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## Gender Imbalance, Reduced Productivity and Low Political Empowerment of Women in Nigeria's Democratic Space (1999-2023)

Ibitoye, Majekodunmi Olusesan Ph.D

Department of Political Science and International Diplomacy,  
Bamidele Olumilua University of Education, Science and Technology  
Ikere-Ekiti, Ekiti State, Nigeria

E-mails: [ibitoye.majekodunmi@bouesti.edu.ng](mailto:ibitoye.majekodunmi@bouesti.edu.ng) [ibitoyemajekodunmiolusesan@gmail.com](mailto:ibitoyemajekodunmiolusesan@gmail.com)

### ABSTRACT

The clamour for gender parity and/or equality is a global issue that has been and is still being widely discussed and this has prompted most governments of the world to address the apparent challenges posed by gender disparity and discrimination across the globe. Thus, this paper intends to address the plethora of problems and issues being confronted by womenfolk in Nigeria so as to provide the strategies for ensuring gender equity and to bring to an end the societal bias against women as a prerequisite for societal upliftment which will eventually lead to rapid increase in women's contribution to socio-economic and political development of the nation at large. Using content-analysis method, data were sourced from the existing relevant literature and the research paper adopts Gender Equality Theory. The study reveals that the goal of achieving equality of rights for both men and women has been a difficult task to achieve in Nigeria due to; adverse cultural and religious practices, colonial experience, lack of education, oppressive political environment and poor socio-economic status of Nigerian women. The study therefore recommends among other things, the breaking down of the adverse cultural and religious negative practices, integration of women into the mainstream of politics, liberalization of the oppressive political environment, re-orientating and re-awakening the womenfolk through mass media as well as to ensure that issues of special concern to women are wholistically addressed at all levels of government.

**Keywords:** Gender imbalance, Reduced productivity, Low participation, Women and Nigeria.

### Aims Research Journal Reference Format:

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Ibitoye, M.O. (2023): Gender Imbalance, Reduced Productivity and Low Political Empowerment of Women in Nigeria's Democratic Space (1999-2023). *Advances in Multidisciplinary and Scientific Research Journal* Vol. 9. No. 4. Pp 44-58.  
[www.isteams.net/aimsjournal](http://www.isteams.net/aimsjournal). [dx.doi.org/10.22624/AIMS/V9N3P5](https://doi.org/10.22624/AIMS/V9N3P5)

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

“A major challenge for women is how to wield power not as an instrument of dominance and exclusion but as an instrument of liberation and equity” – Jacqueline Pita Guy (1995).

The 8<sup>th</sup> of March, every year marks international women's day worldwide and the essence of this special day set aside for women internationally is to basically reawaken the consciousness of everybody to the plights of all women in the world and to unravel the mystery responsible for the near absence of women in the decision-making positions and organs of government which has made it difficult to achieve the 35 per cent of women participation being sought for in elective and appointive positions in many countries; developed and developing.

In the pre-colonial era, the political sagacity of Nigerian women cannot be under-estimated as Nigerian women recorded notable and classical achievements in the political history and decision-making processes of the traditional society/ies. Examples of such great women are: Moremi of Ile-Ife, Princess Inkpi of Igalaland, Queen Amina of Zaria, Queen Kambasa of Ijaw, Queen Owani of Ilesa and Madam Tinubu-The Iyalode of Egbaland. In addition, during the colonial period, despite the rather slow educational and professional progress of women in the country, some women still made significant contributions to the struggle against the marginalization of Nigeria womenfolk especially in politics.

These include the likes of Mrs Chariotte Obasa, Lady Oyinkan Abayomi, Mrs Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti, Chief [Mrs] Elizabeth Adekogbe, Mrs. Margaret Ekpo, Chief [Mrs] Wuraola Esan, among others. Since independence to date, however, the progress of Nigerian women in political participation has been significantly poor when viewed against the giant strides they have achieved in education, business enterprises and other professions – such names as Prof. Alele Williams, Prof. Bolanle Awe, Prof. Jadesola Akande, Chief (Mrs) Kuforiji Olubi, Prof. Dora Akunliyi, Mrs. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, Mrs. Oby Ezekwesili, Mrs. Joy Emordi, Hon. Abike Dabiri, Mrs. Florence Ita-Giwa, Mrs. Ndi Okereke – Onyiuke, Mrs. Joy Ogwu, Mrs. Hellen Esuene, Senator. Biodun Olujimi and others, cannot be easily thrown overboard.

