

**CONSOLIDATING NIGERIA'S DEMOCRACY
THROUGH WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION
IN THE FOURTH REPUBLIC, 1999 – 2017**

BY

JACHO David Sunday, PhD

Department of Political Science, Nasarawa State University, Keffi.

e-mail: boyisunday60@gmail.com

and

ABIMIKU J. John, PhD

Department of Public Administration, Nasarawa State University, Keffi.

e-mail: Johnabimiku5@gmail.com

Abstract

Age long efforts designed to harness the creativities, skills and resourcefulness of Women for all round rapid national development in Nigeria have not yielded desirable and impressives, result considering their (women's) representation in key legislative, judicial and executive positions in government as well as party leadership. This paper therefore examines how women have fared in Nigeria's democratic dispensation from 1999– 2017. Put differently, the paper x-rays women's participation in the politics of the fourth republic with a view to knowing how far or the extent to which they (women) benefitted from policies and resolutions (such as United Nations' International Convention on Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (United Nations' Beijing Platform for Action et cetera) to which Nigeria is a signatory. Liberal Feminist theory guided the paper, while data thereto were generated from secondary sources of textbooks, conference proceedings on Women and United Nations' resolutions among others. Upon

investigations, it was discovered that participation of Women in Nigeria's politics during the period in view remained basically marginal as obtained during the military era, as men still overwhelmingly dominated the country's political landscape. Equally revealed was the fact that the development occasioned inception of most policies and programmes in favour of men. Moreover, it was found out that democracy could not be consolidated in the country as the all important contribution of women was shut out. Thus, it is recommended that redressing the situation requires incepting and implementing stiff penalties against default at all levels of national life. It is similarly recommended that aggressive and sustained sensitization and or enlightenment be embarked upon at all levels so as to deannul existing beliefs and prejudices against women's participation in politics.

Keyword: Consolidating, Democracy, Political Participation and Fourth Republic

Introduction

Women constitute a formidable force in the socio-economic and political life of every society. They make up about half of the World Population (Anifowose, 2011) as well as play critical roles as mothers, producers of goods and services, home managers, community organizers including political activists wherever they are (Boserup, 1970; Soetan, 1999 and Anifowose, 2011). No wonder, they are often regarded in many quarters as pillar or backbone of the society. These roles notwithstanding, they are often discriminated against, owing to age long and deep seated policies and practices. This development is undoubtedly an affront on modern democracy which clearly guarantees all eligible citizens of a society (women inclusive) the right to actively participate in the politics thereof; as it enables them vote in or out those who govern or are to govern; contribute to policy conception, formulation and implementation including budgets. It (participation) equally offers electorates opportunities to hold public and or party positions, be involved in electioneering campaigns, contribute to party funds among others. The net effect of this is to render leadership accountable to the people and by extension improve the people's lots.

Pursuant to the goal of accessing women to the levers of power in society so that they actively participate in influencing policies, including distribution of resources in favour of their members (women), measures such as United Nations International Convention on Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), United Nations' Convention on the Political Rights of Women as well as the Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA) have been introduced by both national and international organizations to which Nigeria is a signatory. It was therefore expected that with the return to democracy as from 1999 where women made up about 57% of total

registered voters (Itodo, 2015), coupled with the above stated measures, women's participation in Nigeria's politics will improve appreciably. As a matter of fact, women's influence in the politics of Nigeria would have been growing/consolidating as democracy is being entrenched in the country.

Regrettably, reverse appears to be the case, given women's timid and low representation in governance (in both legislative and executive councils), political party activities and general affairs of society (Itodo, 2015; Usman and Shawai, 2015 and Jibrin, 2015 among others). This paper was therefore prompted to examine the extent to which women fared in the politics of Nigeria from 1999 – 2017. Expressed differently, the paper seeks to assess the extent to the various national and international conventions and resolutions to which Nigeria is a signatory have enabled women in the country to play more active and positive part in the politics thereof.

This paper is structured into six parts, beginning with introduction which is followed by conceptual clarification in the second part. Theoretical framework that guides the study is presented in the next (part three), while women's participation in the country's politics from 1999 – 2017 features in unit five. The issue of obstacles to women's participation in politics features in the fourth section, while the paper is concluded in part six with summary and recommendations made to enhance women's participation in the politics so as to consolidate democracy in the country.

