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

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CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION: Remarks and Recommendations

5.1 Remarks on findings

Gender equality in politics and beyond is one of the main issues at the center of Nigerian government in the recent dispensation. Top on the agenda is the clamor for more women to participate and be represented in the political process not just as mere members but to be part of the decision making process in the country. In the last decade the political setting has shown some degree of willingness to give room for better women's participation and representation. Accordingly efforts have been put in place to enable women have access, presence and influence in matters of the state. These efforts include government measures in the forms of policies and affirmative actions, independent organizations recommendations as well as recommendations from international bodies; however making a success of these measures still lies in their implementation.

While one cannot deny that the Nigerian government has scored well on adopting and or formulating measures to address gender justice, they have however failed to allocate resources critical to the implementation and ensure proper functioning of these measures. As it stands, gender equality remains a mirage in many instances especially in politics (Umeha, Champion Newspaper, 2010). The findings of this study points to the fact that the last decade has presented hope as well as recorded a bit of success for women in politics. There is a conscious effort to increase the level of women political participation at all levels to at least 35% by 2015. Be that as it may, evidence still shows that Nigeria has a long way to go as regards implementing these gender equality propositions.

Women's participation as it stands today has improved from what it was in the past but there is still room for improvement. Records show that women have moved from a state of insignificance in participation to about 11% representation in the last general election held in 2007. In other words, women's participation from 1999-2009 shows that an improvement, although the level is still very low. Respondents point out that the pace of implementing the gender propositions is very slow and there are still lots of challenges as

regard sustenance. The general argument is that women still play minor roles in the country's politics despite their numbers and potential and unfortunately women still make up a negligible number in decision making positions.

In view of the above arguments, a lot of factors have been associated with or blamed for marginalization of women in all walks of life especially in politics that are undeniable. The low level of women participation in politics and public policy decision-making have been attributed to the influence of a lot factors common to all and some unique in some cases. These factors range from social, economic, cultural factors, political environment etc. In the Nigerian setting it is obvious that these factors play a major role on the ability of women to be part of the political process.

Patriarchy is exceptionally powerful in Nigeria till date. The girl child still occupy a second place in the society be it in the area of education or the economy and the cultural beliefs also tend to relegate women to the back ground. Women are often conceptualized in their traditional roles as care givers and or mothers, they are also considered the weaker sex and too fragile to be part of public life especially in areas of decision-making. This conception greatly influence the opportunities women have in politics today even with the level of interventions in place.

Subsequently, studies have also shown a lack of political will on the part of the Nigerian government to incorporate gender equality propositions (Badmus, 2006). Agina- Ude (2003), Badmus (2006) point out that government often capitalize on gender issues to gain support during elections but never really take practical steps to increase women participation in the governing process. Government often presents this consciousness towards gender equality by setting up institutions like the Ministry of Women Affairs and Poverty Alleviation with the objective of organizing and supporting more women to take part in politics, yet very little progress has come from those institutions because at the end of the day, women are neither given the opportunity at election nor appointed as promised. Quoting Agina-Ude (2003 in Badmus, 2006) "nothing stops the state chief

executives from appointing a sizeable number of women into public offices to make up for the short fall in all elective offices".

In addition to the above, other factors have been identified as equally contributory to women's poor state of political participation, one study in particular by Badmus (2006) highlighted the role of women as the key in this regard. He notes that amongst other things, women have failed to organize to fight for their right to be part of political process; he argues that women need to support themselves in other to succeed in Nigerian political field. Contrary to the above argument, other arguments paid greater attention to the political environment especially the political parties and how they affect women or influence their ability to be part of politics. The view is that the political environment especially the political parties tend to have the upper hand and the final say on the level of women participation and representation in politics and not necessarily the other way round.

Findings in this regard suggest that political parties have played a role in Nigeria's political history as well as the history of women's participation since the time of independence. Today with the system of government- in place- representative democracy, the political parties once again play a major role in the electoral process. Using the three major political parties - the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), All Nigerian People Party (ANPP) and Action Congress (AC) as a case study, the research showcase that contrary to Badmus (2006) arguement that women's lack of organization is what is holding them back when it comes to participation, political parties in many ways hold the key to women advancement in Nigerian politics, especially in decision- making positions and elective positions.

Evidence points to the fact that political parties in Nigeria has always been and is still dominated by men, and there is an unwillingness include to place women high on the electoral list during elections, make women issues high on their list of priorities or even include them in decision-making positions within the party. Party manifestos and activities are yet to fully reflect women's issues; instead they remain confined to the

women's wing of the various parties where they are treated as subordinates and mere supporters instead of equal partners. Respondents pointed out that the only position given to women in the executive arm of the political parties is often 'women's leader'. This definitely does not define the sort of inclusion that would increase level of participation they desire. As a result there have been arguments as regards the women's wing of political parties. While some argue for its ban to enable proper recognition and integration of women in these parties as this position encourages discrimination. On the other hand some believe this proposition should be re-examined as this group has its merit because given the level of gender backwardness, this organization within the parties will give women the space to grow and launch themselves properly in the political field.