It is rather unfortunate to note that the overall female representation in the governance of this nation, both under the military and democratic regimes has been less than 5 per cent (Nwankwo, 1996). The result of this gross under-representation has continued to further relegate women to the background and slow down the country's pace of development, socially, economically and politically.

Furthermore, four main issues have been raised to solidify attention and global commentary by pundits as follows:

- a) Nigeria has not produced a lady in the Presidency either as Vice or as the main person;
- b) None of the 36 States of Nigeria has dignified the State House with the presence and picture of a woman. Not even the Federal Capital Territory of Abuja;
- c) In the first ten years of the Fourth Republic (1999-2009), the aggregate representation of women in democratic official space was 9%. In other words, out of every one thousand political appointments, women were given only ninety. The second half fared better with a 2% marginal increase from 9% to 11%; and
- d) Cabinet positions at both the State and Federal levels displayed grotesque selfishness, male domination and disregard for the principles delicately enunciated in the Quota Commission/Agency.

In view of the above observations, Nigeria cannot be left out in the struggle for better strategies and course of actions which aimed at achieving equality of opportunities for both men and women in the development of our great nation.

### **Conceptual Clarification and Explanation**

Women empowerment is a universal phenomenon and in recent time, the phenomenon is fast gaining ground. The reason being that there is no human society or polity in all regions and climes of the world where women to a certain degree are neither marginalized nor oppressed. The concept of empowerment has become a major source of concern and interest in recent years. This is perhaps largely due to the wide scope of content areas to which empowerment theory can be applied. Today, apart from the political aspect, the study of empowerment has expanded to include the empowerment of women in a variety of social, economic, public health and community context (Ubi, 2007). However, there remains a great deal of debate as to the definition of women empowerment. The term empowerment in the first place is derived from the word power. Thus, to empower means to give power, to give authority to, to enable a person or group persons gain power. Empowerment, therefore implies that the person or group of persons being empowered has hitherto lacked power or authority by circumstances, denial or default (Okeke, 1995).

Having defined the concept of empowerment, the term women empowerment simply means women taking control over their lives, setting their own agenda, gaining skills, knowledge, building self-confidence, solving problems and developing self-reliance (Bagobiri, 2008). In this discourse, therefore, women empowerment can be defined as a process whereby women will gain ability and authority to make decisions and implement change at higher level than previously allowed or thought possible. To corroborate this view, women empowerment may take the form of women led media, womens' rights or meaningful women involvement in any task, among other things. In this case, women empowerment exists for the purpose of promoting civil engagement, participatory democracy, and popular education and to give women the authority – political, social, economic, e.t.c, in order to enable them to do the things that could have been otherwise thought impossible, that is, by contributing to the economy, politics, social and above all to be reliant and independent.

### **Theoretical Framework – Gender Equality Theory**

Gender equality theory is a theory which denotes having considerable equal and easy access to material resources, freedom to make life choices and freedom of movement and power to actively participate in the decision-making institutions and the holding of positions of power- economic, political and ideological and opportunities regardless of gender attachment (Agassi, 1989). Sojourner Truth (1797-1883) fearlessly fought for gender and racial equality. She was an African-American abolitionist who dedicated her entire life to fighting and defending gender equality. According to her, gender equality entails the concept that all human beings both men and women are free to develop their personal abilities and make choices without the limitations set by stereotypes, rigid gender roles and prejudices.

The theory believes that different behaviour, aspirations and needs of women and men are considered, valued and favoured equally. It does not mean that women and men have to become the same, but that their rights, responsibilities will not depend on whether they are born male or female.

