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Women's participation and representation in Nigeria's politics in the last decade (1999-2009)

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CHAPTER 4

MEASURES TO INCREASE WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN NIGERIA AND THEIR IMPACT IN THE LAST DECADE

According to Squires (2007: 1), "governments around the globe are introducing institutional mechanisms to increase women's political participation rates and to incorporate women's interests into policy-making". She also adds that, 'parity of political participation in particular has emerged as central to both feminists' gender campaigns and governmental gender equality directives'. In Nigeria, awareness about the role of women in development and the need to encourage them to participate more in government gained momentum in the '1980s'. This awareness was further enhanced in 1995 as a result of Nigeria's participation in the International Conference on women in Beijing, china (Attoe, 2006). This trend has continued to date, as greater efforts are being made to boost awareness on gender equality in politics and beyond.

This chapter outlines the various measures the Nigerian government have put in place to encourage gender equality in politics and in the political parties in particular. This will be done by looking at recent policies adopted, the ways they have been applied to ensure sustainable gender equality in the country's political environment. Other efforts outside government efforts being made to enhance women's chances in politics will also be analyzed.

Furthermore, strategies do not automatically guarantee success; evidence from experiences over a period of time reveals that while documents present a distinct approach and possible objectives, in reality it is clear that the conceptual and practical tensions remain. This chapter will also look into the impact and effect of these strategies in Nigeria in the last decade; thus analyzing the key question in this research which centers on how gender equality propositions in politics have been perceived and inscribed in the political system and political environment.

4.1 An overview of the major strategies towards gender equality in Nigeria's political environment

Although the current system of governance in Nigeria is built on the principles of equal and fair representation of all citizens; this however does not mean an automatic transformation of gender inequality in representation that has existed over a period of time. It does not automatically empower women who have been relegated to the background for some time now. Conscious efforts must be made to enforce gender equality in the country especially in politics. Women's empowerment in Nigeria has been described as 'a dynamic process with four major stages namely, access, conscientization, action and equity' (CEDPA, 1997; Afolabi, 2008). The aim is to ensure numerical increase in significant positions, improve women's articulation especially on issues concerning them as women and as citizens of the country and also to ensure a level playing field for their participation at all levels.

The initial documented effort towards women empowerment in Nigeria is highlighted in the 1979 constitution as well as the 1992 and 1999 constitutions which prohibit any forms of discrimination on the basis of sex. These constitutions guarantee women's right to participate in various things including politics at any level, once they have attained the ages of 18. Following this declaration, on the 23rd of April, 1984, Nigeria made another bold effort by becoming a signatory to the United Nations' Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and by the 13th of June 1985, she ratified the principles of this convention without prejudice (Okome, 2002; The Guardian, 2009). CEDAW basically calls for an end to all forms of discrimination against women by emphasizing 'the need for a radical redefinition of the process and content of social and political development (Okome, 2002). It also stresses the need to acknowledge the important role of women in development and as such engineer their integration into development process as equal partners with men (Okome, 2002). Basically, CEDAW policies guarantee full equality of men and women at all levels and stages of development. In Nigeria, the CEDAW recommendations have been classified as the stepping stone, the foundation on the journey to attaining gender parity which unfortunately is still ongoing as the objectives are yet to manifest in reality.

Nonetheless, the government has continued to initiate policies and programs aimed at improving the status of women to ensure parity with their male counterparts; and these efforts were even recorded during the military era. Women's empowerment programs were initiated by the wives Gen. Babangida and the late Gen. Sani Abacha respectively in their positions as the first ladies (Attoe, 2002). Mrs Maryam Babangida launched the Better Life program for women, a program aimed at empowering women through the development of skills that would improve their financial status amongst other things. She especially targeted rural women; her goal was to enable women irrespective of their background, location or their level of education. At the time it was a welcome development strategy for women and it set a trend for other first ladies and other women in the position to make a difference. In addition to this, Mrs Babangida, one would argue created what we now have as the office of the first lady from just being the wife of the leader to people that have the ability to make a difference especially for women; and this trend has continued ever since. Following this regime was that of the late Gen. Abacha and during this regime, the then first lady, Mrs Miriam Abacha, launched the Family support program, which is also an empowerment program. In her case, the target was not just the women but also for the unit they mostly represent which is the family. Subsequently the late wife of the former president- Olusegun Obasanjo, Mrs Stella Obasanjo made her own contribution specifically targeting the children.