Conceptual Discourse. Some main concepts used in the paper are operationalized as presented below:

i. **Consolidation:** Literally, it means to strengthen or deepen something. Expressed differently and in the context of this paper, it refers to series of activities undertaken to make democracy strong so

that it is able to withstand the challenges that may confront it. But, since the concept (in verbal context) is used in continuous tense, as consolidating, we refer to it as ongoing efforts made to ensure that democracy grows stronger by increasing women's role in political activities of Nigeria. This includes putting in place new or strong measures/rules, policies and institutions designed to make governance accountable to the people, women inclusive. It equally means growing freedom of the electoral commission to conduct free, fair, credible and acceptable polls so that only popular and duly elected office seekers win elections without manipulations by the powers that be. Since women are always shortchanged in elections, this will mean those of them (women) that win will be given their victory.

Saliu (2010) sees democratic consolidation as a chain of activities embarked upon in a society to ensure that electorates including women take more active part in the governance of a country. By involving women, their creativities and resourcefulness are brought to bear on the society. Ultimately, development will be experienced in the larger society, as all citizens (women inclusive) will bring their ideas, creativities and commitment to bear on affairs of their communities/society.

Consolidating democracy in Nigeria through women's political participation means a process of continuously providing opportunities for women in the country to get increasingly involved in influencing the course of development therein like deciding on who should be elected or appointed to a position, contesting for election, contributing to funding of political party as well as influencing the budget and so on and so forth. If women are playing more and more active roles in the politics of Nigeria than before, it means that democracy from that perspective is consolidating as their skills, creativities and values etc will be brought

to bear on national development. We shall now operationalize the concept of democracy.

ii. **Democracy:** Though, Scholars are divided over its exact meaning (Lincoln, 1996; Omotola, 2005, Saliu, among others 2010), it is generally believed to be a system of government in which directly or indirectly, the citizens of a polity render governance accountable periodically through elections, question and answer dialogue between the leaders and electorates as well participation in policy/budget conception, formulation and implementation by the people.

iii. Political Participation:

Consensus does not exist among scholars on the precise meaning. But, it is basically about playing certain roles in the socio-political affairs of a society like involvement in elections, including policy conception, formulation and implementation as well as taking part in holding public or political party position, contributing to party funds or electioneering campaigns et cetera. The main essence of political participation argue Dowse and Hughes (1972) is to render leadership accountable to the people which will lead to improvement of their lives.

iv. **Fourth Republic:** Refers to the period of return to democratic rule in Nigeria from military regime as from 1999. Though, it is still an ongoing journey, we shall limit our study to 2017. This will enable us know the level of progress made in empowering women in the socio-political affairs of the country.

Having undertaken clarification of major concepts used in the paper, let's now examine the theory that guides it (the paper).

Theoretical Excursus:

In efforts to explain increasing marginalization of women in the socio-

economic cum political affairs of Nigeria, several theories (such as class, functionalism and radical feminism among others) have been employed. However, due to inadequacies associated with them, this paper employed Liberal Feminist theory as a guide. Principal proponents of the theory include Tong (1989); Francis (1991); Pall (1992); Russell (1997) Nwankwo (1997) and Ako-Nai (2004).

The theory posits that women are discriminated against and marginalized in society due to deep-seated age-long belief that men are intellectually and physically superior to women. It further contends that this belief influences the opinion of people such that access to decision making levers and by extension other resources of society are skewed in favour of the male folk. Nwankwo (1997) particularly believes that marginalization of women arises from structured inequality in government and society. Thus, the only way to correct same is to have enabling legislations that specify quotas for women in terms of access to decision making rungs and distribution of other resources of society with attendant penalties for lack of compliance thereto clearly spelt out. On her part, Ako-Nai (2004) believes that the feminist ideology is capable of liberating women from the stranglehold of undemocratic structures of the family and society. She equally believes that women's empowerment and equality are dependent on their actions and choices. The theory (Liberal Feminism) frowns at the belief that women are naturally physically and intellectually weaker than men in the academy, forum and political arena. Rather and as a matter of fact, it ascribes the situation of marginalization of women to deep-rooted lego-cultural practices which favour the men. As Tong (1989) perceptively opines, such male-centric structures which favour the men and access them to the public world can only be changed through down to earth political and legislative craftsmanship.