Gender equality theory established the fairness of treatment for both male (men) and female (women), according to their respective needs. This includes equal treatment or treatment that is different but which is considered equivalent in terms of rights, benefits, obligations and opportunities. Similarly, Agassi (1989) posited that as long as women are barred from significant political or economic roles, there is no genuine gender equality.

The liberal feminists' theory also includes the claim that the abolition of gender segregation of occupational roles is necessary for the achievement of women's equality. Schlegel (1977) however, claimed that it is of no importance whether work activities are gender segregated as long as the creation myths and ritual system of the society evaluate and celebrate women's activities as highly as men's. According to him, neither segregation of work roles nor participation in the production determines the status of women and men but only the spiritual evaluation of their activities. From the foregoing discussion as pointed out by the above scholars, it is crystal clear that gender equality is both desirable and feasible.

However, gender inequality and imbalance has been one of the major issues fuelling low participation of women in socio-economic and political activities in Nigeria right from inception of the First Republic to the current political dispensation (The Fourth Republic). No doubt, this unpalatable scenario has led to political apathy among the Nigerian women and this singular factor, among others, has further reduced their socio-economic, political productivity, growth and advancement in Nigeria's body politics. It is against this background that the Federal Government signed the international treaties for women inclusiveness in decision-making process which aimed at balancing and closing the gap of gender inequality at all levels, be it formal and informal settings. Therefore, for any given society to develop, efforts must be made to put in place structures that prevent gender imbalance, inequality and subordination in order to witness high level of productivity and political participation among women. Thus, it is necessary to provide women with equality and the same respect in the society as accorded men in Nigeria's democratic space.

## **2. A GLIMPSE OF HISTORY OF WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN POLITICS**

In 1925, at the peak of empire building and colonial acquisition in Soviet Russia, Trosky, the highly cerebral and philosophical exponent of Marxism-Leninism declared that:

In the history of mankind and for the first time in societal governance, socialism has made it possible for women to contribute their energy and brilliance to the bowl of social wisdom and pot of societal empowerment needed for development at all fronts. From this moment henceforth, no ethnic tradition or taboo can prevent women (who form over 60% of the world population) from laying claims to equal contribution and recognition" (Trosky, 1925).

The sentiment and logic of Trosky was later shared by Ade-Ajayi in 1979 during the Graduation ceremony at the University of Lagos when he asserted that:

No nation can achieve true or rapid development unless and until it finds a way of releasing energy and potentials of the women. The Arab world appears to be stagnant essentially because Arabian tradition and religion have refused to allow

women to contribute, in any meaningful manner, to national development(Ade-Ajayi, 1979:5).

The above point is well illustrated when one compares the giant strides in the Korean peninsula, Japan, China, India, Bangladesh, Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq. Indeed, the wonderful fairy story of Dubai happened only when United Arab Emirates (UAE) committed itself to the new ideals of openness, inclusiveness, gender equity and liberalization of opportunities. In Japan, South Korea and modern day China, no profession is exclusive or allocated to one gender permanently: politics, law, driving, carpentry, sailing, dancing, animal husbandry, medicine, e.t.c.

The Nigerian constitution guaranteed the rights of women to participate in active politics; the right to democratic governance is an entitlement conferred on all citizens by law. The 1999 Nigerian Constitution by virtue of Section 40 states the following:

Every person shall be entitled to assemble freely and associate with other persons, and in particular he may form or belong to any political party, trade union or any other association for the protection of his/her interests: Provided that the provisions of this section shall not derogate from the powers conferred by this Constitution on the Independent Electoral Commission with respect to political parties to which that Commission does not accord recognition (FGN, 1999).

Section 42(1) of the same constitution states further that:

A citizen of Nigeria of a particular community, ethnic group, place of origin, sex, religion or political opinion shall not, by reason only that he is such a person be subjected either expressly by, or in the practical application of any law in force in Nigeria or any executive or administrative action of the government, to disabilities or restrictions to which citizen of Nigeria of other communities, ethnic group places of origin, sex, religion or political opinions are not made subject. [FGN,1999].