This era also established the National Commission for Women, what is now known as the Ministry of Women Affairs. This is a ministry created specially for women to deal with issues of empowerment as well as poverty alleviation, a ministry aimed at catering for and improving the well being of women. Attoe (2002) rightly argues in this regard, that these programs and efforts and especially the ministry, have given a foundation to the various women's organizations in that they created a rallying point for common actions politically, economically and socially.

4.2 Recent Policies for Promoting Gender Equality in Politics:

Since the return of democracy in 1999, other policies have emerged and were adopted at various times. By July 2000, the federal government adopted the **National Policy on**

Women. This policy was formulated in the hope to ensure justice, freedom, basic human rights and most of all equality across gender. A number of important documents served as a basis reference in the formulation of this policy, and some of these documents include, the resolution of the United Nations' End of Decade for Women (1976-1985), the conference held in Nairobi, Kenya in 1985 with the theme 'Forward Looking Strategies Towards the year 2000'(HAWA, 1995). This policy provides for the empowerment of women at various levels, it calls for the elimination of practices that marginalize women especially in the area of decision making. The National Policy on Women amongst other things promotes Affirmative Action that would bring about up to 30% women's representation in legislative and executive arms of government (CEDAW Nigeria, 2004). Affirmative Action has been defined as a body of procedures designed to combat discrimination against marginalized groups especially women. 'It involves taking deliberate actions to give such groups priority in appointment and nominations to positions of responsibility' for example the quota system (Fashola, 2009:5).

Other objectives of this policy are to 'ensure an equitable sharing in the acquisition of resources, information, opportunities and benefits of development for men and women' (CEDAW, 2004). Secondly, to 'integrate women in all sectors of development in accordance with their capabilities and needs in order to enhance their quality of life, to eradicate poverty, ignorance and illiteracy, and ensure a peaceful and purposeful nation' (CEDAW, 2004). The policy also recommends that 'the objectives of equality and justice must be made the essence of development policies which must be people oriented so that women who constitute about half (49%) of the nation's population can contribute and realize their potentials to the optimum. In all, the objectives of this policy provides the basis for 'integrating women's contributions in all national development efforts with the aim of focusing on areas where support facilities have not yet been adequately provided and women's role are not yet fully acknowledged' for example in politics (CEDAW, 2004).

Although the National Policy on Women contained measures to protect and empower women, many years since its adoption, the objectives are yet to manifest in Nigeria.

Arguments in this regard, highlights that there is the lack of will power to follow through and to change the status quo and ensure a better balance of power across gender. While significant gender inequality still persists in the country, the pursuit of gender equality is still 'perceived as a mainstream rather than a marginalized counter-cultural activity' (Squires, 2007), women themselves are now campaigning more to ensure the recognition of the need for gender equality in Nigeria.

By 2006, the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs pushed for the adoption of yet another policy to replace the National policy of Women, the **National Gender Policy** (The Guardian, June, 2009). In essence one can say that the National Gender Policy embodies the basic principles of the National Policy on Women as well as other International policy recommendations for gender equality, it is more or less working towards similar objectives as the former documents or policies. Nonetheless as reported in the Guardian (2009), the major goals of the National Gender Policy is to build or create a 'just society devoid of discrimination; also to harness the full potential of all social groups regardless of sex or circumstances, and to promote the enjoyment of fundamental human rights and protect the health, social, economic and political well being of all citizens in other to achieve equitable rapid economic growth. Furthermore, it calls for an evidence- based planning and governance system where human, social, financial and technological resources are efficiently and effectively deployed for sustainable development.

This policy is built on the principles of United Nations' Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discriminations Against Women (CEDAW) and other global and regional frameworks that support gender equality and women empowerment in the country laws, the legislative process, judicial and administrative process (The Guardian, 2009). CEDAW basically acknowledges the right of women to 'take part in government of her country either directly or through freely chosen representatives' (CEDAW, 2004). It also promotes the right of 'equal access to public services. The objective of CEDAW centers on the equalization of the status of men and women in the enjoyment and exercise of political rights according to the provisions of the UN charter and UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights (CEDAW, 2004).

