence Nigeria. However, the present era is adjudged by scholars and political leaders as an era of rebirth for women participation in national life. " Women play multiple roles in National Development. In spite of playing the role of home managers, they play a part in running the community as well as meaningfully adding value to National Life. They are homemakers and center of the family. As was reported by premium times (4/10/2019) the number of women elected to public offices in Nigeria did not increase after this year's election. The National Council of Women Society (NCWS), National Association of Women Journalists (NAWOJ), Women in Nigeria (WIN), and Better Programme for Rural Dwellers (B.L.P.), are some of the feminine organizations that have made frantic efforts towards feasible national development. No doubt, there is a wide margin between men and women participation in national life, the fourth republic is considered a new dawn for Nigeria women as there is a surge

in women participation in National Politics with more women appointed as heads of ministries, parastatals, and government institutions and the National Parliament. Notable among these women are – Speaker, House of Representatives, Mrs. Obubumi Etteh, head of Civil Service, Mrs. Ebele Okeke, Petroleum Minister, Mrs. Dozieni Allison Madueke, Mrs. Farida Waziri Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (E.F.C.C.), Mrs. NgoziOkonjoIweala – Finance Minister, Minister of Education, Mrs. ObyEzekwesili, Director General of NAFDAC – Mrs. Dora Akunyili of blessed memory, Mrs. Nenade Usman Minister of Finance, D.G. NAPTIP – Ms. Julie Okah-Donli and many more credible and competent women who are still serving in governance. The contribution of women goes beyond agriculture and household activities Agarwal, (2000). As Olurin (1996), Agboola (1996) and Mabogunge, (1991) assessed their contribution beyond farm and household chores (subsistence) and noted that the narrow perception of women duties may be attributed to the late arrival of women in the colonial system. Though the status of women is changing, however, many believe the decadence in moral standards in the country is a backlash of women exclusion in National Life.

### Women Participation in Politics

The participation of women in politics in Nigeria is replete with restraining and constraining factors which has distanced the Nigerian woman from active politics except for a few. There is a consensus on the need for greater and active participation of women in politics in Nigeria. Right from independence, to date, Nigeria has had both democratically elected governments and military regimes, and in all these governments have conceded to the fact that women have not been treated fairly in the scheme of things. The Obasanjo administration in its first tenure from 1999-2003 was lack luster on gender equality. The Federal Character Commission over the period appeared to have lost grounds in gender equity, being that the Nigerian population is about 50% male and 50% female, government appointments at the centre then did not reflect this balance, but there was a marked improvement over the second tenure, 2003-2007 (Nwokocha, 2007). Though, today if not for the glaring exclusion of women in national politics there was relative improvement in women participation in politics in the previous administration of Goodluck Jonathan, both in elective positions and appointments there is still disequilibrium as the target has not been met. Despite the fact that women are engrossed with domestic activities at the home front, they have contributed immensely to national development right from the pre-independence period to date. Under colonialism, women organized themselves against colonial rule. The Aba Women's Riot of 1929 wherein about 50 women lost their lives was a protest against British heavy tax system. Chief Elizabeth Adekagbe, in a bid to record her displeasure against the rise of the Electoral College in the West, led the women movement in the Western region. Women took similar initiative against British indirect rule which gave unprecedented privileges to male traditional rulers, while excluding female traditional power holders from taking part in decision making. It is pertinent to note, that the struggle for Nigeria's independence cannot be complete without a mention of the contributions of women. Margaret Ekpo made her inputs in the pro-independence constitutional conference that led to Nigeria's independence. Women made immense contributions to national development both in pre-colonial and post-colonial period, and this has been affirmed by various

governments, who have made pronouncements of correcting the imbalance, though more in theory than in practice. The experiences of Nigerian women during the colonial era had compelled government to initiate corrective measures to restore women's dignity in the society (Nwokocha, 2007). From independence Nigerian women began to actively seek self-expression to be rightfully placed. Fifty-eight (58) years after independence, Nigerian women are still begging for equality, despite the various calls for gender equality. Is it that Nigerian women are not competent enough or they are merely? Relegated to the background by their men counterparts who see them as responsible to the home front?

