WOMEN AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN NIGERIA; THE IMPERATIVE OF EMPOWERMENT

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ABSTRACT

The low level of political participation of women is becoming alarming and disturbing. This hampers women from contributing their quota to the development of Nigeria. Empirical observations have shown that women in position of responsibilities are noted to be hardworking and firm in their decision. The aim of the study, therefore, was to find out the specific factors responsible for the low level of political participation of women and to proffer recommendations that will enhance women's participation in political activities. In achieving this, the study will make use of existing data. The study discovered that the major inhibiting factors were sedentary in nature rather than the issue of money politics, violence, thuggery, etc which were considered by women as secondary.

Keywords: Women, Empowerment, Participation, Politics, Power, Resources,

Introduction

Politics is too serious a business to be left in the hands of politicians -Charles De Gaulle.

If Charles de Gaulle were alive he would be giving a revised version of the-quoted maxim. In my estimation, it would read like: "Politics is too serious a business to be left solely in the hands of men." And that spoof could better be directed at Nigeria. In Nigeria, politics is presumed a man's turf where *No Woman needs apply* an unspoken slogan reminiscent of the discrimination against the Irish nationals in 19th century Britain. This unwritten rule is one that only a few women relative to their population have dared to successfully defy. While democracy presupposes a pluralistic system that is all inclusive, it is ironic that women are systemically excluded from participating in the process. Consider the following telling statistics: during the last general elections held in April 2007, there were a total of 1,200 women aspirants to 1,532 offices. 660 of these women won their primaries. Of the 660 candidates who contested elections into various posts, Ninety-three finally emerged as winners: six deputy governors, nine senators, 27 national representatives, and 52 in various state Houses of Assembly. Even though this represent a significant increase in womens participation in the political process, it is still a far cry from aspirations of women the world over. The essence of political participation in any society, either civilised or primitive, is to seek control of power, acquisition of power and dispensing power to organise society, harness and distribute resources and to influence decision making in line with organised or individual interests (Arowolo and Abe, 2008:13-14). All groups (including those of women) seek to influence the dispensation of power in line with their articulated interests as a fundamental motive of political participation.

Women, in their gradual consciousness of state of mind also, in recent times, increasingly seek power equation and distribution and redistribution of resources in their favour. Although, careful observations have indicated that the involvement of women in Nigerian politics is largely noticeable at the level of voting and latent support, Adeniyi (2003:353) has identified violence and other forms of electoral conflicts perpetrated and perpetuated by men and male youths as the major barriers confronting and inhibiting women active participation in Nigerian politics. Arguments are on the increase on the specific role women should play in the society. Opinions are divided on whether the role of women is predominantly in the home fronts or women can also engage in other socio-economic and political activities like their male counterparts. It is, however, believed that while the natural relationship between mother and her child may compel and confine her to sedentary activities, it is also important that such mother should contribute her quota to the development of her family and that of her society at large. The focus of this paper is the aspect of participation of women in societal activities that relate primarily to politics. For the purpose of explicit analysis, the paper is divided into six parts. Part one consists of introduction, part two focuses on the conceptual clarification. Part three dwells on the problems militating against women's participation in politics Part four comprises of women and political participation in Nigeria. Part five looks at the social, political and economic empowerment and the lastly is the recommendation and conclusion.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

Empowerment: Empowerment in my reckoning is the absence of the barriers to the actualization of natural dreams of women. By this, empowerment would mean the leveling of the playing field such that men do not have an undue advantage in their quest to utilize the human potential whether in business, politics or other social platforms. It is the opening of the space for women to have unfettered access to education, skills, and to participate in the decision making process on matters that affect them.

Women: Refers to the female gender, the opposite of male gender. There is the dependency syndrome that women are known to have being dependent on men. In other words their roles are that of helpers to men.