To achieve the above, the National Policy on Women has set some targets and they include the adoption of simple measures such as quota system amongst others in order to achieve a minimum critical threshold of women in political party offices, party organs and public life. However unlike the previous policy which recommended 30% representation for women, the National Gender Policy targets a 35% Affirmative Action in favor of women to bridge the gender gap in political representation in both elective and appointive posts at all levels by 2015 (The Guardian, 2009). Subsequently, experts note that the adoption of this policy is an indication that the country has recognized 'the vital role of gender-specific mechanisms within government for mainstreaming gender and promotion of women's empowerment' (Iyalla-Amadi, in the Guardian, 2009).

As regards the level of women participation and representation today, these policies are yet to have the expected impact. Regrettably evidence shows that in the history of Nigeria most of the targets set with timeframe are yet to be met and this one is no exception. In 2007 for example it was reported that the National Assembly rejected a bill incorporating the CEDAW convention into domestic legislation (The Guardian, 2009). According to a front line female politician Mrs Oluremi Adiukwu-Bakare, in a workshop on the implementation of the United Nations' Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), she notes that almost 30yrs after the adoption and ratification of the convention in Nigeria, we still have a lot to do to ensure its proper domestication (The Guardian, 2009). Quoting Mrs Adiukwu-Bakare, 'women still need to fight the good fight for them to get their rights entrenched and passed into law by the National Assembly'. Along this line, the present first lady Hajiya Turai Yar'Adua, expressed her dismay on the level of discrimination women still face in the country despite the various interventions. She notes that the non-adoption of policies for domestication such as the CEDAW is due to the lack of effective advocacy and that this must be addresses soonest (CEDAW, 2008; The Guardian, 2009).

Another plan in place to encourage a better representation of women in politics is the creation of fairer electoral process. The electoral process has been identified as one the contributory factors to injustice in politics as well as gender inequality experienced today.

Arguments suggest that the current trend in the electoral process is very disturbing especially as it relates to preparation for general elections (Oluyerni-Kusa, 2001). Accordingly, there has been a clamor to bring about change. Senator Gaya of the ANPP notes that, the ANPP, the major opposition party in Nigeria today spear headed the move to form an electoral review committee immediately after the previous elections(2007) which was unfair from every angle and unjust in many ways (Interview, 2009). The **'Electoral Reforms'** have become the latest measure embarked upon to ensure a just and fair election and to give everyone interested equal opportunities regardless of gender.

According to Oluyeni-Kusa (2001) the weakness of the electoral law has led to the pervasion of the electoral process under the present democratic dispensation. He argues further that a reform is important in other to create access and participatory democracy. Electoral reform according to Adama (2008) involves a 'change in a system composed of people entitled to vote in an election to improve how public desires are expressed in election result'. The general view is that a successful reform of the electoral process in Nigeria will help curb corruption during elections as well as provide a level playing field within the various political institutions. Accordingly, on the 28th of August 2007, President Yar'Adua formally inaugurated the Electoral Reform Committee headed by Hon. Justice Muhammad Uwais. The objective of this measure is to "re-examine the Nigerian electoral process with the view of ensuring that we raise the quality and standard of the general elections thereby deepen democracy" (Committee report, vol 1, 2008).

The committee has lined up a number of issues that needs to be addressed in other to ensure a level playing field for all in politics regardless of gender. The issues the committee hopes to address would include amongst other things - 'Independent candidacy', the objective of this is to provide room for candidates to vie for elections independent of the political parties especially in cases where party membership frustrates the individual for example in the case of women- when parties deny them access to represent for electoral posts, they would have the choice of standing alone for electoral positions outside their party. Another issue is the negative political culture which has led

to increased violence in the electoral process; this often discourages women from participation in politics.

Furthermore the electoral reforms entails plans evaluate party ideologies and programs, it hopes to ensure that all parties should have identifiable ideologies, ideals which shall inform their programs, 'encouragement should be given to policy-based rather than personality based politics' (Committee report, 2008). The committee also recommends transparency on campaign finance to avoid corruption and clamp down on 'party god fatherism', Political parties should establish internal machinery to determine nomination of candidates in party elections and disqualifications of candidates should be based on the constitution and the law.

Also, the committee calls for the re organization of the Independent National Electoral Commission to that all the constitutional requirements are met at all level. Amongst their recommendations is the need for the sanitization of the electoral process by calling for a truly independent electoral commission imbued with administrative and financial autonomy; a transformation of the voting process to a more transparent one. They highlighted the need to curb corruption in the political process especially in the political environment- the political parties, electoral commission etc. the committee also calls for a reform of the party system because from their findings, the inherited multi-party system is not favoring the country, given the performance so far of the 50 something parties which is fast turning the country into a one-party state. In this regard they call for a re-evaluation of the party system by reducing it to between two and seven party system (Reform Committee Report, 2008).

