"Reviewing the 50+ Years of Women's Participation in Politics in Nigeria"

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Introduction

Nigeria attained its independence from the British in 1960 and celebrated its 50th anniversary on October 1, 2010. Fifty years down the line the statistics of women's representation in politics and decision making remains abysmally poor. No woman has ever occupied the position of President or Vice President neither has any been elected governor of any of the thirty six states. In fifty years, Nigeria has had only seven female deputy governors.[i] The highest representation women have had in the Federal Executive Council is 20% in the 2007 – 2011 Cabinet.

The highest number women have attained in the Senate is nine [ii] out of the one hundred and nine members i.e. 8.3%. Worse still, in the House of Representatives of three hundred and sixty members, there are only twenty seven women, constituting a paltry 7.5%.Out of sixty three political parties, in 2010 only one, the United National Party for Development (UNPD) has a female Chairperson.

From the above summary, it can be seen that Nigerian women are poorly represented in politics and decision- making. This is in spite of the fact that women constitute roughly half of the current population projection of over 140 million based on the 2006 census.[iii] While the global average representation of women in Parliament is 19.2% - the same for Sub-Saharan Africa,[iv] in Nigeria, it is still at an all time low of 7% at the national level and 5.5% at the state level.

From the pre-colonial, to colonial and post-colonial periods, there have been various degrees of women's participation in politics and governance and varying sets of limiting factors to equal gender participation. Some of the limitations are understandably tied to the political development of the country. For example, the colonial period saw the dismantling of the extant local traditional structure; 29 out of the 50 years postcolonial period being considered here were under different military regimes which are globally acknowledged as male dominated and women unfriendly. The rest of the 21 years saw Nigeria struggling with a nascent democracy with little or no recognition or respect for women's right to political participation.

Pre- Colonial Period

In the pre-colonial era, many of the 250 ethnic groups that made up Nigeria were self-governing kingdoms. In most of those kingdoms and entities, women were hardly part of the communal decision-making bodies. However, some kingdoms and communities had dual political systems that allowed women to participate in governance.[v] This was nevertheless limited to decisions concerning women's issues.

Oral tradition attests that women played prominent roles in the political history and decision –making processes of (some) traditional societies. The legendary roles played by Princess Inikpi of Igala land and Moremi of Ife as saviours of their societies during warfare, to the extent of sacrificing their lives to ensure victory, were remarkable. Other notable women of valour who helped in directing the course of history of their traditional societies in the pre-colonial era included Queen Amina of Zaria, Queen Kambasa of Ijaw and Queen Owari of Ilesa.[vi] Queen Amina was a formidable female ruler who led military expeditions and expanded her territory as far as River Niger, the Kwararafa Empire and Kano in the north.

There were also women leaders whose role was to mobilize for their families' welfare and articulate the views of women. Many of them had the financial muscle to maintain their status. Among these were the Iyalode, Lobun, and Arise of the Yoruba, the Omu of Onitsha and Western Igbo.[vii] Women also had strong and powerful associations through which they organized and acted politically.

The associations served as platforms to organize around issues that concerned them. On those platforms they protested against actions or political situations they did not approve of. Among the Igbo of the South east, there was the institution of the Umu-Ada, the daughters of the village whose main role was peace-making in the community. The Umu-Ada were usually feared because they wielded enormous powers in the communities. Among the Igbo speaking people of Awka in Anambra state for instance, one of the strongest women's organisations known as the "Awomili" became very powerful in decision – making and virtually took decisions that led to the development of Awka town in particular.

The Awo-Mmili was revered and was invited by the men to settle disputes in the communities. This strong forum, however, has been dismantled by men's chauvinistic attitude towards power. The group no longer exists and as such there is no strong forum for women in that community.

The Colonial Period

The colonial era which started in the 1900's drastically changed the political set up. The colonial government abolished the kingdoms and largely eroded the dual political systems. Female chiefs, where they existed in the kingdoms, lost their power base and were no longer reckoned with in the decision-making process. In the eventual redistribution of positions and power, the colonial authorities ignored women.

The British authorities did not consider women in their appointments of local staff to run the colonial government. Even in markets where women were used to wielding power in the allocation of stalls and imposition of levies, the government appointed men to take charge. The marginalisation of women during the colonial era was behind the earliest mass protest movement by women in Eastern Nigeria, the *Nwaobiala* movement in 1925.[viii]

The protests eventually culminated in what came to be known as the 1929 Women's War, (also known as the Aba Riots). The Women's War was both a political and economic protest against the colonial authorities' planned[ix] taxation programme and the population census being conducted by the British authorities.[x]

The population census planned by the British was perceived to be a prelude to over-taxation. The women were unhappy about the over-taxation of their husbands and sons, which they felt was impoverishing them and causing economic hardship for the entire community [Van Allen 1972].

They also resented the British imposition on the community of warrant chiefs, many of whom carried out what the women considered to be abusive and extortionist actions such as obtaining wives without paying the full bride price and seizure of property. Before this period, new village leaders or heads were democratically chosen and removed by the people themselves. Decisions were reached informally or through village assemblies of all adults who attend. Women protected their interests through these assemblies.

While they had less influence than men, women did control local trade and specific crops. But the colonial government, which appointed its agents as warrant chiefs to rule over the people, had changed all these components of female participation. The early stages of nationalist revolt against entrenched British rule took the form of localised skirmishes like the Aba Women's riots provoked by specific grievances.