Although better organization as suggested by Badmus (2006) would help women to a large extent no doubt, however overwhelming evidence supports the fact that political parties in many ways determine women's level of participation. Political parties are the institutions that prepare, present and support candidates for elective position and other key decision-making positions; therefore for women to have access to these position they definitely need the support of the political parties. As it stands there is still a high level of corruption, godfatherism, within the various parties, violence and thuggery is very much the order of the day. Furthermore, because of the existence of patriarchy at various levels, there is lack of recognition of women as equals and inclusion in party decision making body as such. Therefore, although women are increasing numerically in the political parties; they are however struggling to be heard or to make an impact. All these need to be addressed despite the numerous policies and affirmative action in other to improve the position of women in the Nigerian political field.

5.2 Recommendation on how to ensure and sustain women participation and representation in Nigerian politics:

Comparing the various measures to address gender justice to the level of women participation and representation in Nigerian politics today, it is obvious that there is a gap between these policy prescriptions and their implementation. The study has revealed that there is no faithful implementation of the established policy framework. The argument in

this regard is that policies alone cannot automatically change the trend in the political arena; additional efforts are needed alongside policies in other to bring about change for women.

Various recommendations were offered by respondents as additional principles that could ensure and sustain success for gender equality especially in politics. Some of these recommendations include structural adjustments. According to Miss Udoubak, "no society would succeed in establishing equality until structures that upheld male dominance were altered as they would always work against the objectives of the policies" (Interview, 2009). Also Akintunde-Ighodalo (2001) argues in this regard that a country like Nigeria should not imitate European models or recommendations blindly when it comes to things like policies, rather it must be adapted to fit the Nigerian society. In other words, it is imperative to address the negative societal attitudes towards women participation in public life by creating awareness along side the various policy documents. For example in the area of women equality in governance, there is the need for enlightenment programs: education, re-orientation, sensitization and advocacy for all at all levels irrespective of gender. Also there should be a correlation of the public and private aspects of the society in that the views of equality of sexes must be practices in the communities, family unit etc. In other words, national plans of action must include human development and capacity building so as to create greater opportunity to increase women's access, presence as well as influence in the Nigerian Political field.

Secondly, in recent times (2009) transparency is lacking in the Nigerian political environment especially in the political parties and this has greatly discouraged the impact of gender equality strategies in the country. There is a lack of proper dissemination of information on this issue both within and outside the party setting. Policy documents are often not accessible and information on the subsequent plans is often not made known to the public. I experienced this first hand while conducting this research as I faced difficulty obtaining policy documents amongst other important materials; I had to rely on contacts as well as secondary documents to obtain information. According to the latest Transparency International Report in the Vanguard Newspaper (November, 2009),

Nigeria's level of transparency in politics as well as other areas in the country is very low, in fact Nigeria current rank is 130 out of 180 countries covered by the report. This however is detrimental to the growth and development of women in political as well as other aspects in the country. Transparency will enable the citizens especially women to know what the plans for implementation of the gender equality propositions, what is being done and what is yet to be done. It would enable people and in this case women to be part of the process in every sense. Another factors that has to be implemented alongside transparency is the establishment of a monitoring process, as it stands today in Nigeria this is lacking and this is to monitor the impact and influence of the policies.

Thirdly, there is a need for legal backing of gender equality propositions in Nigeria. In the last decade, it is a known fact that Nigeria has adopted two major policies and also devised affirmative actions like the quota system to help increase the level of women participation in politics (The National Policy on Women in 2000/2001 and The National Gender Policy in 2006). Nigeria is also a signatory to recommendations of the Beijing Women's conference as well as the UN conference against women discrimination CEDAW. But evidence suggests that there is the inadequacy of legislature to supports these gender equality propositions.

In addition, the constitution of Nigeria (Section 42) prohibits discrimination on grounds of sex amongst others, evidence show that there are few anti-discriminatory laws at national level, CEDAW (2008) points out that none of the existing laws really targets elimination and promotion of equal opportunity and access to women and girls in all spheres of life. Ironically, the constitution in some cases seems to be aiding discrimination. For example, Sections 26 of the constitution which relates to citizenship implies that a man who is not a Nigerian but married to a Nigerian woman cannot be conferred with Nigerian citizenship by registration but the reverse is the case for men. This section of the constitution clearly portrays a huge degree of discrimination and intolerance to women's emancipation in the country. As regards the two major policies on women and gender equality, there is no evidence of any provision for them in the

constitution or in the country's legislature. This may affect their perception in the country, within the political parties as well as government institutions.