Since age-long efforts to free women in Nigeria from the strangle-hold of marginalization have not succeeded reasonably, it is important to know the obstacles on the way to success as such now lead to breakthrough.

Obstacles to Women's Participation in Politics in Nigeria in the Fourth Republic.

As was clearly stated earlier, political participation enables those involved to seek control of power with which to distribute resources of society to various groups as well as influence policies in favour of groups of choice. This means that since the level of participation of women in politics across the World, especially in developing countries like Nigeria and Guyana et cetera is still low, their take home/benefits therefrom is correspondingly low. Such a development undermines democratic consolidation. This state of affairs is caused by the following:

Exclusion of Women from party leadership: When parties are conceived and formed, women are not always involved. This skews party leadership and policies in favour of the men. Thus, decisions about elective and appointive offices including government policies and programmes are male-centric. This is consistent with the observations of Abdullahi (2015) and Tom and Shawai (2015).

Thuggery and Violence: These vices are part and parcel of politics in most Third World Countries including Nigeria. Since women are by nature not as strong as men and also abhor violence, they often step aside and allow men have a field day (Hafsat, 2014; Tom & Shawai, 2015). This largely explains why they loose out in the struggle for power.

Religious/Trado-Cultural Practices: Age long religious and trado-cultural practices and beliefs present

the woman as inferior to man. These affect conception, formulation and implementation of policies as well as programmes including allocation of resources to groups and or individuals in society (Aituage, 2015; Jacho, 2015).

Lack of/low access to critical resources:

Equally worrisome about the marginalization of women in society has to do with their lack of or low access to some critical resources such as appropriate educational qualifications and skills including finances to enable them aspire to elective and or appointive offices. This is especially so in Nigeria where access to positions considered important requires settling those who have the power to recommend one for the office. In view of the facts that people will have to buy their ways into offices, most women lack such and therefore find it difficult to compete with men for such (Dowse and Hughes, 1972; Liman, 2015).

Absence of enabling legislations: In view of deep beliefs and practices, women find it difficult, if not impossible to access key elective or appointive positions at all levels of government. More often than not, they are seen in many quarters as irresponsible when they accept certain positions that require their absence from home regularly. In this regard, rules and regulations can be made which not only oblige governments at all levels to be gender sensitive in engagement, but punish default. Given the obstacles to women's political participation above, lets now

Women and Political Participation in Nigeria's Fourth Republic.

Achieving rapid, sustainable and all round development in society requires that all citizens, regardless of sex, age, economic status as well as educational attainment et cetera are organized and their creativities harnessed. This is particularly so in Nigeria where age long trado-cultural forces have kept the women folk from

actively and fully participating in the socio-political affairs/activities of their areas and the nation. As Alade (2015) opines aptly, for any nation to achieve national development, it must tap the potential talents of all its citizens, including those of women and youths. As a matter of fact, Coleman (2011) perceptively cautions against such a development as it could cause not only staggering losses of human capital, but national productivity loss and economic development.

Disturbed by this lopsided development which favours the male folk and in a bid to broaden participation of all citizens (women inclusive) in national development, the United Nations, Commonwealth of Nations and the Organization of African Unity (now African Union) to which Nigeria belongs have introduced various policies and programmes on elimination of all manners of discrimination against women. Let us now see how successive regimes in Nigeria from 1999 - 2017 have taken steps to enhance women's participation in politics of the fourth republic at both State and National levels as presented below:

With respect to holding of public office in the various arms of government, remarkable changes cannot be said to have taken place during the democratic era as only few women were appointed or elected into offices just like it was during the military era. The examples below give a vivid picture of the situation better:

Statistics on Gender composition of both National and State Assemblies in Nigeria from 1999-2017.