According to the committees report volume 1 (Dec. 2008), 'free and fair elections are the cornerstone of every democracy and the primary mechanism for exercising the principle sovereignty of the people'. Accordingly have recommended various mechanisms tailored towards free and fair election, as well as equality in politics for all irrespective of gender. One of the major issues they wish to address in this reform of the electoral process is the near exclusion of women who make up about 49% of the population from governance

and they highlighted the urgent need to evolve the electoral process in other to give them a better chance. They urge that all major stake holders in the electoral process, especially the political parties perform creditably so that women and other interest groups are not sidelined in the emerging government. They suggest that there is the need for 'serious sanctions and punishments for electoral malfeasance. Political parties that show a proclivity to violence or intolerance in ideology, policy or the kind of candidates they field should be sanctioned' (Reform Committee Report, 2008: 249)

Despite the above recommendations and more, since the inauguration of this committee, women are still fighting against gender discrimination. Going by a recent interview given by a female politician Mrs Adiukwu-Bakare to the Guardian Newspaper (June 19, 2009), these recommendation are yet to translate to reality. Adiukwu-Bakare who is currently serving a member of different committees on Electoral Reforms both at the National Assembly and Presidential level lamented on how the National Council of States have chosen to remove and ignore issues on gender reforms. She said "we had the Gender Electoral Reform Committee in which all female members of the National Assembly and I was actively involved, we had our electoral reform agenda and we presented it to the Justice Uwais Electoral Reform Committee; we were very emphatic on gender issues, but the white paper that the council of states members brought out just expunged anything on gender. That was really sacrilegious, I couldn't believe it! So we are fighting some of these things and hopefully, we would be able to fight it between now and 2010, so that in 2011, Nigerian women would have better hopes" (Mrs Adiukwu-Bakare in the Guardian Newspaper, June 19, 2009).

In view of the situation above, arguments have emerged questioning Nigeria's ability to translate what is on paper to reality even in the presence of democracy. The arguments range from the fact that it is easier to come up with policies than to implement it; that the rate of corruption in the country affects the will to implement the proposed principles. While others believe that the transformation is in the pipeline, although the impact is slow but surely on the way. As analyzed by a political observer, we cannot expect a miracle overnight; you walk before you can run. Nonetheless all hope is not lost as there

are claims of changes unlike what was before this present republic. Today women are becoming bold in this regard and they are contributing in different ways by organizing themselves to fight for greater emancipation for women as well gender equality socially, culturally, economically and politically.

4.3 Other contributions towards women empowerment and gender equality in Nigeria

Nigerian women are beginning to rise to the occasion when it comes to women empowerment and gender equality. Today there are various organizations and programs geared towards emancipation and uplifting of women. The establishment of the Ministry of Women Affairs and Poverty Alleviation most importantly, has provided an avenue for women to advance in the area of politics. This is because it is an institution created specially to facilitate the mobilization and involvement of women in national state and local government affairs (Effiong, 2008). The Ministry of Women Affairs and Poverty Alleviation is a ministry controlled by the government either at the federal or state level. It is dedicated to cater for the wellbeing of women as well as children. The ministry creates awareness on and also addresses gender issues in the areas of poverty alleviation, education and sensitization, skills development as well as financial aid and especially better participation in governance amongst other issues.

The objectives of this ministry include promotion of women's rights and corresponding responsibilities; to stimulate actions to promote civic, social and economic participation of women; to co-ordinate and monitor women's programs; provide technical and financial support to women NGOs especially National council of Women Societies. The Commissioner in charge of this ministry in Lagos state, Mrs Adefulire, analyzed the various ways this ministry contributes towards the advancement of women of women, she says, "this ministry is doing a lot to help women through it various schemes and programs. We use these programs to enlighten women by educating them to know their rights, to know what is going on around them as well. We also organize skills training where they are encouraged to learn a skill so as to become independent. We do not just stop there; we also provide funds for them to put what they have learnt into practice"

(Interview, 2009). On the question of how they encourage women participation in government, she said that "this ministry has ways of encouraging more women to participate in government. We educate women on things they need to know about being part of governance, so they would go in confident and prepared. We also encourage them when it comes to campaign by supporting them financially, making posters, rallying for and with them in order to get votes. We also encourage the very educated ones that tend to shy away to come out and make changes by making a difference ourselves, leading by example so they know that politics is improving and that women can make a difference if they try. In fact we do a lot" (Interview, 2009).