Late in December 1929, the women forced the Umuahia warrant chiefs to surrender their caps thus launching their successful campaign to destroy the warrant chief system. [Perham 1937:208]." Some 25,000 Igbo women faced colonial repression and over a two month period of insurrection, December 1929 to January 1930, at least 50 were killed [Hanna 1990:338-340].[xi]

Similar protests took place in Western Nigeria in 1946. Led by Mrs. Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti, the Abeokuta Women's Union protested against the taxation policy of the colonial authority and the withdrawal of the powers of women to control the markets. Although in contrast to most other places in Nigeria, market women in Lagos retained charge of the administration of their markets and were very well organised, their market associations took sides in politics and other related matters in the government. Between 1927 and 1941, the Lagos market women organised several protests to stop the colonial masters from taxing women.

In this era, women were denied the franchise and very few of them were offered any political or administrative appointments. In the 1950s, three women were appointed into the House of Chiefs. These were Chief (Mrs.) Olufunmilayo Ransome Kuti (Western Nigeria House of Chiefs); Chief (Mrs.) Margaret Ekpo and Chief Janet Mokelu (Eastern Nigeria House of Chiefs). It was also only in the 1950s that women in Southern Nigeria were allowed to vote. Women's wings of political parties were formed but they possessed very little functional relevance.[xii]

One of the notable political developments during the colonial era was the emergence of a Women's Party in 1944. Reacting to the marginalization and exclusion of women in the only political party existing in Nigeria at the time, the Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM), the women, led by Mrs. Oyinkan Abayomi, formed a political Party that was exclusively for women. However, the Women's Party was never organized as an active political party seeking to obtain representation in government.

Mba records that the party "contested the Lagos Town Council elections in 1950 but that was its only attempt to seek political power. It did not have a political programme as such, but its leaders shared certain definite political views which were to lead them to support another political party, the Action Group, at a later stage.[xiii]

One of the significant issues the Women's Party pursued was the franchise for women. Its members informally lobbied government officials. Subsequent women's organizations during the colonial era also had the attainment of franchise for women at the top of their agenda. For instance, the Nigerian Women's Union, the Federation of Nigerian Women's Societies and the Women's Movement all campaigned for women's franchise.

The 1946 Richards Constitution seemed to support party formation as many more political parties were formed during the period. The parties were the National Council of Nigeria and Cameroons (NCNC), (1944), which was considered the first truly national political party, the Action Group (AG) (1948) with its base in Yorubaland having sprang up from Egbe Omo Oduduwa, a cultural group; the Northern Peoples' Congress (NPC) (1951), also ethnically based, having come out of the Jamiyyar in Northern Nigeria. Also in 1951, another northern-based party, the Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU) came into existence. Women's Wings of these parties were formed by women so as to remain relevant in the scheme of things within the party. It was through these organizations that the parties related with women.

Nonetheless, a few women contested political positions on their own merit as party members and won party elections.[xiv] These women included Mrs. Margaret Ekpo, Mrs. Henrietta Lawson, Mrs. Keziah Fashina and Mrs. Mary Ededem.[xv] The four of them were of the NCNC. Mrs. Ekpo was also later nominated to the Eastern House of Assembly in 1953.

The political parties shared the same weakness of marginalization of women. The structure of the Action Group (AG) for instance did not create any spaces for women to participate in elections within the party. However, the party proposed the appointment of a non-partisan woman, Mrs. Remi Aiyedun into the Western House of Assembly in 1953. Later in 1955, Mrs. Oyinkan Abayomi also joined her in the Western House of Assembly. Although the NPC was opposed to the participation of women in politics and the enfranchisement of women, it used women's numbers to secure seats in the Federal Parliament after the 1959 Federal elections. By 1959, Nigerian women in other parts of the country had won the vote, having been enfranchised in stages through the 1950's. Women in the North were denied voting until 1978.

Apart from the denial of franchise, women who attempted any political activism in the North, whether they were northerners or southerners residing in the North, were subjected to untold harassment and branded "prostitutes." Many of such harassed women in the North showed great courage.

A classic example is Mallama Gambo Sawaba, the leader of the Women's wing of the Northern Element Progressive Union (NEPU), who was kidnapped, beaten and imprisoned several times. She was once deported from Kano but in all of that she kept faith with the political struggle.[xvi]

Women were part of the clamour for Nigeria's independence. Two of them, Mrs. Margaret Ekpo and Mrs. Ekpo Young, were among the delegation that attended some of the constitutional conferences between British officials and Nigerian delegates in 1953 and 1958 in London to prepare for Nigeria's independence. However, they attended as advisers and therefore did not have the chance to speak officially during the meetings.[xvii]

Post-Colonial Era

The 36-member post-independence Senate had only one woman, Mrs. Wuraola Esan, who was nominated by the Western Region. There was no woman in the 312-member House of Representatives. Neither the Federal government nor the three Regional governments had women in their cabinets. In the 1961 general elections, two women, Mrs. Margaret Ekpo and Mrs. Janet Mokelu won seats into the Eastern House of Assembly. A third woman, Mrs. Ekpo Young also won through a bye-election into the Eastern House in 1963. Many women were appointed or elected into the local councils. Another woman, Mrs. Benice Kerry was nominated by the newly created Mid-Western Region into the Senate to join Mrs. Esan in 1964.[xviii] These women gave an excellent account of themselves in the Senate through their numerous contributions and activism especially with women's rights issues.

The 1964 elections were marred by violence and the disputations that followed the results degenerated to very intolerable levels, and seemed to have provided the fertile grounds for the first military incursion into Nigerian politics in January 1966. A counter military coup followed in July 1966. The violence and killings that followed culminated in the Nigeria Civil war, which lasted from 1967 to 1970. The war further diminished women's political space and brought untold human suffering and abuse on women, especially on the "Biafran" side. The military continued in power at the end of the war in 1970 until 1979 when it tried its hands on democracy. Soon after the 1983 elections the military struck again and was not to leave the scene until 1999. Nigeria was under military rule for 29 years and there were altogether six military regimes.

