

WOMEN POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND REPRESENTATION IN LEGISLATIVE ARM OF GOVERNMENT IN YOBE STATE

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Abstract

Women participation and representation in politics and governance has been worrisome over the years. Women constitute a greater number of registered voters in Nigeria. Despite the fact that they are yet to experience full representation into political position. More so, in spite of United Nation (UN) and other international Organization advocacy and declaration of the right and equality between men and women of which Nigeria is a signatory, women still constitute a small percent of those participating in political decisions and leadership, specifically in legislative position at both State and National levels. Based on these, the paper seeks to unveil the challenges Nigerian women face as a result of under-representation in politics and governance in Yobe State. The study is a content analysis which utilized secondary data consisting of journal, articles, documents from UN and other Non-governmental organizations in making analysis and drawing conclusions. The study found that the factors affecting women participation in politics

include the patriarchal nature of Nigerian society, lack of finance, culture/religion, political party discrimination, violence amongst others. These factors hinder women from participating and contributing their quota to national development of their fatherland. It concludes that gender parity in the parliament is essential for promoting women's right and supporting women voices in Yobe State. The study therefore recommends that there should be inclusion of women in political activities and allocation of political positions through quota system; Political parties should subsidize nomination forms for women to contest political positions and there should be public enlightenment and sensitization on negative stereotype which the society tag women who engage in politics

Keyword – Legislature, political participation, political representation, Stereotype, Women.

Introduction

On a global scale, the role played by women in political sphere is very minimal because of men's nature of domination and supremacy especially in developing nations like Africa. This can be attributed to the patriarchal nature that characterized most African societies where women are regarded as inferior or second-class citizen. The patriarchal culture of male supremacy still remains embedded, obscured and protected within traditional institutions and structures held in abeyance and relative utmost sacredness (Federal Ministry of Finance, 2012:15).

Women constitute over half of the world's population which stood at 7.474 billion and contribute significantly to various societal developments

(Agbalajobi, 2009:75). They are indispensable segment in the nation development, as no society can do without women. But yet, they are negligible minority in both elective and appointive position of most countries in the world. According to Enemuo 1999, women are under-represented in institution of governance in spite of the fact that they make up an overwhelming majority of the world populace.

In the previous election conducted in Nigeria from 1999 to 2019, almost six rounds of national election, no significant improvement has been recorded in the performance of women who contested and by extension their representation in parliament and political positions is still minimal. Women under-representation is worrisome given that expectation and prediction from scholars and analyst alike that democratic rule in Nigeria is beginning to deepen and enter into a new phase and the expectation of all is that women will perform better if given the opportunity. But nonetheless, available statistics reveals that women representation in Nigeria government is less than 7%. There is slow increase in terms of representation of women to men in Nigeria since 1999 to date (CDD, 2018). Over the years, political space in

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the country compare to elsewhere remained male dominated especially at legislative arm of government. Since the advent of democracy in the 4th republic, men have continued to be at the helm of affairs in both elective and appointive position, especially in the National & State Assemblies and all executive position (ibid).

For instance, in the Senate, there were only three women were elected in 1999, the number increase to four women in 2003, it again rose up to nine in 2007, and later decline to seven in 2011, 2015 and 2019 respectively, out of a total of 109 Senators. Similarly, in the House of Representatives only 12 women were elected in 1999, the number increase to 21, 25 and 26 in 2003, 2007 and 2011 respectively. It declines in 2015 to 22 women and in 2019, there were only 12 women out of the 360 members at the lower chamber. While in the 36 States house of Assemblies across the nation, only 24 representing 3% of the entire members of the house of assembly members across the country in 1999. The number increase to 40, 57 and 68 in 2003, 2007 and 2011. But later it declines to 51 in 2015 and in 2019, it again decreases to 44 women out of 990 members of State Assemblies (CDD, 2018).