In addition to the above, there are many NGOs some local and some sponsored by International organizations that have been established to encourage women. There are over seventy formally registered in the country and they are established through out the regions- East, West, North and South as at 2007. Some of them are made up of professionals and geared toward mentoring other women for example the Nigeria federal Business and Professional Women, the Association of University women, Medical Women Association etc. Some focus on protecting the rights of women at various levels, from the grass root, across religions and culture; for examples we have- The Muslim Sisters Association; Centre for Citizens' Emancipation and Empowerment, formed to promote the emancipation of women especially those in 'pudah' (Islamic practice of women seclusion) in Northern states and to offer legal assistance to the underprivileged in the society. We equally have Christian Women and Christian Mothers' association (Nigeria Women's Organizations), all aimed at improving the lives of women in different way.

These are just a few of the current organization geared towards social, cultural, economic and political emancipation. They also into mentoring programs for women and in addition to that, most of them focus on the legal rights of the Nigerian woman which is something that has been in the shadows for a long time. These organizations provide a platform for women to be part of their society, a platform for them to air their views and

make their opinions count and most of all to be part of the process of making a difference in their country.

From all indications, women are becoming better organized unlike what was some years back and as a result, perceptions of women in this regard are beginning to change as well. According to the likes of Chizea & Njoku (1991) and Badmus (2006), the greatest challenge for women advancement is their lack of organization; but now evidence in the recent past have shown a huge change in the rate at which women are organizing themselves and hopefully this will bring about the much expected changes for women in their quest for greater participation and representation in the affairs of the state.

4.4 Impact and Influence of these strategies in the last ten years (1999-2009)

From the evidence provided above, it is obvious that gender equality in public life is one of the dominant issues in Nigeria's fourth republic. Feminist activism is adopting a more state-oriented stance and gender equality advocates are focusing more on greater engagement of women in the state (Squires, 2007:4). Also, feminist activities are now prominent in political parties and state bureaucracies; women activities are increasingly engaging with these institutions with the aim of incorporating more women in decision making positions (Squires, 2007). This somewhat explains why in Nigeria today more women are entering and aspiring to enter the political field in spite of the various challenges and barriers.

Affirmative Action is a welcome development in the country today, and to this effect it manifest in the forms of policies, programs etc to support the move towards gender equality. However the big question remains- how successful have these measures been in areas of implementation and how has it impacted women participation in Nigerian politics? Increased women participation in the political arena has been a continued struggle the world over and Nigeria is no exception. Although Nigeria anticipate changes in this dispensation and with the various affirmative actions to support the minority groups in the country; however all that would only be effective when a deliberate action

is taken to enforce the principles. In Nigeria evidence show that despite the various strategies in place, equitable participation and representation remains a work in progress. The evidence also confirms the fact that women in developing countries still have a long way in attaining the highest political office in their countries.

According to the CEDAW report (2008) the gender roles and stereo-types which predominates the Nigerian society militates against the full participation of women in politics as well as other areas. The general view is that although efforts have been made and are still being made to give more women political opportunities, the ratio of women to men in governance is still insignificant and women are more or less not present in decision-making bodies and they are not properly represented in the political arena. Information gathered in the course of this research presented various opinions on women's level of evolution in politics in the last 10years. While some are of the view that things are on the right track and women need to be patient and follow the course of events, others however are of the opinion that although there is some improvement no doubt, it is still insignificant; the pace is very slow and a lot still needs to be done.

In this regard, Senator Adeyemi of the PDP argues that though women are still clamoring for more participation and representation in politics, in reality women have really gained a lot in the last decade as compared to what was. He notes that before now it was abnormal to see women in politics but today it is different and there is a likelihood greater improvement by the next election come 2011. His overall opinion is that women should play down on the perceived marginalization because for him he doesn't classify women's position in politics as marginalization per se (Interview, 2009). This view unfortunately is common especially amongst men as they believe women should be content with what they have now because it is an improvement form what their predecessors had. In response to this view, Miss Udoubak George amongst others expressed that women today are different from their predecessors in terms of their capabilities and qualification. She notes that women today are a lot more educated, enlightened and more independent than their predecessors and therefore should not settle

for token representation but fight for equality in politics especially in decision making positions (Interview, 2009).