Because the few women in the military were not sufficiently highly placed and were found mostly in the service sectors such as nursing, they were not part of the decision-making bodies of the military governments. Even when the first military regime in 1966 involved some civilians in government, there was no woman among them. In effect, the military occupation of the political space compounded the already pitiable situation of political development of women.

The second military regime (July 1966-July 1975) split Nigeria into a 12 - State structure from the three regions structure. There was no woman at the Federal level. Two of the twelve states, East Central and Lagos, appointed a woman each as commissioner while a third state, Oyo, appointed two female commissioners.[xix] The third military regime (1975- 1979) also had no woman at the federal level but it had an unofficial policy of appointing a female commissioner in each state. But most disappointingly, the third military regime (1975-1979) did not nominate any woman among the 50 persons chosen to draft the constitution for the return of civil rule.

However, in response to the criticisms about the exclusion of women, five women were appointed to the 250-member Constituent Assembly that subsequently reviewed the draft constitution. A notable contribution by the five women was the insertion of the anti-discrimination clause in the constitution. That section made discrimination on the basis of sex illegal and automatically enfranchised the women in Northern Nigeria in 1978.[xx]

When the ban on political activity was lifted in 1978, over fifty political associations sought to be registered as parties. Among the associations were two would-be women's parties. Eventually, only five parties were registered and none of the women's parties was among them.

During the elections that ushered in the civilian rule (second republic) in 1979, a handful of women contested at various levels except for the presidency or gubernatorial seats of the (then) 19 states. Four women contested for seats in the 45-member Senate but none won. A meagre three got into the 450 – member Federal House of Representatives and only five got seats in the State Houses of Assembly.[xxi] The civilian government of 1979 - 1983 had three female Federal ministers and most states had at least one female commissioner.[xxii] Only very few women won elections into the State Houses of Assembly during the Second Republic. A number of women were appointed Commissioners in the states. As far as women were concerned, the most significant outcome of the 1983 elections was that it produced the first elected female member of the 45 member Senate in the person of Ms. Franca Afegbua. Their term lasted only three months before the army struck again in December 1983.

It was during the fourth military regime (1983-85) that the first formal quota system was introduced by the Federal Government as regards the appointment of women in governance. General Buhari directed that at least one woman should be appointed into the Executive Council in every state. All the states complied with this directive; some states even had two or three female members in the Executive Council. Beyond that, women were not in high decision-making bodies.

In 1985, a military coup ousted the regime of General Buhari and imposed the fifth military regime (1985-93) headed by General Ibrahim Babangida. He followed the same pattern, except for the visibility of the First Lady, Mrs. Maryam Babangida (of blessed memory) whose pet project, the Better Life for Rural Women Programme (BLP), sought to enhance the living conditions of rural women. The BLP and the fanfare associated with it gave women some visibility, and its beneficiaries enjoyed enhanced economic power. The Head of State appointed two women out of nineteen members (10.5%) to the Political Bureau he set up in 1985 to oversee the transition programme. In 1989, he appointed five women (3%) to serve in the 150 member Constituent Assembly.

The military promised to return the country to a civilian government in 1993. When the military government held preparatory local government and gubernatorial elections in 1990, women won only 206 out of 1,297 local positions nationwide and none made it to any of the (then 30) gubernatorial positions. Very few women emerged as councillors and only one woman, Chief (Mrs.) Titilayo Ajanaku, emerged as Chairperson of Abeokuta Local Government Council in Ogun State. In the 1992 elections to the National Assembly, only one woman got into the 90–member Senate while 12 of them won seats in the 638–member House of Representatives.

During the gubernatorial elections, no female Governor emerged in any of the states. Only two female Deputy Governors emerged, namely Alhaja Sinatu Ojikutu of Lagos State and Mrs. Cecilia Ekpenyong of Cross River State. In the Senatorial election held in 1992, Mrs. Kofo Bucknor-Akerele was the only woman who won a seat in the Senate. Very few women won elections into the National Assembly, one of whom was Chief (Mrs.) Florence Ita-Giwa who won the senatorial election in the Calabar Constituency, Cross River State under the banner of the National Republican Convention (NRC).

During the 1993 presidential election primaries that were supposed to conclude the process, there was a female presidential aspirant in the person of Mrs. Sarah Jubril. However, her presidential aspiration was cut short when she could not produce the five hundred thousand *Naira* required as non- refundable deposit by the National Electoral Commission (NEC).

In the party primaries of that year, only seven out of the 330 aspirants that vied for governorship ticket were women. None of them won their party ticket. After the elections, there was no female among the 30 state governors, only two female deputy governors emerged, two female Secretaries to the State Governments out of 30, twelve female members of the 596 seats of the Federal House of Representatives, 27 female members of the Houses of Assembly out of 1199, and one female senator out of 90.

Out of over 300 Presidential aspirants, there were only 4 females (Awe; 1995). Although there are more women now than ever before who are actively engaged in politics in Nigeria, the percentage is still low as compared with that of men.

After the elections of 1993 had been won and lost, the military government annulled the result because it apparently did not want to hand over power. That annulment took Nigeria to the brink. To salvage the situation, the military government appointed an Interim government of 32 members among who was one woman, Otunba Bola Kuforiji-Olubi. The Interim government lasted only a few months before another military regime, took power in November 1993. For women, the significant thing about this sixth military regime (1993- 1998) was that the Ministry of Women Affairs was created in January 1995 to more closely address issues of women.

Also two women - Mrs. Mobolaji Osomo and Mrs. Ada Adogu - were appointed into the Federal Executive as Minister and junior Minister of Establishment and Agriculture respectively. That was the highest appointment women ever got in a military regime in Nigeria. Regardless of that however, the regime took the country on a tortuous political and emotional transition process. It took the death of the military head of state, General Sani Abacha, to end that regime and start the country on a process of civilian democracy again.