Section 42(1) of the same constitution states further that:

A citizen of Nigeria of a particular community, ethnic group, place of origin, sex, religion or political opinion shall not, by reason only that he/she is such a person-  
a) be subjected either expressly by, or in the practical application of any law in force in Nigeria or any executive or administrative action of the government, to disabilities or restrictions to which citizen of Nigeria of other communities, ethnic groups, places of origin, sex, religion or political opinions are not made subject; or  
b) be accorded either expressly by, or in the practical application of any law in force in Nigeria or any such executive or administrative action, any privileged or advantage that is not accorded to citizen of Nigeria of other communities, ethnic groups, places of origin, sex, religion or political opinions (FRN, 1999).

The above further confirms that a woman can go to court to seek redress if her right to vote and be voted for, as a woman is violated. The constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria prohibits

discrimination of partisanship on the basis of gender. Section 77(2) of the Constitution also supports the above assertion and this shows that there is nothing in the constitution which excludes the participation of women in politics in Nigeria. Yet, when it comes to actual practice, the pace at which women participate in politics has not been quite impressive. The percentage of women in active political participation is still below the threshold.

Nevertheless, the last decade has witnessed a relative increase in participation of women in politics. This can be measured when we consider the number of women who contest in elections; the number of women in elective offices like States Houses of Assembly, Representatives and Senate. Over the years, there has been a remarkable increase in women's participation in politics in Nigeria. In spite of this, there is a pronounced level of under-representation of women participation in politics when compared with their male counterparts (Agbalajobi, 2010).

### 2.1 Number of Nigerian Women in Political Offices from 1999 to 2023

**TABLE 1: 1999**

OFFICE	POSITION AVAILABLE	NO OF MEN	NO OF WOMEN	% OF MEN	% OF WOMEN
President	01	01	-	100%	0%
Vice President	01	01	-	100%	0%
Senate	109	106	03	97.2%	2.8%
House of Representatives	360	342	18	95%	5%
Governors	36	36	-	100%	0%
Deputy Governors	36	35	01	97.2%	2.8%
States Houses of Assembly Speakers	36	36	-	100%	0%
States Houses of Assembly	990	978	12	98.8%	1.2%

Source: Fieldwork, 2024

**TABLE 2: 2003**

OFFICE	POSITION AVAILABLE	NO OF MEN	NO OF WOMEN	% OF MEN	% OF WOMEN
President	01	01	-	100%	0%
Vice President	01	01	-	100%	0%
Senate	109	106	03	97.2%	2.8%
House of Representatives	360	339	21	94.2%	5.8%
Governors	36	36	-	100%	0%
Deputy Governors	36	33	03	91.7%	8.3%
States Houses of Assembly Speakers	36	34	02	94.4%	5.6%
States Houses of Assembly	990	967	23	97.7%	2.3%

Source: Fieldwork, 2024

**TABLE 3: 2007**

OFFICE	POSITION AVAILABLE	NO OF MEN	NO OF WOMEN	% OF MEN	% OF WOMEN
President	01	01	-	100%	0%
Vice President	01	01	-	100%	0%
Senate	109	100	09	91.7%	8.3%
House of Representatives	360	333	27	92.5%	7.5%
Governors	36	36	-	100%	0%
Deputy Governors	36	32	04	88.9%	11.1%
States Houses of Assembly Speakers	36	35	01	97.2%	2.8%
States Houses of Assembly	990	936	54	94.5%	5.5%

Source: Fieldwork, 2024

**TABLE 4: 2011**

OFFICE	POSITION AVAILABLE	NO OF MEN	NO OF WOMEN	% OF MEN	% OF WOMEN
President	01	01	-	100%	0%
Vice President	01	01	-	100%	0%
Senate	109	102	07	93.6%	6.4%
House of Representatives	360	337	23	93.6%	6.4%
Governors	36	36	-	100%	0%
Deputy Governors	36	33	03	91.7%	8.3%
States Houses of Assembly Speakers	36	34	02	94.4%	5.6%
States Houses of Assembly	990	927	63	93.6%	6.4%