Despite the Affirmative Action, available statistics reveal that from 1999-2009; the state of women participation and representation in politics and governance in Nigeria is still poor, that a great deal of inequality still exists. After the 2007 general election, statistics reveal that Nigeria has about '11% of women political office holders against 89% of men (Fashola, 2009). It is therefore not surprising that Nigeria is ranked 102 in an International Gender Equality Index' (Gov. Fashola, 2009). This is obviously a far cry from the minimum of 35% representation anticipated for women by 2015. According to the CEDAW report (2008: 35), the numerous policies have had little or no effect since the people who are meant to benefit form them are often excluded when these policies are promulgated. The report argues that 'apart from the National Gender Policy on Women, all other policies on women have had little input from women who are routinely absent from their formulation', as a result they are susceptible to failure from the word go (CEDAW, 2008). A UNFPA report on empowering women, states that addressing inequalities through policies and laws is a way of formalizing the goals of gender equality. It notes further that though this is a necessary step, it is however not sufficient to create lasting changes. It all still boils down to proper implementation and willingness to carryout what is written down, as more women are still under-represented in politics and public life.

4.4.1 Impact of gender equality strategies in the political parties:

Political parties claim to have adopted gender equality policies; they claim to implement affirmative action for the empowerment of women. Party manifestoes showcase various plans in place to make sure a minimum of 30% representation for women is attained within the party especially in decision making positions. The table below showcases the various plans the three major parties in Nigeria have devised to encourage women participation in politics:

Table 1: gender equality and women empowerment planks in the parties manifestoes

Political Parties	Peoples Democratic Party (PDP)	All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP)	Action Congress (AC)
	Ensure gender equality in employment and socioeconomic advancement and promote greater women involvement and effective participation in politics.	Provide orientation programs aimed at securing greater political awareness of women in their effective participation in decision- making process at various levels.	Provide orientation programs aimed at securing greater political awareness of women in their effective participation in decision- making process at various levels.
	Ensure adequate women representation in all the organs and institutions of the party and of its government through encouraged participation of women in electoral contest and through political appointments.	Ensure that political parties and government authorities at different levels, involve duly qualified and capable women in higher administrative and policy- making responsibilities	Ensure that political parties and government authorities at different levels, involve duly qualified and capable women in higher administrative and policy- making responsibilities

Sources: The manifestoes of the three political parties and cited in Simbine, 2003 and Badmus, 2006.

It is important to note here that although this was extracted just before the last general elections, the contents of the manifestoes as regards women more or less remain the same.

Given the above propositions within the political parties amongst other things like improved education and economic status, more women are joining political parties in Nigeria. In spite of this, the numbers are still negligible compared to their male counterparts. Very few occupy executive and decision-making positions in the parties because the above measures are yet to be implemented fully (CEDAW, 2008). In PDP,

which is the largest party with the greatest appeal, women are yet to be properly represented in the executive positions, for example the party's National Convention report in 2008, shows that women representation in the party's executive was about 12% as 5 women made the list out of 41 posts. By April 2009, despite speculations of amendments in favor of more women, these amendments are yet to be enforced (Daily Triumph, 2009).

In addition to the above, views from female party members of the PDP as well as the other parties (AC and ANPP) suggest that women are more often assigned 'traditional feminist jobs'. They argue that in many cases they are relegated in the women's wing of the party, and their tasks often include organizing rallies, playing hostess, organizing social events, handling community development projects and dealing with general women's issues that are in hindsight not regarded a priority within the party.

Furthermore, the parties are said to have devised other means of suppressing and oppressing women's opportunities either intentionally or otherwise. The general argument in this regard especially amongst women is that even with the proactive measures devised to encourage women, there is often other avenue to frustrate them. For example on the issue of nomination fees; evidence show that though the political parties have waived the payment of nomination fees for women to encourage them to participate more, CEDAW (2008) argues that parties often devise and demand other payments they cannot afford especially as politics especially at the party level, campaigns etc in Nigeria is all about money, such that women cannot necessarily afford.