Elections were held in 1998 and Nigeria returned to civil democracy on May 29, 1999. The elections did not improve women's electoral fortunes. In the civilian government of 1999-2003, (4th Republic) women held less than 3% of elective positions. At the Federal level, the President and Vice- President were both men. In the 109-member Senate, there were only three women[xxiii] and in the 360-member House of Representatives, there were just 12 women.[xxiv] Out of a total of forty four Ministers and Special Advisers, there were only nine women (20.4%).[xxv]

There was no female governor and of the 36 Deputy–Governors, only one was female, and that was Senator Kofo Bucknor- Akerele in Lagos State. Of the 36 speakers of the State Houses of Assembly, there was only one woman, Mrs. Grace Icheen of Benue State who was later forced to resign. In the State Houses of Assembly very few women emerged as members. While in some States, one or two women emerged in the Houses, most other states had no females in their legislatures. The 36 State Houses of Assembly had a total of 990 seats, (i.e. an average of 28 members each) out of which there were 12 women only, meaning that most of them did not have any female members. At the local government level, women accounted for 9 out of 774 local government chairpersons nation-wide. Of the 8,810 local government councillors nationwide, there were 143 women constituting 1.6% only.

It is quite significant that former President Olusegun Obasanjo appointed a number of women into the 1999 – 2003 Federal Executive Council. These were Dr. (Mrs.) Kema Chikwe (Minister of Transport), Mrs. Dupe Adelaja (Minister of State Defence), Dr. (Mrs.) Bekky Ketebuigwe (Minister of State, Ministry of Solid Minerals), Dr. (Mrs.) Amina Ndalolo (Minister of State, Federal Ministry of Health), Mrs. Pauline Tallen (Minister of State, Federal Ministry of Science and Technology), Hajia Aishatu Ismaila (Minister of Women Affairs), and Chief (Mrs.) Titilayo Ajanaku as the Special Adviser to the President on Women Affairs.

2003 – 2007 Period

There was a slight improvement in the numbers of women in elective office in the 2003 elections. The eventual registration of thirty political parties for the 2003 elections widened the political space for women as more women than ever before vied for various positions. Two female aspirants, Mrs. Sarah Jubril of Progressive Action Congress (PAC) and the now late Major Mojisola Obasanjo of the Masses Movement of Nigeria (MMN) [xxvi] won their parties' nominations as presidential candidates. Two other women – Hajia Mairo Habib and Hajia Asmau Mohammed of Justice Party and African Renaissance Party respectively won vice-presidential party nominations. Two women won their parties' nominations for the gubernatorial contest while five women got their parties' nominations for the Deputy Governorship slot. Many more women won nominations to various positions but most were with the newer and relatively unknown political parties.

At the end of the elections, it became clear again that the women have not fared well. At the Federal level, the positions of President and Vice-President were still occupied by two men. The number of women increased from three in 1999 (2.7%) to four (3.6%) in the 109 - member Senate; there was an increase in the number of women in the 360 – member House of Representatives from twelve in 1999 (3.3%) to twenty one in 2003 (5.8%). At the Federal cabinet level, women accounted for six out of a total of thirty four Ministers (17.6%) and ten out of thirty five (28.5%) special advisers.

However, compared to the previous administration, women had been placed in more key ministries and advisory positions. For the first time, two women – Mrs. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala and Mrs. Esther Nenadi Usman were in charge of the Finance Ministry as Minister and Minister of State respectively. A woman, Mrs. Mobolaji Osomo, was appointed the Minister of Housing. At the advisory level, two women –Mrs. Oby Ezekwesili and Mrs. Remi Oyo – headed the budget and media sectors, respectively. Oby Ezekwesili was to later become the Minister of Solid Minerals.

The Nigerian Political Reform Conference (NPRC) was a landmark event and each state Governor was expected to nominate six members but only two states out of the thirty six appointed one woman delegate each. The then President, General Olusegun Obasanjo nominated twenty women out of the fifty federal slots.

The few women who participated worked hard to ensure the inclusion of the principle of affirmative action in the final document, demanding specifically for constitutional amendment to provide for non discrimination on the basis of gender and for affirmative action measures. The document is yet to be implemented.

At the state level, no female governor emerged. Of the 36 Deputy Governorship positions, women occupied two[xxvii] (5.5%), representing an increase of 2.8% from one (2.7%) in the 1999–2003 dispensation. There were also two female speakers of the State Houses of Assembly in Ogun and Anambra States - Hon. Titi Sodunke-Oseni and Hon. Eucharia Azodo respectively (although that of Anambra State was soon to be impeached). That also represented an increase of 2.8% from one female Speaker in 1999 to two in 2003. Ironically that lone female speaker also did not complete her tenure.

2007 – 2011 Period

In the 2007 elections, no woman emerged as President, Vice President or Governor. The numbers however increased from two to six female Deputy Governors.[xxviii] One of the deputy governors, Dame Virgy Etiaba was sworn in as Governor by default and served very briefly. The Governor of Anambra state, Mr. Peter Obi had been impeached by the House of Assembly and was in court challenging his impeachment. He was reinstated as soon as the Supreme Court quashed the impeachment.

The number of women in the 109 seat Senate increased from four (3.6%) in 2003 to nine (8.2%) in the 2007, a marginal increase of 4.6% only.[xxix] In the House of Representatives, there was an increase of female members from twelve (3.3%) in 2003 to twenty-seven (7.5%) in 2007, an increase of only 4.2%. There was also a marginal increase (1.6%) in the number of women in the Houses of Assembly in 2007, from thirty eight in 2003 (3.8%) to 54 (5.4%) in 2007.