Participation: entails involvement of citizens in some way with making decisions in political system. Roberts and Edwards (1991) described participation as a term which is usually applied to voluntary rather than coerced activities....they proceeded to explain the term by saying that when participation is used in political context it is thus "the voluntary activities of an individual in political affairs including inter alia: voting as one of the tenets of democracy, is found to be liberal and unrestrictive. Subscribing to this, membership and activity connected with political groups; political movement and parties; office holding in political institution; the exercise of political leadership informal activities such as taking part in political discussions or attendance of political events such as demonstration; attempts to persuade the authorities or members of the public to act in particular ways in relation to

political goals" Participation therefore is the voluntary involvement of eligible citizens in the political, social, and economic activities of the political system.
Okolie (2004:53) perceives participation as "freedom of expression, association, right to free flow of communication, right to influence decision process and the right to social justice, health services, better working condition and opportunity for franchise". Political participation is one of the key ingredients of democracy in its real sense.

Democracy: Taking the conceptualization of democracy by Larry Diamond (1989: xvi) into cognisance, democracy provides the equal opportunity platform for political participation and fairness in such competition, thus: a system of government that meets three essential conditions: meaningful and extensive competition among individuals and groups, especially political parties, for all effective positions of government power, at regular intervals and excluding the use of force; a highly inclusive level of political participation in the selection of leaders and policies, at least through regular and fair election, such that no major (adult) social group is excluded; and a level of civil and political liberties, freedom to form and join organizations sufficient to ensure the integrity of political competition and participation.

In a similar perspective, Onyeoziri (1989:6) conceptualises four indicative domains of democracy which include: "the domain of individual and group rights and freedoms; the domain of popular and equal participation in collective decision; the domain of accountability of government to mass publics and constituent minorities; and the domain of the application of the principles of equal citizenship in all spheres of life- social, economic and political. The running theme of these definitions is that any claim to democratic regime or state must essentially embrace a high degree of competitive choice, openness, and enjoyment of civil and political liberties and popular participation that embraces all groups of the society, one that is not segregationist or discriminatory. The conceptual underpinnings of the definitions are freedom and equal opportunity for political participation that democracy avails both men and women. If democracy does not ordinarily discriminate on the grounds of race, religion or sex, then restrictions experienced in Africa, nay, Nigeria suggests a level of artificiality and man-made imposition. Twentieth century industrial capitalism, however, ushered in secularisation of politics and the legitimisation of universal civil rights (Nda, 2003:329). Women began to form themselves into groups in consciousness of the wave and potency of globalisation and industrial capitalism that inevitably moved towards loosening the socio-economic and political shackles of women and attempted to hasten the pace and tempo of institutionalisation of equal rights for all. Women now, to varying degrees depending on the levels of modernisation and technological development in different societies, participate in education, economic activities and the political processes with little or no formalized hindrance.

History of Women and Participation in Nigerian Politics

In understanding the history of women in Nigeria, It is very important to divide it into three phases.

The pre-colonial period should best be referred to as the pre-capitalist days because it predates the incorporation of the country into the world capitalist system. Despite being a patriarchal society, Nigeria has a rich history that is sprinkled with the inputs of women who have broken out of the mould to participate in politics. Although, during this period, no geographical entity called Nigeria, existed. Historical records show that there were situations where women did not only contribute to the socio-economic development of their nations but were also involved in the historical struggles of their various communities. Their positions were not merely a passive supportive role, but it was powerful, constructive, sometimes self sacrificing roles. The roles these historical women played can therefore serve as a spring board for future generation women to build on some of these historical women, especially the legendary figures, sacrificing themselves in the service of their communities. Another feature about these women is that they struggled to liberate women- hood from the shackles of tradition, which confined them to limit responsibilities in the community. The situation often of crisis, brought out the leadership qualities of these women, it is therefore fair to say that these women started the emancipation of women.