The party primary election is yet another obstruction to women's advancement in the party. The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) as well as other government (the Ministry of Women Affairs) and non governmental initiative are evidence that women are aspiring to rising above the level of just being voters and members of the women's wing of political parties where they are only mobilized during campaigns as sycophants for their male counterparts to a level where they will be involved in constructive participation. Nonetheless it is still very difficult for

them to successfully stand for elective positions and their representation remains very low; only very few women contest for and fewer win elective positions as shown in the CEDAW report (2008). Parties often use party primaries to frustrate women in this regard. From the results of primaries conducted over a period of time by political parties, one can easily count the number of women that were able to gain their respective party tickets for the elections. In 2003, the statistics released from the primaries of the PDP showcases a typical example of the political fate of women in politics today. Out of 4 women that contested for the gubernatorial tickets none won, 5 contested for the senatorial ticket and all lost, 7 vied for the House of Representatives and only 1 sailed through and none out of 8 women that contested for the party ticket to run for heads of local governments got a ticket (DSM, 2003).

Based on the interviews conducted, the situation is similar in the other two major parties, as women equally struggle to scale through the party primaries. The reasons suggested by critics of women advancement is that women are too weak to represent the party in the general election, that having a woman as that the flag bearer for the party more or less translates to failure. Others were also of the view that it is simply demeaning for a woman to go ahead of men. A respondent simply said "a woman cannot just play the game as good as a man would" (Interview, 2009). The above situation shows that in spite of the initiative to encourage women within as seen from the party's manifestos or outside in terms of policy recommendations, it is still a struggle for women.

4.5 An Overview of the level of Women's Participation from 1999-2009

According to the research findings, one cannot deny the fact there has been a bit of improvement for women in Nigerian politics in the last decade, however this improvement have been analyzed as steady but very slow. Hon. Patricia Udogu, a gender activist and a PDP member in the House of Representatives, in an interview with This Day Newspaper, (2007) on how women have fared in this dispensation particularly since 1999 through to the last elections in 2007, confirms and analyzes this slow but steady pace in which women have increased in their level of participation and representation. She says that records reveal that as at 1999 there were only 12 women in the state

assemblies as against 978 men, also 3 out of 109 senators and 13 women against of 347 male members of the House of Representatives. However, by 2003 she notes that there was a slight increase to about 6.1% representation of women that is 39 women elected against 951 men in the State Assemblies and 21 women against 339 men in both House of Representatives. Also there was 3.7% elected in the Senate with an increase from 3 to 4 women against 105 male senators. 2007 also recorded a slight increase in the level of women participation and representation (This Day News paper, 2007).

Hon. Udogu, notes the figures form Database of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) although not conclusive as election tribunals are still on, sheds light on the level of women participation and representation today. The records reveal a total of 7160 candidates both men and women participated in the April 2007 elections and only 628 were women. For the office of the president, out of the 25 candidates that contested only 1 was a woman and 5 women contested for the office of the Vice president. For the post of governors in the 36 states of the federation, 474 candidates contested and of this, there were 14 women aspirants while 21 contested for the office of the deputy governor. She notes further that there were 799 candidates for the senate, of which 59 were women; 2342 candidates for the House of Representatives with only 150 women, also 5647 candidates vied for seats in the State Assemblies with only 358 women (This Day News paper, 2007).

According to This day (2007), current records show that there are 9 out of 109 senators and 27 women in the House of Representatives out of 360 members. There are also 5 female deputy governors out of 36 states- in Imo, Lagos, Ogun, Osun and Plateau Sates. Earlier in the dispensation, a woman was the speaker of the House of Representatives- Mrs Particia Etteh and another woman was the speaker of Ogun state House of Assembly- Hon. Titi Sokunde. However, recent report shows that these women no longer occupy these positions Mrs Etteh was forced to resign following some corruption charges while Hon. Sokunde was impeached. In all, evidence show that in 2007 there was just about 2% improvement gains from the 2003 general elections (This Day News, 2007).

Women participation and representation in elections at the national level is regrettably low despite all the policies, improvements reordered still no way near the various gender equality propositions. The CEDAW report, presents a comprehensive statistics of women participation and representation in last three general elections in this republic or dispensation. The table below showcases the level of women representation in the key decision-making positions at the national level since the beginning of this republic:

Table 2: Number and percentage of female candidates who successfully contested in the 1999, 2003 and 2007 General Elections

			1999		2003		2007	
S/N	**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	**Senate**	**109**	**3**	**2.75%**	**4**	**3.7%**	**9**	**8.38%**
3	**House of Representatives**	**360**	**12**	**3.33%**	**21**	**5.83%**	**23**	**6.38%**
4	**Governorship**	**36**	**0**	**0%**	**0**	**0%**	**0**	**0%**
5	**Deputy Governorship**	**36**	**0**	**0%**	**2**	**5.5%**	**6**	**16.6%**
6	**State Houses of Assembly**	**990**	**12**	**1.21%**	**38**	**3.84%**	**53**	**5.25%**

Source: The CEDAW Report, 2008.