The elections of 2007 were adjudged the worst rigged in the history of Nigerian elections by both international and local election observers. Because of the protests and disputations that followed, the then President Yar' Adua set up the 22-member Presidential Electoral Reform Committee headed by retired Supreme Court Chief Justice M. Uwais, to make recommendations for electoral reform towards achieving credible, free and fair elections. Only three of these members were women constituting only 13.6%.[xxx] In spite of the fact that the committee was male dominated, it made far reaching recommendations on ways to increase women's participation including a modification of the electoral system from the 'First Past the Post' electoral system to proportional representation system to accommodate various interests in governance.

There were also recommendations on affirmative action measures that would address historical discrimination and marginalisation of women. The White Paper Committees and the Senate and House of Representatives Constitutional Reform Committees rejected these recommendations. It is also noteworthy that although there were only three women on that committee, there were many gender sensitive male members who worked with the women to integrate women's interests in the final document.

At the traditional level, women are gradually being appointed into traditional ruling councils in some parts of the country to give women the opportunity of a forum where they can express their interests. In Ugwogo Nike, for instance, in the newly created Iyiukwu local government area of Enugu state, there is an emergence of new roles played by the women. Over twenty-four women have been appointed members of the Traditional Ruling Council. This new trend is creeping into the other states and opening up the traditional structures to women in the communities.

2010 Gubernatorial Elections in Anambra State

When Mr. Peter Obi was declared the winner of the 2003 elections by the Court of Appeal, and the sitting Government of Chris Ngige was ordered to leave three and half years into the tenure, the electoral time table of the state changed from that of the rest of the country. The courts had also held that the tenure of any of the newly declared governors started to run from the day they were sworn in. This meant that in 2007, there was no vacancy in the Anambra state gubernatorial office. His tenure started to run in 2006. So in 2010, only Anambra state held gubernatorial elections. In the election which was held on the 6th of February, only two women Hon. Uche Ekwunife of PPA[xxxi] and Njideka Anyadike of NAP contested for the Governorship position.. None of them won although Hon. Ekwunife put up a great campaign and gave her opponents a run for their lives. Three women[xxxii] contested for the deputy governorship in the relatively new political parties. None of them succeeded.

Table 1: Women's Representation in 1999, 2003 and 2007 General Elections

S/N			1999 - 2003		2003 - 2007		2007 - 2011	
	Political Position	**No of Available Seats**	**No of women Elected**	**% of Total**	**No of women Elected**	**% of Total**	**No of women Elected**	**% of Total**
1.	Presidency	1	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
2.	Vice President	1	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
3.	Senate	109	3	2.7%	4	3.7%	9	8.2%
4.	House of Reps	360	12	3.33%	21	5.83%	27	7.5%
5.	State Governorship	36	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
6.	Deputy Governorship	36	1	2.7%	2	5.5%	6	16.6%
7.	State Houses of Assembly	990	12	1.21%	38	3.84%	54	5.4%
8.	Ministers	44/34/39	4	9%	6	17.6%	8	20.5%
9.	Speaker House of Reps.	1	0	0%	0	0%	1	100%
10.	Speaker House of Assembly[xxxiii]	36	1	2.7%	2	5.5%	1	2.7%
11.	Deputy Speaker	36	0	0%	0	0%	1	2.7%

Factors Militating against Women's Effective Political Participation

In spite of the constitutional guarantee of equality between sexes and rising interests among women, politics in Nigeria remain virtually an exclusive affair of men. The limited participation of women in the political sphere, which is glaring from the above analysis, is due to a number of factors, such as the socio-cultural determinants which establish women's domain in the private sphere. This conceptualized dichotomy of public and private sphere has continued to militate against women's political processes.

Very few educated women participate in politics because of society's negative perception of women. Many women have to get permission from their husbands to attend a meeting or be involved in some activity outside the home. They have less bargaining power, which may be dependent on their ability to earn income. Further, women are still largely responsible for household labour and child care, leaving them little or no time to participate in other activities. Religious and cultural traditions may also act as barriers and create constraints for women, prescribing what a woman may or may not do and contributing to the acceptance of the status quo, no matter how repressive. Compared to men, women have less access to crucial resources such as information, education, skills training, health (especially reproductive health and family planning), cash income, and credit, all of which are necessary for survival within the current stifling economic depression. (CEDPA, 1997:8)

In all of Nigeria's political history, including the previous attempts at democratic rule, women were severely side-lined in terms of representation in government although they constitute 50 per cent of the population and 51 per cent of voters in elections. During the military regimes, women were virtually non-existent partly because military regimes naturally diminish space for women to participate in decision-making. Women are not found in high positions in the military and therefore hardly qualify to hold leadership positions.

Women's numerical strength has not translated into improved representation and that is as a result of factors such as monetisation of politics, fear of violence, electoral fraud, patriarchy, cultural norms and traditional belief that the place of the woman is in the home catering for her husband and children.

A major obstacle to women's political participation is insufficient finance to fund political activities. Money has assumed an unhealthy priority in determining who wins elections in the country. Electoral offices are presently occupied by the highest bidder. Women find it more difficult than men to raise the kind of campaign funds required. Women are said to be amongst the poorest people in the world and a poor person cannot play a significant role in politics. If political participation did not involve so much money, there would be more women in politics (Fadako, 1995). When the political process is monetised and the cost of contesting elections is prohibitive, it hinders the entry of honest and hard working people into politics,_and this has become the lot of women in Nigeria.

In forum after forum organized by the Civil Resource Development and Documentation Centre (CIRDDOC) and other NGOs to document the experiences of female aspirants in the 2003 and 2007 elections and to identify factors responsible for their poor performance in the elections, almost all the aspirants interviewed cited dearth of resources. These resources are necessary to meet the basic requirements of the political parties, which include registration fees, setting up of constituency offices, maintaining the relevant campaign structures, and basic logistics such as paying the cost of renting buses to be used by supporters during the campaign. Some of the aspirants were not in regular employment and therefore had challenges with the required tax declaration. Many of those who were able to meet the party requirements for the primaries were unable to pay delegates to vote for them because it involved competing with wealthier opponents.