Source: Fieldwork, 2024

**TABLE 5: 2015**

OFFICE	POSITION AVAILABLE	NO OF MEN	NO OF WOMEN	% OF MEN	% OF WOMEN
President	01	01	-	100%	0%
Vice President	01	01	-	100%	0%
Senate	109	102	07	93.8%	6.2%
House of representatives	360	338	22	93.8%	6.2%
Governors	36	36	-	100%	0%
Deputy Governors	36	32	04	88.89%	11.11%

States Houses of Assembly Speakers	36	33	03	91.66%	8.34%
States Houses of Assembly	990	939	51	94.84%	5.16%

Source: Fieldwork, 2024

**TABLE 6: 2019**

OFFICE	POSITION AVAILABLE	NO OF MEN	NO OF WOMEN	% OF MEN	% OF WOMEN
President	01	01	-	100%	0%
Vice President	01	01	-	100%	0%
Senate	109	101	08	92.66%	7.34%
House of Representatives	360	347	13	96.39%	3.61%
Governors	36	36	-	100%	0%
Deputy Governors	36	33	03	91.67%	8.33%
States Houses of Assembly Speakers	36	35	01	97.22%	2.78%
States Houses of Assembly	990	957	26	96.67%	3.33%

Source: Fieldwork, 2024

**TABLE 7: 2023**

OFFICE	POSITION AVAILABLE	NO OF MEN	NO OF WOMEN	% OF MEN	% OF WOMEN
President	01	01	-	100%	0%
Vice President	01	01	-	100%	0%
Senate	109	106	03	97.25%	2.75%
House of Representatives	360	346	14	96.11%	3.89%
Governors	36	36	-	100%	0%
Deputy Governors	36	29	07	80.56%	19.44%
States Houses of Assembly Speakers	36	35	01	97.22%	2.78%
States Houses of Assembly	990	942	48	95.15%	4.85%

Source: Fieldwork, 2024

The above tables show the total number of women representation in elected positions of the Federal and various State Governments from 1999 to 2023. According to the figures given above, women were grossly under-represented. This does not speak well of participatory democracy where nearly half of the population are women.

### 3. MAJOR CONSTRAINTS TO WOMEN POLITICAL PARTICIPATION



The problem of women low participation in politics and decision-making positions is not confined or limited to a particular region or climate. It is a universal phenomenon which affects continents and nations, the only difference is that the level of political empowerment differs from continent to continent and from nation to nation.

For example, Willis as cited in Lawal and Ojo (2006) argued that even in the highly industrialized countries such as Britain, women only make seven (07) per cent of the Senior Managers in industries, five (05) per cent of the Under-secretaries in the civil service, three (03) per cent of the University Professors and two (02) per cent of the Vice-Chancellors in British Universities. In Australia, in 1989, women occupied five (05) out of thirty-five (35) positions in the Australia Council of Trade Unions while only one (01) out of eighty (80) members of Business Council of Australia was a woman. Indeed, in 1989, only three (03) per cent of top Americans and eight (08) per cent of top British Managers were females. Therefore, for Europe as a whole, there are eleven (11) per cent women in the top of various establishments.

Surprisingly, the per cent has not improved significantly till date. In the Nigeria context, the situation is even worse as women were not given the right to vote until 1959 general elections and Northern women were not allowed to vote until 1979 general elections. Nevertheless, women participation in governance in the present democratic dispensation is equally low. As a matter of fact, no single woman has been elected as a State Governor from independent to date and only very few elected as Deputy Governors. Both at the National Assembly and Houses of Assembly across the nation, women are grossly under-represented. However, the following factors are discovered to be responsible for their political marginalization and forms of discrimination suffered by women generally:

#### **4. ADVERSE CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS PRACTICES**

The negative cultural, social and religious world view against the womenfolk is perhaps the greatest challenge facing women in decision-making processes in Nigeria today. In virtually all patriarchal cultures, the primary duty of a woman is to look after the home and do all chores. If she is married, she has additional duty of bearing and rearing children and because the woman is so overwhelmed with work in the home, on the farm or in the market or in all the three combined, she has neither the time nor the strength for any socio-political activities. In addition, socio-cultural barriers often make our girls not only the victims of child or forced marriage but also the first to be eliminated from school if a family is in financial crisis or when a sick or handicapped family member needs care. This situation has resulted in a higher illiteracy rate among women than men, thus, making women political empowerment a mirage and unfulfilled dream.