Furthermore, there is also the need to address the electoral concerns in the country. There is a weakness of electoral law in Nigeria and this has led to corruption of the electoral process in this present dispensation. There are cases of deception traced to some candidates presented by political parties as well as other cases of blatant violation of the rules in election in other to frustrate the seemly weaker candidates mostly women and in most cases nothing was done and this has become the trend. For gender equality to be promoted in this environment is going to be difficult; the recommendation is that electoral law and the electoral process has to be reformed to create access and participatory democracy. Independent candidacy should be encouraged to provide an alternative for women finding it difficult to obtain their party ticket, laws should be enforced to control campaign process, curtail money politics.

Non-governmental organizations as well as government organizations should also be involved in the campaign of women participation in politics. They can work in collaboration with various political institutions especially the political parties. They can organize capacity building support for women participation in politics by the introduction of programs for aimed at providing conceptual, analytical and practical tools for leadership skills (Udogu, 2007; Afolabi, 2009). They can organize 'leadership development trainings which emphasizes awareness raising, self-esteem, inter-generational and capacity building programs (Afolabi, 2009) etc. all these educational programs would help create an enabling environment as well as attitude that will allow women participate more in public life and put more women in decision making positions in government as well as other sectors.

Gender mainstreaming must be made mandatory in all government, political parties' even private sectors in the country (CEDAW, 2008). The focus should be on implementation and not just on the policy itself, efforts should be made to enhance the will of various institutions in making the policy ideas a reality. In the area of women participation and

proper representation in politics, more of this focus should be on the political parties. Political parties are the gatekeepers to women participation in politics, it is important that gender dialogues be intensified within these parties (AFA, 2007). The content and implementation of the laws governing these parties must have an impact on women participation and representation (AFA, 2007). They must ensure fairness and equal opportunities for women; most of all, the mode of implementation of the party bylaws must be adequately monitored and transparent. Alliance for Africa report (2007) suggests that "unless political parties make special effort to democratize themselves internally, there is little prospect to equal participation of women in elections". The report also notes that 'women will most likely continue to be forced to make compromise on issues that are important to them' despite the various policies available to help women. Senator Bent, a senator representing PDP, Adamawa state, recommends that parties should be compelled to tackle problems of violence and corruption as this constitutes hindrance to women despite the affirmative actions and makes the political environment very uncomfortable for them (Interview, 2009).

CEDAW report (2008) on the other hand, suggests that government institutions must ensure that all political appointments align to the National Gender Policy which stipulates at least a 35% appointment of women. Other suggestions include; that political parties must work in collaboration with the Federal and State Ministries of Women Affairs to ensure that the women's voices are not swept under the carpet (Hon Adefulire, Senator Bent, Interview, 2009). CEDAW report (2008) even suggests further that in working with the ministry, they can also establish trust fund for women political aspirants as part of the affirmative action.

Women are yet to gain the support of their various parties to compete for such seats as the seat of the president or be elected as a governor. There is also still a high level of tokenism in appointive positions. At the moment we are addressing the tip of the issue, we are yet to address the iceberg. There is a need for the promotion of the will to make changes in the country for all regardless of ones class or background. As it stands, evidence points to the fact that increase women's practical freedom especially in politics

still vary with class, and yet to trickle down to the ordinary woman. Recognition in the political field for women especially is still very much based on nepotism. The commissioner for Women Affairs and Poverty Alleviation in Lagos State, as well as various senators interviewed for this study confirmed this fact, they noted that each and everyone of them are in one way or another connected to a political family either daughters of ex-politicians, wives of politician etc. They all agreed that the ordinary woman out there is yet to be recognized in the challenging world of politics and when they do, they have to fight twice a hard to be recognized and supported.

Another common view expressed by respondents is that Nigeria is still not matured politically to fully address issues such as gender equality. A journalist with the Independent Daily Newspaper (Interview, 2009) argues that Nigeria is still a baby in the world of democracy and therefore cannot be expected to attain the level of success in democracy like The United States of America. He notes that ten years is not enough to record the level of success in women participation in politics women anticipate given the history of women in politics. This level of maturity according to the arguments is evident in the structure of political parties today, their lack of or inability to change in the way they are organized and run from what they are used to, thus creating a huge barrier for women advancement even with the adoption of the various policies and affirmative actions. In addition to this, socio-cultural, religious, economic factors still role to play in the various political institutions and Patriarchy is still the order of the day when it comes to women representation and participation in public life. The recommendation in this regard is that Nigerians and women in particular should exercise patience with the attempts and initiatives by the government; they should be seen as a source of hope for women in the near future.