The inability of the elections management bodies to regulate the influence of money in Nigerian politics has impacted negatively on women's participation in politics. The experience of Honourable Habiba Sabo Gabarin as documented in her profile[xxxiv] is very instructive. She had to sell off some of the assets she acquired while she was in government appointment in Bauchi to fund her first election into the State House of Assembly. Another female politician, Iyom Josephine Anenih had this to say on the same issue: "I learnt a few hard lessons. The experience I garnered is invaluable. I was shocked to learn that your years of service to the party counts for nothing when you are seeking party nomination. Money is the answer. Money, money and more money; you need to have a lot of money to receive your party's nomination and to be elected into office. I learnt that it is, in fact, possible to get results without the people's support or votes"[xxxv].

Since 2003 the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and later other political parties have waived nomination fees for female aspirants to enable more women to contest and win elections. But these efforts, rather than help to increase women's participation, have been used by party leaders as a justification for the exclusion of women. They argue that it is only fair to give preference to someone who has made contributions to the party through payment of nomination fees over one who has not. They take it as evidence that women are not fully committed to the party. Examples in some of the profiles published in "Election *Herstories*"[xxxvi] reveal instances where such purported favour turned out to be of disadvantage to the women. In cases where there was a stalemate on party candidature, women were directed to step down for male nominees since they would lose nothing by so doing.

Electoral fraud and other malpractices accounted for the "defeat" of many female candidates who withdrew or were edged out before and during the primaries. Rules of engagement of political parties were unclear and subject to constant change. The arbitrary changing of the rules of the game and withholding of relevant information are some of the fraudulent ways women were cheated during party primaries. Some women recounted how times and venues of meetings and primaries were changed just hours before the election without their being informed. In the primaries, many women could not survive the behind-the scene-manoeuvrings, deals and backslapping that attended the primaries. Even when they got the party's ticket, some were taunted at campaign grounds by a populace that still view women's candidacy as unacceptable under the culture.

Other violations of party regulations included rigging and unrest during primary elections and the refusal of the party leadership to constitute electoral panels to hear petitions by aggrieved party members. In some instances, no primaries were held, yet results were declared for favoured candidates. Some defeated female aspirants complained that lapses and electoral malpractices by electoral officers in conjunction with other male aspirants made them to lose the primaries. Iyom Josephine Anenih suffered similar fate in Anambra State where according to her, "no primaries were held. The list of those the party wanted to represent them had been drawn up, they knew who was going to be governor, which is why for instance in the gubernatorial race some staunch PDP members contested under other parties."[xxxvii]

Female politicians were subjected to whisper campaigns and innuendos about their alleged loose sexual and moral standing. There was also some hypocrisy in the unwritten rules of the political parties. Campaigns were organized around the 'true marital status' of female candidates as a means of questioning their moral standing. Higher standards were set for female politicians and the rules about morality and responsibility were relaxed for their male counterparts. Women were expected to be chaste while male politicians openly went on campaigns with their mistresses and girl friends. Women candidates needed to prove that they are good housewives and mothers to be acceptable to the men.[xxxviii]

Women were also marginalised on grounds of indigeneity. When a woman's husband comes from a different state as her state of origin, she is discriminated against in both states. In the former, she is told that her rights are realized in her husband's state, while in the latter she is told they are to be claimed in her state of origin. This is the fate suffered by Senator Grace Bent in the 2007 elections. Senator Grace Bent is from the Southern part of Nigeria but married to a Northerner from Adamawa State. Although she won the elections to the senatorial seat of Adamawa state, in narrating her experience she pointed out that "this practice is mostly prominent in the political environment and can be very frustrating".

In her own words, “it was the major issue raised during campaigns to discredit me but I was persistent, I wanted people to get to know me and not where I come from and along the line people saw past that and I won the seat …”. She notes further that this is however, not common, Adamawa state has paved the way for a new frontier and have proven that women do have hope in the future of Nigerian politics” (Interview, 2009). The general issue here is that a “foreigner” does not have the right to make decisions or be part of the decision making body for the “citizens” of the land. This sets a limit to gender equality participation in the political environment as it hampers women’s electoral bids. The case is even worse for a foreign woman married to a Nigerian because she may never be appointed into any noteworthy political office because she can never be considered a true “indigene” of any state (CEDAW, 2008).

So, how did Women perform at their jobs?

The few women that have held decision making and high profile positions in Nigeria have done well. It is on record that in the few years Professor (Mrs.) Dora Akunyili served as Director General of the National Agency for Food and Drug Administration Control (NAFDAC), she revived the comatose agency and showed excellent leadership in combating the menace of counterfeit drugs. On her own part, Mrs. Oby Ezekwesili is credited with establishing Due Process as a standard in Nigerian government, hitherto unknown in Nigeria’s civil service. She also performed creditably as Minister of Solid Minerals and Minister of Education. Mrs. Ngozi Okonjo Iweala, former Minister of Finance ably steered the direction of President Obasanjo’s economic reform agenda. She also led the negotiation that resulted in the cancellation of 18 billion US dollars in Nigerian foreign debt. And till date, Mrs. Farida Waziri of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) is a force to reckon with in the battle to control corruption in Nigeria. These women and several others have demonstrated that women are capable of delivering quality and positive leadership when the country needs it.

What are Women Doing to Change the Situation?

The Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development is taking the lead in encouraging women to participate in governance. In 2010, the Ministry organised a National rally of women in Abuja to mobilize women to seek elective positions in the 2011 elections and take advantage of their large population to vote for female candidates and those who have their interest at heart. It was also to call the attention of the Executive and the National Assembly to the commitment made by the Federal Government in the National Gender Policy to adopt the 35% affirmative action principle in elective and appointive positions in the country. A call was made for this provision to be integrated in the Constitution especially with the ongoing review of the 1999 Constitution.