Our pre-colonial history is replete with the exploits of Queen Amina of Zaria in the 16th century who was so powerful that she waged war and conquered the whole of Hausa land and led her armies to drive out invaders from Zaria; In Yoruba land, Princess Moremi who lived in the second half of the 18th century in Ile-Ife, in one invasion during a war allowed herself to be captured only to learn the fighting tactics of her captured and came back to train her people who later defeated their enemies and her sacrifice for her people speaks to selfless leadership that we are so bereft of these days.(Noah;1985) Oba Orumpoto who lived in the 6th century was the only known female Oba in Yoruba land. Before her, Yoruba land was often attacked by the Nupes and many of them taken captives, but when she came to the throne she trained her army in such a way that they were able to attack and conquers Nupe. Gailey;(1970) Ityavyar (2002) believes that in benin Wuli Emotar who lived in the second half of the 15th century was so powerful, intelligent and highly diplomatic that she was able to restore Oba Ogun to the throne by successfully staging palace coup. Queen Obuma Achibong of Duke town in Calabar, who lived between 1854 and 1864, prevented her rivals from overthrowing her by accusing them of sorcery. Mba (1989) Mama (1997) believed that in Igbo land Omu Nwagbako was so powerful and influential that when the christian missionaries came, she influenced almost all the women to go to church. And she was also the one who signed the treaty between the Queen of England and Onitsha in 1884 when it was to be taken over by the British. Princess Inikpi in the 16th century allowed herself to be buried alive in order to save her people from being taken into captive by the Jukuns during the Jukun-Igala war. The Igala people still pay tribute to her till today by leaving money on the grave side. Our recent past bears testimony of prominent women leaders like Funmilayo

Ransome Kuti, a crusader and scourge of despotic leaders who led Egba women on a protest against taxation, similarly the Aba women riot of 1929 (Leith-Ross;1965) Margaret Ekpo, was a member of the house of assembly eastern region 1960-1966 while Mrs Wurooola was the only female in the first republic out of the 12 senators from eastern region.(Macintosh;1967) Hajia Gambo Sawaba ,was the national chairman women's wing of NEPU between 1958 and 1966 and in 1962 she led a group of women and men in an all-night attack on their political opponents in the northern parts of Nigeria to mention a few. Iyalode Tinubu of Lagos testified to the rich participation of women on the economic scene. The legacies of these women are at the risk of extinction. Even though an increasing number of women are finding their way into boardrooms and proving leadership for blue chip companies, the modest feats achieved by women in present day Nigeria pales into insignificance in light of the minimal participation of the preponderant population of women. In reality women participation in decision making in Nigeria is still a far cry from the Rwandan experience- whose economy rode to recovery on the back of women. It is instructive to know that in some parts of the country, women did not earn franchise until 1976 16 years after Nigeria's independence from Great Britain. Like it was then, so it is now and there are nagging fears that exclusion of women might be with us for the long haul for reasons that are not farfetched.

The major thrust of this paper is to look at the level of women's participation in Nigerian politics and the major challenges, if there are any that prevent them from actively participating in politics, Comparatively, the rate at which men participate in politics is incredibly higher than their female counterparts. This is not to say, however, that there has not been a progressive increase in the trend of women participation in politics in terms of appointments and elections, but the participation is considered low considering the international standard of 30% benchmark. In 1992 for instance, under the Babangida's administration, out of 300 gubernatorial aspirants, only 8 were women representing 2.6% and none of these women was elected as governor Iloh and Ikenna, (2009:117). Research has shown that exclusion of women in the party executives contributes in no small measure to the marginalisation of women in politics, especially during party nominations (Ako-Nai, 2005:491; Muhammed, 2006:51; Okoosi-Simbine, 2006:153; Iloh and Ikenna, 2009:117). For the past 27 years, election of women into the National Assembly has not gone beyond 8.3%. It is stated clearly that out of 56 contestable seats in the Senate, only one woman was elected and 3 out 442 were women in the House of Representatives. The story was the same in 1992 in the Senate where only one woman emerged as Senator out of 90 and 14 out of 575 in the House of Representatives. It was also revealed, in the year 1999, out of 978 contestable seats in the 36 Houses of Assembly, men occupied 966 leaving 12 seats for women representing 1.2%. There was upward movement in 2003 where women occupied 39 out of 951 seats representing 4%. In 2007, women occupied 54 seats out of total of 990 with the percentage of 5.5. In the House of Representatives, in the year 1999, out of total 360 seats, women occupied 13 representing 3.6%. In 2003, men occupied 318 out 339 leaving 21 seats for women of 3.6%. The number was increased in 2007 with women occupying a total of 25 seats representing 7%. The story was the same in the Senate, where in 1999;

women occupied 3 seats out of a total of 109 representing 2.8%. In 2003, men occupied 105 out of 109 seats leaving 4 for women representing 3.7%.