As for elected women in the executive positions, only six women representing 17% gain access to the position of deputy governors from Osun, Lagos, Rivers, Enugu and Akwa Ibom states. Sarah Jibrin was the only presidential aspirants who ran for the ticket of presidential candidate under the platform of PDP during the primary election in 2015 secured a single vote which she voted herself and also the only gubernatorial aspirant Senator Aisha Jummai Alhassan (Late) stood for election in Taraba State in 2019 but eventually lost after a spiritual fight which rise and dashed the hope of women that at least history will be made with the election of the first female Executive Governor in Nigeria. It is evident that the number of women elected into political offices continued to dwindle despite effort made by UN, NGO's and Civil Societies to promote women participation in electoral processes. There is no gain saying that the development of any nation require participation of both male and female if gender parity is still in existence in the political leadership of Nigeria despite the fact that, political participation is premised on the principle of fundamental human right and gender equality. The constitution of the federal republic of Nigeria as amended, guarantees equality

and right of freedom to participate in political activities, so as the various global, regional and national policy commitment to gender equality and human right (including the convention and elimination of discriminatory practice against women (CEDAW), the Beijing platform of action, MDGs, the African charter and its protocols for gender equality among others) and national gender policy, provide that 30% of all positions in government be given to women (NCWD, 2017), but in spite of this, undertone of gender has hindered Nigerian women in active politics and decision making. Hence it has been noted that a State which embodies the culture of democracy is a State that embraces political participation, vibrant civil society, integration of human right (Bluevey, 1998). Akinjode and Arogundade (2003) confirmed this by asserting that equality, development and peace across all spheres of life cannot be achieve without active involvement and integration with the perception of women in decision making process. This disparity between theory and practice raises fundamental question of social justice, when women form the majority of electorate and yet remain very meagre in electoral and appointed position. In the 21st century the gab of achieving gender parity in Nigeria politics continue to remain a course of concern. One area that has witnessed the glaring under-representation of women and the domination of men is the legislature/parliament (at both national and the state level).

In Northeastern Nigeria, Yobe State particular, women participation and representation in politics is very low. There has never been a female member in the Senate and State House of Assembly from the onset of the fourth republic, only one women was elected into the lower chamber of the NASS (House Representative) and only a single woman that recently won the seat of chairperson in the recently concluded local government election in 2021 representing Fika Local Government. Similarly, in the appointive position, it always features a single women representative or two women occupying such position (Ministry of Women Affairs) and of late, there are states like Adamawa, Kano and Gombe were men were even appointed as Commissioners in the Ministry of Women Affairs which is the only appointive political office reserved for the women folks. it is against this background that this paper intent to ascertain the reason behind women's lack of

aspiration for active participation in legislative and Governance in Yobe State to contribute their quota as nation builders and to make a difference, just like their other counterpart in some countries. The paper will highlight, factors/challenges hindering women from participating in politics in Yobe State as well as recommend measures that can boost women to participate actively in the State.

Women Participation in Politics in Nigeria

It is indisputable fact that women constitute a greater proportion of the total world population (World Bank Report, 2012). Nigeria is not an exception as women constitute significant number of the national population (Agbalojobi, 2010). Despite this numerical advantage and massive participation in voting, women are not adequately represented in politics and governance (Agbalojobi, 2010). Right from independence to date, Nigeria has witnessed both civilian and military regimes, and all these governments have concealed to the fact that, women have always been under-represented in all affairs of the nation. Moreover, with twenty years of uninterrupted democratic governance in Nigeria, governmental appointment at the Centre did not reflect gender equity or inclusion, but nonetheless there was a remarkable improvement during the second tenure of President Obasanjo's in 2003 to 2007 (Nwokocha, 2007). Although, today if not for the glaring exclusion of women in national politics, there was relative improvement in women participation in politics in the previous administration of President Goodluck Jonathan in 2010; though the target is yet to be actualized.

Women have contributed immensely to national development right from pre-independence to date through series of notable activities. Under colonialism, women organized themselves against colonial rule of exploitation, the Aba women's riot of 1929, a protest against British heavy taxation system which lead to fifty women who lost their lives (Ojo, 2003). Chief Elizabeth Adekagbe, in a bid to record her displeasure against the rise of the Electoral College in west, led the women movement in the west region. Women took similar initiative against British indirect rule which gave unprecedented privileges to male traditional rulers while excluding female traditional power holders from taking part in decision making. Indomitable women like Margaret Ekpo made so

many inputs in pre-independence Constitution conference that led to Nigeria independence. Women made remarkable contribution to national development both in pre-colonial and post-colonial period; and this has been affirmed by various governments who have taken moves to correct the imbalance (Nwokocha, 2007).