The Summit resolved to work with political parties to ensure increased numbers of women in party leadership and membership, and to demand the entrenchment of the gender character principle in the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999). The Summit called on state governors to support the emergence of female candidates in general elections, the adoption of twining at all levels of governance and called on female politicians to build inter-generational linkages through the mentoring of a critical successor generation.

The Women for Change (WFCI) NGO initiative of the First Lady of Nigeria, Dame Patience Jonathan is aimed at empowering women economically and politically and eliminating those cultural traits that have held women back. It is to ensure that more women play active role in politics. According to the documents of WFCI, the initiative is a Nigerian gender focused movement for mobilising women to take active interest in affirmation action, which is promoting women's empowerment and gender equality in the society.

Its broad objective is commitment to the creation of a movement that will engender the mass awareness of women, at all levels, to their human rights as well as their obligations as citizens of Nigeria. The NGO specifically wants to advance strategies for gender equality, equity and promotion of Affirmative Action principles and mechanisms for effective resource management and accountability; develop a mechanism which could enhance the legislative processes in Nigeria, including domesticating international instruments to which Nigeria is a signatory. The First Lady has taken this message to all the states of federation and has mobilised women around the issues.

Women's rights organisations have also put together different programmes to support female candidates. The watchdog project of CIRDDOC is worthy of mention. A group of people selected from the CIRDDOC Community Information Centres in the South Eastern States were trained as watchdogs to monitor the democratic process within political parties to ensure that women are not short-changed or cheated out of party and electoral processes.

The watchdogs monitored state, local government and ward congresses of the different party conventions and filed regular reports. The reports were shared as concrete evidence of the marginalisation of women. There are different programmes in place by several other NGOs and development partners to build the capacity of female aspirants to be able to compete favourably with the men in the field; legislative advocacy for the integration of affirmative action principles in the nation's Constitution; advocacy with political parties for increased respect of women's rights to hold political positions, the entrenchment of affirmative action in party Constitutions and Manifestoes; and very recently, the establishment of the Women's Trust Fund to support female politicians.

Conclusion and Recommendations

As seen above, it is evident that a wide range of issues pose challenges for women in politics in Nigeria. These issues not only affect women's numerical growth, but more important their ability to occupy decision making positions. Although obstacles to women's effective participation in politics are daunting from every angle, all hope is not lost just yet. Efforts are being made to encourage women despite these challenges to forge ahead. These efforts come in the forms of policies, political reforms and orientations or reorientations as the case maybe.

The call for affirmative action policies to redress the imbalance should be sustained. Several mechanisms such as reserved seats for women, twinning and voluntary party quotas have been tried successfully in many countries. The Justice Uwais Electoral Reform Committee (ERC) set up by the then President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua after the flawed 2007 elections made some ground breaking recommendations that if implemented would lead to increased numbers of women in decision making. They include a change in the electoral system, from the First Past the Post system to a combination of the First Past The Post (FPTP) and modified Proportional Representation (PR) for legislative elections at the federal, state and LG levels. The PR system is an electoral system that ensures inclusion of vulnerable and marginalised groups such as women, youths and people living with disabilities in governance.

Still on proportional representation, the ERC proposed that political parties should be mandated to nominate at least 30% female candidates and 2% physically challenged persons for legislative elections. Furthermore, the Electoral Act should be amended to establish criteria for the production of party lists for the allocation of PR seats in a manner that will ensure the inclusion of women and disadvantaged groups. The ERC observed that "one of the major problems of our electoral system over the years has been the near exclusion of critical sectors of the population such as women from governance. There is urgent need to evolve an electoral system which ensures that while elections are free, fair and acceptable, all major stakeholders in the electoral process, especially the political parties that perform creditably, women and other interest groups, are not sidelined in emerging government."

Because of the critical role political parties' play in countries where independent candidacy is prohibited, the committee advocated that political associations seeking to be registered as parties should maintain 20% women in the membership of all its governing bodies and that their Code of Conduct should promote active participation of women in the electoral process. Apart from the recommendations to increase the number of women in elective positions, the ERC also advocated for special considerations to be given to women in the appointments of Ministers and Commissioners. Finally, the ERC recognised the obligation of Nigeria to prohibit discrimination against women by its ratification of CEDAW, the Protocol to the African Charter on the Rights of Women in Africa and ICCPR.

Although the first phase of Constitutional Reform that took place after the report of this Committee did not integrate any of these innovative strategies, it is hoped that in the course of time, Nigeria will explore some of these options to open up political spaces for women. Development cannot be complete with the exclusion of over half of the population from governance.

Women and other marginalized social groups in any country in the world hinges critically around the question of poverty, power, politics, and control. Onimode (1996) opines that it is the power, policies and system that marginalise, oppress and impoverish, while they control over these elements that empower people everywhere. He stressed further that economic empowerment is a major component of women's total empowerment and liberation. For women to be actively involved in politics and governance there is the need to mobilise and empower them educationally and economically.

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[i] The states that have had deputy Governors at various times are Osun, Lagos, Imo, Anambra, Plateau, Ekiti and Ogun.

[ii] There were nine female Senators at inception of the 6th National Assembly (2007 -2011) but one of them lost her seat to a contender who challenged her victory in the polls in the court. The court ruled in favour of the contender by holding that she did not win the elections.

[iii] http://www.nigeriamasterweb.com/Nigeria06CensusFigs.html (Accessed on May 19, 2011) 2006 Census figures are as follows: Total: 140,003,542. (Males: 71,709,859 and Females: 68,293,683). The 1991 figures put the total population at 88.9 million, almost equally divided between the two sexes.