More importantly too, some parts of Nigeria, especially the northern parts have a strong dislike for western education because it is associated with Christianity. To support this view, Bukar (1990) found out that there is backwardness in women education in some Northern States because of their belief that girls should not receive western education. This is because western education is assumed to be an agent of Christianity and as a result of this, it becomes difficult to convince parents to send their daughters to schools. Furthermore, the declaration of Sharia law in Northern parts of the country has not helped matters. This law has not only succeeded in relegating the womenfolk to the background, but it has further exposed the women to the risk of permanent low status. To buttress this point, the Late Abubakar Gumi-a renowned Northern Islamic Cleric of note, once declared that no woman would

be emerged as Chairperson of his local government in his life time. It is rather too unfortunate for a man of his status to have made such a thought provocation statement in the 21st century.

### **Colonial Experience**

This is another important issue to be considered in this discourse. Women's low participation in the power struggle dates back to the colonial era. It needs to be emphasized here that since the introduction of elective principle in Nigeria in 1922 by Clifford Constitution till the beginning of the Second Republic in 1979, no woman ever ascended political system of decision making status on the basis of electoral contest (Adu and Ibitoye, 2005). It is a well-known fact that colonialism deliberately created a new crop of privileged elite (men alone) which paradoxically spearheaded the nationalist movement for independence in Nigeria. It must be noted here again that just because it was virtually only men who acquired the elitist colonial education, hence, they enjoyed a head-start in socio-economic progress and combined with the existent patriarchy and the corresponding low status of women, the nationalist effectively excluded women in the institutional framework of the struggle for independence.

Where women participated in the political struggle, it was mainly as cannon fodder, visible only in auxiliary activities of the nationalist political parties. So, it was only men that assumed the mantle of leadership and controlled the apparatus of the State bequeathed by the departing British colonialist (Lawal and Ojo, 2006). According to Williams (1992), bourgeois in outlook and patriarchal in disposition, the emergent leaders saw no reason why women, though a visibly and grossly disadvantaged social group in the colonial order, should deserve political attention at the level of State policies beyond the vacuous promises to improve the material lots of the masses of the people at independence.

### **Education**

The importance of education cannot be overemphasized in any given society. Though, education is power and universal, only very few have access to it. Education as an enterprise is dynamic in nature because the society in which we live is not static and school is intended to serve the functions, goals and aspirations of the society. This means that the dynamism of the society is reflected in the school. Bearing this in mind, the education of women just as that of their male counterparts is of equal relevance to the society. But because women are less educated, they do not have equal opportunity to meaningfully contribute to the societal development. It is estimated that about 31 per cent of Nigerian population are illiterates of which women constitute the majority (Punch, 2023). This is the resultant effect of bad governance on the part of our so-called leaders.

Focusing on education again, right from the colonial era to date, there has been disparity in attainment of western education between the male and female. In the beginning, colonial education was geared towards preparing girls to become housewives. The curriculum laid emphasis on religious instruction and domestic sciences. Accordingly, women were and are still concentrated in traditional fields of study such as nursing, teaching, among others. Technology and science was not encouraged for girls, though, there is significant positive development in the area of women education and training (Ubi, 2008). However, statistics show that the figures when compared to that of men are still very low. For instance, primary school enrolment in 1995/ 1996 of children between 6 - 11 years was 86.8 per

cent for males and 13.2 per cent for females. At the secondary school level in the same year, gross enrolment rate was 71.2 for males and 28.8 per cent for females.

At the tertiary level, women constitute 22.26 per cent of enrollees in Agricultural Science and only 6.15 per cent enrollees in Engineering Technology (Odah, 2002). Besides this, the declaration made by 'Boko Haram' that western education is evil has further compounded and aggravated the plights of womenfolk. The implications of depriving their children of knowledge will not only prevent them from achieving self-fulfilment but retard the progress of the entire society. To put succinctly, the inadequate educational qualifications and skills as well as the relatively small number of educated women available have reduced their chances of being elected or appointed to public offices.