The above showcases the level of women participation and representation in government today. It gives one a clear picture of how women have evolved in this dispensation. It is important to note that although this was presented just last year, there may have been some slight changes brought about by impeachments at various level often carried out in the Nigerian parliaments and also inaccuracy due to the fact that electoral commission is still on. In the area of political appointments, CEDAW (2008) argue that women still not adequately represented. The report notes that it is common to find the few women in appointive positions occupying junior ministerial positions or heading ministries dealing

with issues traditionally seen as women's realm' for example the Ministry of Women Affairs and Social welfare.

Increased women participation in politics remains a continuous struggle in Nigeria. 1999 presented hope for change as regards equal participation for all especially the underrepresented- women. Although 1999 kick started the journey to equality, very little success was recorded at that time. By 2003 and 2007, the political scene in Nigeria started to liberalize, and this has created more opportunities for the participation of women. Unfortunately, this liberalization has not recorded much success in terms of attaining the goals of the various gender equality strategies. According to This day News (2007) and Gov. Fashola (2009), records from 1999 through to 2007 showed that 833 persons were appointed with 86 of them women representing a transition from the 5% reported in 1999 to about 11.9% in the last election in 2007; we are yet to attain the 35% representation goal. CEDAW report (2008:47), notes that disappointingly, the last elections did not produce a significant number of women in elected posts. It concludes that the improvement of the position of women in Nigerian politics has thus been marginal.

Furthermore, evidence gathered in the course of this research reveals something rather interesting. It shows that although women participation is slowly increasing, the opportunities still remain with the 'elites', there is a high level of nepotism. Politics for women today according to Senator Bent as well as the Hon. Commissioner for Women Affairs is still limited to those with inside connections either as a result of immediate family connection or connection by marriage. Hon. Adefulire acknowledges the fact that the ordinary woman, the outsider so to speak has to fight twice as hard to be recognized in the political field. She says that "people that even enjoy the opportunities available today either had a father, husband or brother in politics or bears a name that is easily recognized in the political environment. In my case, I got into politics through my father" (Interview, 2009).

In other words the level of participation is increasing, yet the participation or the ability to participate is limited. The ordinary woman is yet to benefit from the affirmative action often talked about. The political environment and the political parties are yet to open up to welcome the 'ordinary' woman, the anticipated freedom prescribed in the manifestos are yet to manifest in reality.

Concluding Remarks:

According to Effiong (2008), the campaign for more women participation in national activities is not only a street slogan in Nigeria at present, but a government struggle and popularized program. Evidence presented above, gives one a glimpse into the effort and strategies being made to enhance women's level of access, presence and influence in politics by the government, as well as independent organizations. With the return to civil rule and democracy in 1999, government as well as various organizations has worked towards the participation and representation of the majority and since women make up about half the population, policies have been adopted and introduced to enable greater participation of women, to make up for this majority rule in politics.

However ten years down the line, the level of women participation in politics remains very low. Although strategies in place are promising, they seem to have little effect or impact as it stands. There is improvement no doubt but the pace is not very encouraging, the objective of 35% representation at the moment seems far fetched. Women in Nigeria according to the former Minister of Women affairs Hajia Inna Maryam Ciroma are still underdogs in the area of politics despite their numerical strength in the country (This Day News, 2007).

Although, the outcome of these gender equality measures are not yet favorable as one would expect; however, one would argue that it is still early days at least for some of the strategies; hopefully the impacts would be felt more in the near future. In addition, Nigeria's political system is riddled with all forms of corruption and it is bound to cause various forms of challenges for any policy or reform or empowerment programs. Nonetheless, in as much as women are still facing a lot of challenges in gaining access,

having a presence and contributing in the area of politics, there is still a resilience which is built on the hope that the form of government in practice today brings. The general view is that more work still needs to be done within the political structure and beyond to encourage the pace of women's level of participation and representation in politics especially in decision-making positions. According to Oluyeni-Kusa (2001), the litmus test for democracy in Nigeria will be the extent to which the electoral process reforms and policy adoptions and emancipation projects is able to engender fair, participatory and inclusive electoral process in the country.