There was an increase in 2007 as women occupied 9 seats out of 109 representing 8.3% At the local government level it indicates that out of the 774 local government chairmen elected in 1999 only 8 are women representing 1%. There was a progressive increase in the number of appointive positions occupied by women from 1999 to date and is still likely to increase in future, but the fact remains that the degree of improvement remains marginal. (Aiyede, 2006:172). Prior to 1999, women representation in the Federal Executive Council never exceeded 5% (Nda, 2003:334; Iloh and Ikenna, 2009:117). In 1999-2003, the Obasanjo government made a clear departure and appointed 4 women out of the 29 senior ministers representing 13.7% and 3 out of the 18 junior ministers representing 16.6%. There are 2 women advisors and 2 senior special assistants and 6 special assistants and 1 special assistant to the Vice President. 8 permanent secretaries are women. Despite the argument that political participation of women in Nigeria rose in 2003 and 2007, it is, however, restricted maximally to the appointive positions as none of the women who contested governorship election got elected. Also, the few that contested did so under unpopular parties as major political parties discriminated against the candidacy of women. For example, the Alliance for Democracy (AD) was active in 1999 and 2003 only in the South-West and not in Akwa-Ibom and Kogi states (South-South) and North-Central) respectively. The All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA) was only very active in eastern part of the country and not in Ekiti state. The United Nigeria Peoples Party (UNPP), New Nigerian Peoples Party (NNPP) and National Conscience Party (NCP) did not command any strong followership in any part of the country in 2003 and 2007.

However, Ekiti, Ogun, Osun and later Anambra states produced female Deputy-Governors. As has been earlier indicated, no woman won any governorship seat in the period under review in any of the 36 states. The list of female Deputy Governors elected in the 2007 General Elections Following the Supreme Court judgement on 14th June, 2007 which declared that Peter Obi, elected on the platform of APGA, has not finished his tenure, Andy Uba, whose Deputy Governor was Stella Odife, was removed from office as Governor of Anambra State through the court's verdict. Peter Obi's Deputy, Mrs Virgie Etiaba, was also a woman, and retained a female Deputy-Governorship (Iloh and Ikenna, 2009:117). By and large, women are gradually being conscientised and mobilised into participating in politics, the move that has increased their participation in politics. It is still believed that efforts should still be channeled towards awakening women into productive and active participation in politics in order to realise the full productive capacity of Nigerian preponderant population. This becomes imperative as "irresistible role of women is capable of building strong democratic institutions that are acceptable and durable" (Adedeji, 2009:1).

Linkage between politics, social and economic empowerment

The link between social, economic and politic, exclusion of women lends credence to the presupposition that the empowerment of women along either of these lines: social, economic and politics holds prospects for increased participation on other aforementioned fronts. Building on the premise of the existence of a clear inexorable interconnection between women's deprivation and some economic and socio-cultural factors, it therefore follows that to address women's participation on any front efforts must be made to address the barriers to participation on the two other fronts. In Nigeria, social ranking of women depend on age, lineage and achievement. Empowering women economically affects the way women perceive themselves and the way they are also perceived by the community. Thus women would have no inhibition in participating fully on both the economic and political scenes. The absence of non discriminatory laws in statute books would ease women participation in business and politics. Women can own properties without recourse to the approval of existent and non-existent spouses; they can access finance for their business ideas without the ridiculous requirement of approval from their spouse as it is the case in some parts of Africa.