Nigerian women have proven to be competent in all ramifications, though a woman is yet to become the President or Vice President of Nigeria, a woman has become the Speaker of the House of Representatives (Mrs. Patricia Olubumi Etteh), Finance Minister (Mrs. Kemi Adeosun), Petroleum Minister (Mrs. Diezani Allison Madueke), Head of Civil Service (Mrs. Ebele Okeke), First Woman Speaker in Nigeria (Mrs. Margaret Icheen, Speaker Benue State House of Assembly), Deputy Governor (Ipalibo Bambo, Rivers State), Governor, though briefly and later reversed (Dame Virgy Etiaba, Anambra State), to mention but a few, though some of these women have been accused of corrupt practices Agarwal, (2000). Nigerian women have contributed tremendously to Nation-building and National Development right from the pre-independence era to contemporary Nigeria, their participation in active politics and the opportunities in their disposal in the political arena has not been commensurate. Though there is a renewed campaign all over the world in democratic and liberal states for gender equity in all aspects of social and political life, not much have being achieved so far especially in third world countries. In Nigeria women involvement in politics is still very much below the international mark. Women are afraid to run for elective position (Omoruyi, 2008). As Alapiki, (2004) explicitly stated, "the 30% affirmative action provision is designed to be applied at every level of government i.e. federal, state, local government and wards, and within every civil society, village cabinets, political party offices and social organizations". As the call for equity re-echoes, some countries of the world appear to be adamant to this provision of the United Nation's charter. In Nigeria, there was rekindled hope in the previous administration of Goodluck Jonathan as active women participation in government surpassed the 30% affirmative action bench mark of the United Nations that hope has to be kept alive in the present administration. This situation however seems to be fluctuating; women are now making serious and appreciable impact in the political life of the country, especially since the 2005 Beijing conference and women affirmative position (Aweni, 2006).

Nigerian women have also made significant contribution to national political life in post-independence era, most especially in the second and fourth republic (1979-1983 and 1999 to date). Nigeria produced the first female senator in the second republic (Mrs. Francis Afeghua) and in the final four years of the fourth republic, three (3) women were elected into the senate and fifteen (15) women into the House of Representatives. The fourth republic was a period of re-awakening for Nigerian women. Nigerian women have been proven to be qualified and competent to man any political office, irrespective of the rudiments of such offices. These women have demonstrated commitment to their fatherland in various aspects of National life. Today, Nigerian women,

despite their responsibility as home keepers, can compete favorably with their male counterparts in social and political life if given the enabling platform Ake, (2001).

### Constraints of Women in Politics

What are the factors constraining women in politics? Nigerian women have made some significant and remarkable socio-political and economic contributions to national development in the face of challenging circumstances which confronts women participation in political and national life. First is our value system and popular perception that women belong to the home front, though there is a gradual drift from this perception, most cultures in Nigeria require women to conform to male dominance. This was expressed by Yomi (2007), when he said, *“patronal system of descent, in which generations are identified through male off spring”*. The factors constraining women in politics are numerous. Politics in Nigeria has so many Defining factors, most of which determines one’s success in the political terrain. As Nwokocha, (2007) captures it, certainly, politics involves many things, including meetings, campaigns, and consultations, given rise to factors, natural and artificial, that are log in the wheel of progress for women in politics. Though men are also victims, the odds that count against women participation are more than the challenges men face on the field. The general perception of women’s social role is care giver of the home while men are seen as head and chief bread winner of the household; this indirectly restrains women playing active role in politics. Electoral contests in Nigeria are characterized with violence, mid-night meetings and consultations, nocturnal activities, rumor mongering, character assassination and sometimes destruction of lives and property, and by their nature, these factors scare women from actively participating in politics Elections in Nigeria is a contest of guts, strength and who has more money to throw Ibodje, (2009). Another restraining factor is education and economic strength. Women most especially in the rural areas do not have the financial strength and wherewithal to confront their men folks in an electoral contest and this is a discouraging factor that inhibits the interest of women in politics. Nocturnal meetings and consultation which are convenient for most political big wigs reduces women participation in active politics. Most women cannot afford to be part of such midnight forums, especially when religion and tradition frowns at it. Most women in the rural areas lack the required political education to make vital decisions on their own, hence making them vulnerable to political misfits, or subjects them to the dictates of their husbands Ibodje, (2000). In spite of these impediment restraining women from popular participation in politics, the era of total dominance by men is gradually winding up, as Nigerian women are not only centre of the family and custodians of societal values but have also demonstrated competence and confidence in contributing to the socio-political and economic development of the country.

### Conclusion

Nigerian women have made significant and remarkable source – economic and political contribution to national development in the face of challenging circumstances. The challenges before women are numerous, as they restrict women participation in politics, which is considered a major platform for Nigerian women to contribute meaningfully to national development. Nigerian women have shown to be qualified and competent to occupy political offices in the land, therefore the

state and all relevant agencies should pursue enforcement of gender equality legislations, to address all forms of discrimination against women, for greater women participation in politics for national development.

### Recommendations

- i. Governments at all levels should embark on periodic enlightenment campaign on the need and benefits of greater women participation in politics.
- ii. Government should make education at the basic and secondary level free and compulsory for the girl child.
- iii. Political parties can also encourage women participation by making party nomination forms free for women seeking elective positions.
- iv. It is also recommended in this paper that, in order to tap from the women resource and ensure optimal women contribution to national development, the Nigerian state should improve on the 30% affirmative action, even though it is yet to adhere strictly to this benchmark.
- v. It is also the responsibility of the Nigeria state to remove the religious, cultural, institutional and artificial barriers which have relegated and incapacitated the Nigerian women from active national life.

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