S/N o.	Office	Time Frame	No. of Men	%	No. of Women	%	Total
		1999-2003	96	98.8	12	1.8	978

		2015-2017	10	94	8	6	10
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Sources: Computed with data from INEC Website (2015) and European Journal of Social Sciences Vol.4, Number 4 (2010):

As can be observed from the table above, during the period under review, women representation in State Legislative Houses across the country rose slightly from 12 representing 1.8% from 1999 – 2003 to 55 which stood at 3.5% from 2015 – 2017; but, in the House of Representatives, it fluctuated between 13 standing at 3.6% from 1999 – 2003 and 14 put at 4% as from 2015 – 2017. Similarly in the Senate, Women representation sluggishly vacillated from 3 put at 2.8% between 1999 and 2003 to 8 translating to 6% from 2015 – 2017.

Regarding participation of women as members of the executive council of government at both national and state levels, the number of women involved was considerably low between 1999 and 2017. The table below gives an insight into representation of women in the National and State Executive Councils of successive governments from 1999 – 2017, though, details in respect of representation of women in State Executive Councils were only partially available at the time of this research. Details of women's involvement at the National and State Executive Councils are as given below:-

S/No	POSITION	NUMBER OF SEATS	NUMBER OF WOMEN				
			1999	2003	2007	2011	2015-2017
i.	President	1	0	0	0	0	0

ii.	Vice President	1	0	0	0	0	0
ii.	Governor	36	0	0	0	0	0
iii.	Deputy Governor	36	1	2	6	3	4

Source: Compiled by the authors (2019) from INEC Website.

Above table gives a graphic picture of women representation in the executive councils of both State and national governments from 1999 – 2017 in Nigeria. As can be seen, no woman was ever elected for the positions of President, Vice President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria nor was any elected for the position of Governor of a State. Expressed in percentage, it means that from 1999 – 2017, women's participation in the executive council as President, Vice President or Governor of any State stood at 0%, while for the position of Deputy, the number and percentage vacillated as follows: In 1999, there was a woman Deputy Governor out of 36 representing 2.77% which slightly increased to 2 in 2003 put at 5.55%. But, in 2007, the number fairly shot up to 6 translating to 16.66%, but, in 2011, only three women got elected as Deputy Governors, put at 8.33%. The situation was not quite different between 2015 and 2017 as only 4 of them got elected as Deputy Governors representing only 11.11%. Perhaps, we should apologize for not including the number of women Ministers and Commissioners at national and State levels during the period under review, because, as at the time of the investigation, the data available to us were conflicting.

Equally observed about women's participation in politics between 1999 and 2017 was their representation in party leadership structure at local, State and national levels. As a matter of fact, with the exception of the position of Women Leader which was reserved exclusively for women

in all the parties, all the other positions were occupied by men. Given the place of party leadership in presenting candidates for elections or nominating party members for appointments, it is obvious to see why women are often marginalized politically.

From the foregoing, we can summarize our finding thus:-

Beginning from 1999 through 2017, the various measures incepted to increase women's participation in Nigeria's politics did not significantly change the situation as the political landscape was still male-centric. In other words, the structures of policy making and resource distribution (especially the legislative and executive councils) were still overwhelmingly dominated by men like in the military era.

It was similarly observed that this state of affairs was supported and or promoted by age long trade-cultural beliefs and practices that women are naturally inferior to men and cannot therefore reasonably contribute to national development.

Equally worrisome was the finding that non-compliance with appropriate conventions and resolutions was not penalized in any way.

Recommendations.

Redressing this ugly state of affairs and harnessing the creativities, skills and resourcefulness of women for rapid national development requires multi-dimensional approach, details of which:-

Sustained and aggressive enlightenment and sensitization campaigns be undertaken by governmental and non-governmental organizations to make all critical stakeholders realize the enormous contributions that women have and can make to national development.

More educational opportunities be offered to women so as to prepare them for

more rewarding jobs/engagements from which they could access, reasonable incomes to effectively bargain for political positions.

In view of the impunity enjoyed by defaults of various resolutions, strong and enforceable penalties be meted on both government and individuals who fail to comply. Example, governments or agencies that fail to abide by quotas reserved for women be penalized appropriately.

More special loan facilities or grants be offered to women to promote their entrepreneurial exploits.

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