Economic and Political Empowerment

One of the barriers earlier identified militating against women active political participation is poverty. With the predominant population of Nigerian women living below the poverty line, the pressing needs for most women would be scraping a living for themselves and their families. According to the United Nations, of the three quarters of all economic activities in developing countries ascribed to men, women actually perform 53 percent of the work women feature prominently in the informal sectors of most economies in Africa. The under-representation of women on the political scene can be reversed by empowering them economically. Increasing the income of women gives them self confidence. The link between economic empowerment and quality of lives of women come to the fore as women tend to become more vocal when empowered in making decision on the number of kids they want to have, quality of education for their children, matters of hygiene and the environment to mention a few. Women are also better stewards of economic capital as research has shown that they are more likely than men to plough profit of economic activities into human capital development of children and they are more likely to educate daughters. The implication of this is that more educated women are better suited to participate in decision making process in the society. Women who are empowered economically have less difficulty in playing active roles in politics as they can assert themselves and are unlikely to become pawns in hands of political godfathers with sinister ends in sight.

PROBLEMS MILITATING AGAINST WOMEN'S ACTIVE PARTICIPATION IN POLITICS

Several impediments have been identified as limiting the participation of women on the social, economic and political scenes. These barriers are cultural, economic, and legal amongst others. This intervention would focus on some distinctly Nigerian variants of these barriers.

Religion

Religion is an accomplice in the stereotyping of women and the reinforcing of the barriers that prevent them from participating in politics, economic activities, and on the social scene. For instance in the northern part of Nigeria, women are held in Purdah in deference to Islam. The implication of this is that only their husbands can have unfettered access to them and their movement is restricted to their quarters. They are at the mercies of the husband for the needs to be met. The conditions of their lives can be best left to conjecture as most households subsist below the poverty line Religion ensures that a significant number of women are shut out from participating in politics either as voters or as aspirants into elective officies and also participating in economic activities.

Cultural Practices

"Men are the decision makers; women should be cooking in the kitchen while men play politics." - Comments passed to Dorothy Nyone when she announced her intention to represent the Gokana area in south-eastern Rivers State for the ruling People's Democratic Party. Social conventions, values and mores conspire to deepen the stereotype of women as perpetual habitués of the kitchen who are only gatecrashers into other spheres outside of their matrimonial homes. In fact, they are usually socialized from birth to see their place as a second fiddle. The birth of a male child is warmly received. To show the preference for the male child, women often feel that their place in their matrimonial homes is not secured until they give birth to male children. Cultural practices are often harmful to women. Some of these harmful practices include burial rites that ensure that women remain social outcasts common in the eastern parts of the country- widows are forced to drink the bath water of their dead husbands as part of the mourning process; Vesico Vaginal Fistula (VVF), that results from early marriage of teenage girls in the north. Victims of these cultural practices can hardly participate socially as they are viewed as outcasts a number of barriers are imposed on women active participation in politics by cultural practices. Nigerian society is permeated by patriarchy whereby women are expected to conform to and confine themselves to male dominance and female subservience. Women are seen to belong to the home, be incapable of making sound decisions and it is unbecoming of women to expose themselves in public for political activities such as campaign rallies. Men often find it incredible and impracticable to see them participating in politics. (Iloh and Ikenna, 2009:124; Nda, 2003: 336).

WOMEN'S PERCEPTION OF POLITICS

"Politics is a dirty game". The general perception of politics in Nigeria is one dirty vocation that is reserved for unrefined people who have little scruples with bending the rules and subverting due process. Nigerians are regaled daily with the details of the unsavory actions of members of the political class. Female politicians are therefore seen as accomplices of vile male politicians who are adept at manipulating the popular will of the people. They are treated as deviants who are at home with devious male politicians. It is acceptable for

women to take the backseat as cheerleaders while contesting for public offices is often considered going overboard.

The Demands of Politics

Politics is time consuming and it demands great attention. There are caucus meetings, primaries, campaign stumps ad infinitum. Participation often requires attending nocturnal meetings. Juggling their traditionally ascribed roles with an interest in politics, without a supportive spouse, could result in needless conflict. Some women keen on actualizing their political dreams have had to pay some costly price. The tradeoff could be their marriage and marital happiness. Female politicians are often perceived to be divorcees and marital failures.