Right from independence, Nigeria women began to actively seek self-expression to be rightly placed in nation affairs. This led to having two female legislators in the federal parliament and four females. But yet, sixty-one years after self-rule, Nigerian women are still begging for equity despite various calls for gender equality, the question is, "*Are Nigerian Women not competent enough or are they merely relegated to the background by their male counterpart who sees them as weak and inferior*"? But Nigerian women have proven to be competent in all ramifications. Though, a woman is yet to become the president, or Vice President or Governor in Nigeria (Christopher, 2020), but women have become deputy Governors in some states; eventually a woman has also rose to become the speaker House of Representative in the person of Mrs. Patricia Etteh, in 2007 before she was impeached by the menfolk before the end of her tenure (Babatunde, 2003, Audu, 2008, Okwonkwo, 2013, and Ojo, 2003). Others are Speakers of various State House of Assemblies to mention but a few. Nigeria women have contributed to nation building and development in contemporary Nigeria, hence their active participation in politics and the opportunities at their disposal has not been commensurate via increased in the number of women in politics and governance. Though there is a renewed campaign all over the world in both democratic and liberal State for gender equity, justice in all aspect of social and political life, though not much has been realized so far in third world countries. Women involvement in politics in Nigeria is still below the international mark. Women are afraid to run for elective position (Omoruyi, 2008).

The needs for gender equity have been champion by not just democratic states and government but also by international Organization (UN Charter). Chapter III articles eight of the United Nation charter of 1945 included a provision for equality between men and women in all sphere of endeavor. There has also been a concerted and renewed effort by the United Nation from its first world conference on women in Mexico City in 1975 to her subsequent conference of

Copenhagen (1980) and Nairobi (1985) to the Beijing world conference on women in 1995. Member states during the Beijing declaration all agreed that an affirmative action is needed to address the hardship and exclusion of women by the men in all sphere of life, they resolved that 30% of all position in government owned institution and organization should be reserved for women. As stated by Alapiki, 2004 “the 30% affirmative action provision is design to be applied at every level of government i.e. Federal, State, Local Government and wards and within every civil society; village cabinet, political party offices and social organization”. As the call for gender equity re-echoes, some countries of the world appear to be adamant to this provision of United Nations Charter, and very little has been achieved in this regard,

In Nigeria, women political participation in government is a bit slightly on the increase, as women are now making serious and appreciable impact in the political life of the country. In the fourth republic many women have been elected in both upper and lower chamber of the National Assembly as well as the 36 State House of Assemblies compared to the figures recorded in the first, second and third aborted republics. The fourth republic was indeed a period of re-awakening for Nigeria women, to showcase their talent and realized their potentials in their service to their fatherlands. Today Nigerian women, can compete favorably with their male counterpart in social and political life if given the enabling platform.

Women Legislators and Representation in Nigeria from 1999-2019.

The fourth republic witnessed some level of activism on the part of Nigeria women especially in their advancement in all spheres of life, particularly in politics. Currently there are total of 469 legislators in Nigeria National Assemblies i.e. 109 senators and 360 House of representative respectively (Agunbiade, 2019). Out of this figures only 19 (7 from senate and 12 from House of Representative) are female legislators which constitutes 5.6% of the total number of legislators at the National Assembly level. Conversely, male legislators constitute 93.8% of the total number. While at State House of Assemblies level, there are only 44 women out of 990 members representing a total of 4.44 percent at State House of Assemblies across the nation.