### **Political Environment**

The oppressive political environment is another major problem confronting the womenfolk. Though, liberal democracy allows full participation of both men and women in politics through voting and holding elective and appointive offices, yet women still remained at the periphery of real politicking. The reasons for this may not be far-fetched, the societal attitude and their perception about women generally is not impressive. It is erroneously believed that women are weak, submissive, illogical, passive, talkative, and emotional and can easily give up while men are assumed to be competent, active, logical, strong, independent, among others. Such irrational thinking tends to portray men as having more desirable qualities than women. This is far from being the truth. Evidence abound to show that women have performed meritoriously in their chosen careers, even in politics in the past and present. For example, Chief (Mrs.) Wuraola Esan and Mrs. Kerri were both members of Senate in the First Republic.

In addition, between 1999 to date, names like Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, Oby Ezekwesili, Joy Emordi, Abike Dabiri, Ndi Okereke-Onyiuke, Dora Akunyili, Joy Ogwu, Hellen Esuene, Florence Ita-Giwa, Oluremi Tinubu, Abiodun Olujimi, e.t.c, have become household names due to their various contributions to the socio-economic development of this nation. It is therefore wrong to see them as being weak or inferior to men. Furthermore, the political terrain of contemporary Nigeria has not been favourable to women. According Lewu (2005), violence and / or political instability arising from frequent and uncoordinated changes of government hinders effective political participation of women. Prevailing intra-party politics also make it difficult for women to get party nominations to contest elective posts because there are few women party members. Even the few party women are unable to capture significant party offices. Consequently, the very low level of representation at the party executive level impacts negatively on them as decisions and shadow elections of candidates are made at that level. In this regard, women only play the role of the second fiddle and the effects of this had been far-reaching.

### **Poor Socio-economic Status of Nigerian Women**

The relatively lower socio – economic status of women also adversely affects their chances of winning in political contests, as such contests can be quite expensive. Like their counterpart in other parts of the world, the Nigerian women is characterized by the absence of economic power like personal or family income. They lack access to economic opportunities and other economic resources including credit facilities, land ownership and inheritance. At present, the per capital income of an average Nigerian is less than \$1 per day. The most unfortunate aspect of it is that the Nigerian government is

doing little to empower them as most of the women empowerment programmes have been the pet programmes of First Ladies as an aspect of political manifestoes of political parties and / or politicians which in most cases become illusion once new administration is put in place.

More so, the introduction of money-politics and godfatherism into Nigerian politics has finally pushed the womenfolk to the wall. As a matter of fact, for someone to win local government Chairmanship election in Nigeria today, he/ she needs an upward of N50m – N100m and above. With the level of poverty all over the land, only very few people can afford this outrageous amount of money. And at times, for fear of losing the election, they tend to withdraw to their shell.

## 5. BENEFITS OF WOMEN POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT

Nigeria is a signatory to quite a number of conventions committed to the inclusion of women political empowerment. It is generally believed that if Nigerian government is truly committed to this just cause, she stands to gain the following:

- ✓ By fully integrating women into the national politics, a country stands the chances of harnessing her full potentials for optimum growth and development needed for developing nation like Nigeria. Honestly, empowerment of women will certainly increase productivity of women and thereby raise the Gross National Product (GNP). Since empowerment brings opportunities to acquire relevant skills and knowledge for greater productivity, women empowerment is therefore a necessary condition for social, political, and economic development of a nation.
- ✓ Women perspectives will definitely complement that of men to produce more rounded solutions and thereby improving the quality of governance leading to quality of lives. Such a situation will surely breed mutual respect and love between the sexes and result in happier families. The families where women enjoy such empowerment, enjoy peace and harmony and by the same token, a nation that empowers women is sure to have peace and development. No wonder, the UN Decade on women had its motto: Equality, Development and Peace.
- ✓ Involving women in governance gives democracy a great chance to succeed since people are more likely to support the decision, they are party to. Politics is the art of governance and it is through politics and government that policies that affects the lives of many are formulated and implemented. The stability of any nation rests on the political awareness and knowledge of her citizens and when women who make up to 50 per cent of the total population acquire political awareness and possibly political power, they will be in position to give priority to those humanistic problems of development.
- ✓ Since democracy is the government by the majority and the women constitute half of the population, by involving them, it gives them the sense of belonging and confidence in the society. Empowerment of women would therefore be in keeping with Section 42(1) of the Nigerian constitution of 1999 which stipulates equal opportunity for all irrespective of sex, creed, or religion. Meaning that empowerment of women through the dismantling of oppressive social structures will help to restore the dignity of womanhood and enhance self-image.
- ✓ Women will have the opportunity to be part of policy formulation and implementation which will not only be of benefit to them and their children but to the entire political system. It is expected that happy and fulfilled professional career women and mothers will apply the benefits of their knowledge, vast experiences, and more balanced judgement in educating their children (tomorrow's future) and running their homes. They will also be a better inspiration to their children because you can only give what you have but cannot give what you don't have.