Violence and Threat

As an aspirant, Dorothy Nyone had to defy jeers from the chauvinists opposed to her candidacy. The forces of patriarchy in her party ensured that she lost. While her loss was no news, what was telling was the violence- so vexingly rife these days- which marred the elections. In her words: *A ward chairman was shot dead; all the women and most of the men fled the scene. My husband rushed there and took me home. I was scared; men who were fully prepared for the violence were the only ones who remained behind to hand pick the various winners.* One of the potential disincentives to participating in politics is the crudeness of the Nigerian politics that brooks no opposition and resolves dissent by visiting violence on political opponents. The 'do-or-die' nature of politics in Nigeria is hardly veiled and threats are made intermittently to warn opponents that when push comes to shove, the side with the monopoly of violence will carry the day. The spate of politically motivated killings has not helped matters. As I write one of the nine female senators in the national assembly, Senator Gbemisola Saraki narrowly escaped death in the hands of paid assassins on a mission to kill her. Such political motivated attacks are rife. Nigeria's chequered history has had its own fair share of women who have had to pay the ultimate price for venturing into politics. Alhaja Kudirat Abiola, Suliat Adedeji and many others are easily recalled as hapless victims of the sanguinary predilection of Nigerian politics

Funding and High Cost of Election

Although this equally affects men but the rate at which it affects women is more pronounced in Nigeria. The high cost of financing political parties and campaigns is a big obstacle to women. The minimum cost of gubernatorial election could go as high as 200 million naira. How many women can mobilise such huge amount of money and how many men can mobilise such amount of money for women? Which political party would nominate a woman for that post considering her very small contribution to party finance and formation? (Nda, 2003:338). One of the frightening bogeys that politics conjures is the figure of a pot-bellied, avuncular male figure that holds court in a political party as a godfather. His role is not mentoring. Rather the godfather's brief is to provide a robust war chest and clear the path for the emergence of the godson or daughter for the contested office. In return the godfather is for unrestricted access to the corridors of power and inflated contracts that are

rarely executed. For a process that requires tons of cash to buy votes and compromise conscience, candidates without deep-pockets and money bags as backers cannot actualize their dreams of contesting for public office. Nomination forms to contest for elective offices in most parties are very expensive. The average earnings of Nigerian women partly explain why they are reluctant about active participation in politics. . In view of the exorbitant fees charged by political parties for aspirant to run for elections one can safely ascribe the back seat role of cheerleaders and clappers that women have settled for in these collectives. On the economic frontier, limited access to credit/finance also scuttles women's dreams of participation.

The Issue of Indegeneity

This is another major barrier that militates against active women participation in politics. Women who are married outside their constituencies of birth (but who contest elections in their marriage constituencies) are usually regarded as non-indigenes by the people from that constituency (at least by birth). This is a worse case if the woman is married from entirely different ethnic group. Such a woman will be regarded as being over ambitious and may be prevented or discouraged

Poverty

In Africa, poverty wears a woman's face.- UN's Economic Commission for Africa (2009)

A corollary to funding is the stark poverty that confronts Nigerian women. Under stifling economic conditions, women are mostly at the receiving end as they have less access to education, credit information, skills and finance and health care-all critical recipes for attaining financial independence. The combination of all these factors and the burden of child bearing and housekeeping conspire to keep them out of the social and political scenes. In some cultures in Nigeria women have no property or inheritance rights. African women are said to own just 1 percent of the continent's assets. This makes it difficult for them to access loans as they do not have collateral.