[iv] Archive of statistical data on women in National Parliaments, Inter-Parliamentary Union as at 31st July 2010.

[v] Akiyode-Afolabi, A; Arogundade L; Eds. Gender Audit – 2003 *Election And Issues In Women's Political Participation In Nigeria;* Women Advocates Research And Documentation Centre (WARDC), December 2003.

[vi] JHU, (1997), Nigeria Press Briefing Kit: Democracy and Governance, P. 12

[vii] Ibid P.12

[viii] Nina Mba, (1982), Nigerian Women Moblized, P. 68; cited in Gender Audit 2003.

[ix] Ibid; p. 236.

[x] JHU, (1997), Democracy and Governance, P.14

[xi] Wars of the World; Available at http://www.onwar.com/aced/data/whiskey/womens1929.htm visited on 6th November 2009.

[xii] S. A. Effah Attoe, Women in the Development of Nigeria Since pre-colonial Times, Posted to the web: 10/19/2002 10:00:19 PM www.onlinenigeria.com and accessed on 28th September 2009.

[xiii] Mba, (1982), Nigerian Women Mobilised, P. 224

[xiv] Billy Dudley, (1982), Introduction to Nigerian Government and Politics, London, Macmillian, P.58 cited in Gender Audit, 2003.

[xv] Mba, (182), Nigerian Women Mobilised, P. 236.

[xvi] Mba, (1982), Nigerian Women Mobilized, P. 255

[xvii] Ibid. P. 273.

[xviii] The post – colonial government was modeled after the British Parliamentary system under which there was a ceremonial president and a parliament but major governmental powers rested with the Prime Minister who was the leader of the majority group and head of cabinet. At the Federal level there was the Senate and House of Representatives. *Membership of the Senate was by nomination by the three regional governments. Each of the three regions appointed 12 members to make up the 36-member Senate. Membership of the 312 -member Federal House of Representatives was by election but seats were apportioned to the Regions based on population.* In each of the Regions, North, East and West, and later Mid West, there was the House of Assembly, a strong Regional government and its cabinet.

[xix] Nwankwo, N. (1996), Gender Equality in Nigeria Politics, Deutchez, Lagos. P.17

[xx] Ibid

[xxi] These women were Mrs. J. C. Eze of the Nigerian People's Party (NPP) who represented Uzo Uwani constituency in former Anambra State, Mrs. V.O. Nnaji, also of NPP who represented lsu and Mrs. Abiola Babatope of the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) who represented Mushin Central II of Lagos State.

[xxii] Nwankwo, N. (1996), Gender Equality in Nigeria Politics, Deutchez, Lagos. P.18

[xxiii] They were Chief (Mrs.) Florence Ita Giwa representing Cross River State South Senatorial District; Mrs. Stella Omu from Delta State and Hajiya Khairat Abdul-Razaq (now Hajiya Gwadabe) representing the FCT.

[xxiv] They are Patience Ogodo, Linda ikpeazu: Barrister lquo Minimah, Lola Abiola Edewor, Patricia 0. Etteh, Dorcas Odujinrin, J.F. Adeyemi, Binta Garba Koji, Gbemi Saraki, Florence Aya, Temi Harriman and Mercy Almona lsei.

[xxv] UNIFEM (1999) Status of Nigerian Women and Men, P. 60

[xxvi] CLO (2003), Democracy Review, P.6

[xxvii] Alhaja Salimat Badru and Erelu Olusola Obada of Ogun and Osun states respectively.

[xxviii] They were Dr. Ada Okwuonu (Imo state), Dame Virgy Etiaba (Anambra state), Mrs. Pauline Tallen (Plateau state), Alhaja Salmatu Badru (Ogun), Mrs. Olusola Obada (Osun), Princess Adebisi Sosan (Lagos), and Mrs. Abiodun Olujimi (Ekiti).

[xxix] By 2010 the number was reduced by one through the loss of the seat occupied by Senator Joy Emordi through the court which awarded it to a man found to have won the election by the court.

[xxx] The three women on the Committee were Hajiya Dije J. Bala, Chief (Mrs.) Toyin Olakunri and Prof. Grace A. Alele-Williams

[xxxi] Hon. Uche Ekwunife was at the time of elections, a current member of the House of Representatives. She returned the House to finish her term when she did not win the gubernatorial elections.

[xxxii] They were Carol Onweluzor as running mate to Mike Ikemefuna Nwafor, of ALP, Florence Chinyelu Obiako as running mate to Chijioke Godfrey Ndubuisi of NDP and Ibeneme Vivian Chizoba as running mate to Eugene Ezekwueche of PMP.

[xxxiii] The states that have had a female Speaker of the House of Assembly at various times are Benue (1999), Anambra and Ogun (2003). Ebonyi had a female Deputy Speaker Dorathy Obasi in 2007.

[xxxiv] Her profile published in Election Herstories: Documenting Women's Experiences in Nigeria's elections, 2008.

[xxxv] Chief (Mrs.) Josephine Anenih was then a member of the main executive organs of the ruling party - the People's Democratic Party (PDP) - the Board of Trustees, National Executive Committee, and National Working Committee. She was the first National Woman Leader of PDP, a position she held from 2000 to 2005.

[xxxvi] Election *Herstories*: Documenting Women's Experiences in Nigeria's elections, a publication of the Gender and Affirmative Action Coalition (GAA) 2008.

[xxxvii] Interview by the author with Chief (Mrs.) Josephine Anenih on 7th October 2008 published in Election *Herstories*: Documenting Women's Experiences in Nigeria's elections

[xxxviii] Ibrahim, Jibrin and Salihu Amina (2004), Women, Marginalization and Politics in Nigeria, Abuja: OSIWA, Global Rights and CDD.