## 6. CONCLUSION

Historical records shows that right from the colonial era to date, women involvement in democratic government has always been minimal. Even in the contemporary Nigeria, they have not been fully integrated into the mainstream of our body politics either as elected or appointed public officers. This trend is dangerous as there is no meaningful development that can occur without women empowerment. What is worth stressing here is that women who constitute half of the population ought to be the target population for empowerment. They must be part and parcel of all development strategies. This is because development and stability can only be guaranteed through the empowerment of the women. However, they lack the power to effectively participate in charting the course of development. The reasons for this include; cultural and religious barriers, colonial experience, poor education, violence, oppressive political system, poverty, e.t.c. This paper therefore concluded that by integrating womenfolk into the main body of politics, the country stands the chances of harnessing her full potentials and thereby improving the quality of governance leading to quality of lives.

## 7. RECOMMENDATIONS

In modern societies, women especially have vital roles to play in the overall development of a nation. They are not only homemakers but also the main custodian of social, cultural and fundamental values of the society, thus, permanent change is often best achieved through them. In fact, full community development may be difficult without their understanding, cooperation, and collective participation (Adaralegbe, 1992). In view of this assertion and coupled with the benefits earlier stated above, there is need for urgent attention to integrate our women into the mainstream of our national politics by giving them both elective and appointive positions.

To achieve this, the following recommendations are suggested:

- ✓ All mothers as the first point of socialization must start breaking the adverse cultural and religious negative practices by treating their sons and daughters equally. They must expect and demand that their daughters participate alongside their male counterparts in all endeavours including politics. Early marriage and other negative practices should be discouraged among girls. All fathers should also join hands together with their wives to achieve this, if the family is able to liberate itself, then the entire nation would be liberated.
- ✓ Progressive policies must be consciously put in place by the government in order to help integrate women into the mainstream of politics. Such politics will include the expansion of educational opportunities for women and instituting social equality instruments such as gender quota (affirmative action) in recruiting for public positions.
- ✓ The oppressive political environment that has resulted from colonial and military rules must be liberalized. Women political participation can only be promoted in a democratic milieu which will level the playing field, a little better for all actors. In addition, violence and excessive use of money must be minimized as the uses of these two instruments do scare women away from politics.

- ✓ The mass media also has a role to play in re-orientating and re-awakening the womenfolk that, 'What men can do, women can do the same if not better'. Therefore, the mass media need to give sufficient attention and space for covering women affairs in positive manners. The situation is more precautious in the rural areas than the urban centre. In that wise, State information machineries cum National Orientation Agency (NOA) need to concentrate more on educating the rural dwellers about the need to integrate women into real politicking.
- ✓ Women who attained public positions through affirmative action must use such opportunities judiciously by promoting the women political agenda and the mentoring of younger women.
- ✓ Female politicians must show great interest in party positions and government. They must also work within the parties and also build their own political constituencies in order to attain political power by winning more public offices.
- ✓ Lastly, the constitutional guarantee of equality in section 42 (1) of 1999 Constitution which forbids discrimination on the grounds of origin, sex, religion or political opinion either expressly by or in the practical application of any in force in Nigeria or any executive or administrative action of government should be adhered to strictly.

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