Women Participation and the benefits for Nigeria's economy; the way forward

Research has shown the connection between participation of women, a product of economic empowerment and its effect on children, the home and the society at large. Empowered women take adequate care of their children, ensure education of their female daughters and hold in breaking the vicious cycles of poverty that is so rife in Africa. It is widely reported that the Rwandan economy owes it recovery from coma to the effort of its women. Women are said to be driving that economy. With 50% of Rwanda's parliament made up of women, Nigeria can take a clue from the Rwanda by empowering its women. Experts say women make better investment decisions than men. Empowering women with the right skills, adequate funding and timely information will no doubt ensure national productivity. Women can form pressure groups to articulate and voice concerns about workplace issues, redistribution of economic resources, and creation of job opportunities for women among other issues indicative of gender inequality. These groups can also help educate women on

the implications of government policies on their business and participation in politics. Organizations like Baobab for Women's Human Rights, WIMBIZ have played significant roles in this regards. These and many other groups also help by making value adding inputs into legislations that demolish barriers like patriarchal land and property laws that make it difficult for women to own properties by engaging with the political class to enact legislations to encourage the participation of women. The infinitesimal percentages of women in legislative organs still affect the passage of gender friendly law in the country.

Mobilizing and Networking

Regular town hall meetings for women can be convened to discuss issues that collectively affect women. The broadcast media can also be exploited to collate issues that affect women. This is especially effective in rural areas where community radio stations are partners in communicating change. Businesses run by women can form coalitions to formulate policy positions and present a common voice before government. These groups can also interact with thought leaders and think tanks to appraise the impact of proposed legislation on women's intervention in business and politics.

Spreading the word

Periodic publication of IED materials that highlight specific issues can help to galvanise broad support across social lines. These publications should be targeted at a broader audience including particular youths. They should highlight the predicament of other demographics like unemployed youths, widows, the aged and PLWHAs. Quick wins by women should be celebrated. One of such is the recent nullification by a high court in Nigeria of the requirement of spousal approval in form of a letter of consent before the issuance of international passport to married Nigerian women. Young people can help spread report of these quick wins via new media platforms like Face-book and twitter. These social network avenues present the opportunity to rally young people around the cause of gender equality and mobilize public opinion for the opening of the space for women's participation

Impacting skills and information

Skills acquisition centers should be established in rural areas for women to acquire skill on the use of modern agricultural tools as the predominant population of women in Nigeria is involved in agriculture. Women can form agricultural workers collectives where they can pool resources together to collectively acquire lands, and modern tools for farming. Collectives make it easy for women to access funding and also learn new skills to better their lot. Women can also build capacities in ICT and how it can be exploited for financial independence. They can share value adding information especially such Goldman Sachs Women's Enterprise & Leadership Programmes Young people can play important roles in knowledge transfer to disadvantaged women. They can volunteer during holidays to teach basic skills in modern agricultural practices, ICT and managing business. Young professionals can also volunteer to provide financial advisory services to women on the side.

CONCLUSION

Viewed from the perspective of culture and tradition, women actually face massive resistance from participating in politics. Aside the fact that majority of husbands do not allow their wives to participate in politics, the study discovered that a lot of female believed that politics would prevent them from taking absolute care of their families. Fear of broken homes, breeding irresponsible children and the need to perform their domestic activities were identified as major reasons preventing them from going into politics. The issue of violence, thuggery, intimidation and money politics are considered secondary. The first major issue is lack of interest arising from the need to effectively handle their sedentary activities. In order to ensure active participation of women in politics, civil society organisations, governments as well as political parties should increase the level of awareness of women by organizing seminars/workshops not only in the cities but also in the villages. Attendance to such seminars/workshops should be open to both women and men. Men need to be orientated about the need to allow their wives to participate in politics. This is necessary as most of the male respondents are of the opinion that women prostitutes are in politics and that any women in politics are irresponsible house wives. In addition, governments at all levels should encourage girl child education. It can be made compulsory that all female children of school age should go to school free of charge. This will give them equal opportunity with their male counterparts. The exclusion of women from participation on the economic and political fronts is an affront to the spirit and values of democratic governance and free market economy. In fact the society is worse off for it as they are almost always responsible because of their socially ascribed roles of shaping an entire generation. The onus is on young people to take the center stage in overturning these barriers to women empowerment. Women have nothing to lose by their participation on the social, economic and policy scene; the incentives to gain are as limitless.

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