Women agree that they are being marginalized in the political field, and in line with Badmus, (2006) a lot of women believe women have a part to play as well, especially in the area of support for their fellow women. This study uncovered that it is not because women are simply being women, one of the reasons maybe as a result of their orientation over a period of time, passed down from one generation to another thus contribution to

the fact that women often do not believe in themselves. As a result women would rather support male candidates over their fellow women thus pulling their fellow women down, something that was referred to as the 'pull me down syndrome'. Various respondents argue that women need to organize themselves not just forming organizations to fight for today. They need to adopt strategies for themselves outside that of the government that would make them believe in their abilities more, support themselves better; strategies like political education, mentoring programs etc. they should also pass this new form of education and orientation down to the younger generation so as to replace what they are used to. This in many ways will help prepare women especially upcoming ones and broaden their horizon on the issues of politics and help them realize the need for them to have a voice in the way they are governed.

Concluding Remarks

All these recommendations are not entirely new; nonetheless a continuous effort is needed to promote awareness on the need for gender equality not just for women but for the country as a whole. In reality women are still faced with the struggled to be heard and the 30% -35% policy recommendations is yet to be realized. An important contribution of this study therefore is to create awareness on the evolution of women in the light of the somewhat 'sustained' change in government in the last decade; to highlight the difference between numerical increase as well as substantial increase in women participation and representation. It also showcases the importance of understanding how an ability to properly implement affirmative action strategies especially within political institutions can bring about a difference in the level of women participation and representation in politics.

Given the nature of this study, as mentioned earlier the study used a qualitative method of research. The major strength of this approach is that it provides a detailed and in-depth description of views and experiences of the different respondents. It created a detailed data for me as the researcher, thus providing an insight into the reality on women's state

or level of participation in Nigerian politics. Although the above findings cannot be generalized, the goal was to explore what is happening with regards to women participation and representation in Nigerian politics since the return of civilian rule and democracy. To understand the attempts that are being made and how they are being made to ensure women are made part of this transition. And as such the views that re reflected in this study include that of officials in the political field both male and female, political party officials, women party members as well as female political observers, intellectuals, journalists or political analysts. This is obviously a much talked about topic that people especially women are very passionate about, the kind of passion that could affect ones findings. The limitation included such facts like; more women were willing to participate more than the men; there was a lot of reactivity in response to the interviews. In this regard, one could say that the documents provided some form of balance in the area of accuracy; however it was impossible to obtain documents to substantiate all the claims made. Finally, the methods applied were time consuming.

Following the findings in this study, one would recommend that there is a need for further research on this topic. The clamor for increased women participation in politics is an ongoing topic that is still at a very early stage in a country like Nigeria, further studies needs to follow up to help create more awareness on the topic. Studies need to follow up on the initiatives, strategies and implementation process of the various recommendations. There is also the need to look into ways of monitoring the gender equality process in the politics especially in a country like Nigeria where there is low legal support of such issues and data documents is difficult to come by because it is not made available to all. Further research should provoke new angles of debate about gender issues to take on from where other researches stopped, to create increased understanding of the world of injustice and violation of rights associated with gender discrimination.

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APPENDIX

INTERVIEW GUIDE

The following questions served as a guide for the interview. These questions include some general questions as well as some specially designed for some of the respondents.

General:

- How would you describe politics in Nigeria overtime?
- Looking at the last 10 years, what has changed?
- How would you analyze the position of women in Nigeria especially in the area of politics?
- Are there changes for women as well in the last decade especially in participation, in what ways?
- How possible is it for a woman to become an elected governor or president in the Nigeria of today?
- The general view is that despite agitations for gender equality in politics, the situation of women today is so because of various factors, one of which is the political environment especially political parties which do not place women first, what is your view?
- What in your opinion are other possible challenges women face in their quest to be politically significant?
- What do you think should be done and how, to include women more and improve their position in politics?

Political Analysts:

- Nigeria runs a multiparty system of government, however three are dominant; could you briefly describe these three major parties?
- How would you analyze the position of women in these parties?
- Is there a future for women in Nigeria's politics?
- There are national policies on women to encourage gender equality in the political arena amongst other places, and these parties have adopted these

polices. How would you assess their perception and adoption of these polices?

- Are there any significant changes in the area of women participation and representation within these parties and beyond?
- On a general note, does the seemingly lack of strong opposition in Nigeria's political system impact on the level of women participation in general?

Political Party Respondents:

- How would you describe your party, the ideologies and vision; how does this relate to women?
- How would you assess their level of access, presence and influence in the party in the last decade?
- Since the adoption of the two major policies on women, how has it been implemented so far?
- How easy is it for a woman to be the party flag bearer during elections?
- What are the various mechanisms in place within the party to enable women attain their full potential within and outside the party, and how are these mechanisms monitored?
- What in your opinion needs to be done for women in this party in other to ensure and sustain equality in every sense?

NB: Although these questioned were designed to answer the major research question, it is important to note, that they are just guides and as such may not have been followed rigidly.