Table I Women Representation in the Senate from 1999-2019

YEAR	MALE N	FEMALE N	TOTAL N	MALE %	FEMALE %
1999	106	3	109	97.2	2.75
2003	105	4	109	96.3	3.66
2007	100	9	109	91.7	8.25
2011	102	7	109	93.6	6.42
2015	102	7	190	93.6	6.42
2019	102	7	190	93.6	6.42

Source: CDD 2019

Analysis

There were only 7 female's senators in 2011, 2015 and 2019 compared to 3, 4, and 9 in 1999, 2003 of 2011 respectively. The figures remain static in the last 3 minds of natural elector, with no much improving. Equally of the seven senators, only one is for the North East, Adamawa State.

Table 2 – Women representation in the House of Representative from 1999-2019

YEAR	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL	MALE%	FEMALE%
1999	348	12	360	96.67	3.33
2003	339	21	360	94.17	5.83
2007	335	25	360	93.66	6.94
2011	334	26	360	92.78	7.22
2015	338	22	350	93.89	6.11
2019	348	12	360	96.67	3.33

Source: CDD 2019

Analysis

There are only 12 women out of the 360 members of House of representative in 2019, representing 3.33 %. This actually shows a decline in the number of women in the House of representative in the last three rounds of election conducted in 2007, 2011, and 2015, which recorded a higher number of elected women ranging from 25, 26, and 22 respectively. Currently there are 12 women elected as members in the chamber, though only four women are from the north; three from Northeast and one from North central.

Table 3 – Women representation in the 36 State house of Assemblies from 1999 – 2019

YEAR	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL	MALE%	FEMALE%
1999	966	24	990	97.6	2.4
2003	950	40	990	96.0	4.0
2007	933	57	990	94.2	5.8
2011	922	68	990	93.1	6.9
2015	939	51	990	94.8	5.2
2019	946	44	990	95.55	4.44

Source: CDD 2019

Analysis

In 2019 a total of 44 women occupied legislative seat in various State houses of assemblies across the nation. This figure represents 4.44 percent of the 990 seats. There was a decline in the last three rounds of election of 2007, 2011 and 2015.

Looking at all the 3 tables, showing gender representative in NASS from six rounds of national election conducted in the country from 1999-2019. No much improvement has been recorded in terms of women representation in line with the 30% affirmative action of gender equality. It seems all effort to increase participation of women in politics, public life and policy making have so far yielded negligible gains at local State and Federal level. It is also a challenge to democracy because democratic decision is made based on number that are in favor (NCWD, 2017).

Challenges of Women Participation in Politics

There are number of challenges that deter women from participating in politics and making them to have limited access to political representation. These factors include:

1. Gender discrimination and negative perception of women in politics – Women are discriminated, marginalized, stigmatized and under -represented in politics despite the fact that the constitution of Federal Republic of Nigeria gave equal economic, social, political, cultural and civic right to all citizen regardless of gender, but yet is not reflected in reality in our politics. It is also disheartening that although women constitute a greater proportion of the total population of about 49.36% (WB Report 2012), and a greater number of registered voters in Nigeria, but they are yet to experience full representative political position.

Women involved in politics are look upon as shameless and prostitute, this in turn create a stigma that many wants to avoid and fear that participating in politics will tarnish their image and reputation.

2. Patriarchy-Tradition, custom, stereotype and cultural prejudices in many societies/ communities continue to militate against women participation with men in politics and development. Gender stereotype is so much entrenched in Nigerian society. Moreover, women have been viewed as inferior and weaker sex to men. The psychological and emotional stress that is attach to maternity has been viewed by some as reason why women should be “excluded” or rather given less or peripherals political position. And this has continued to consolidate women under-representation in national politics (Agbolajobi, 2010).
3. Religion - This is a powerful factor which halt women participation and involvement in politics in Nigeria. The two major religion Islam and Christianity preach women to be submissive to their husband and to highly support them at the helm of affairs. For example, in Northern Nigeria, the purdah system (i.e. house seclusion of women) of the Islamic doctrine strictly bars women from participating in politics either as voters, political aspirant or even participating in campaign or other electoral activities. However, when it comes to the issue of political leadership and formation of government policies, women's role in Islam is limited to supportive and advisory. (Nwakwo and Surma, 2008). So also the Christian doctrine does not accord women much role in public life.
4. Economic factor - Politics in Nigeria is very expensive, which require solid financial backing for success. For instance, obtaining a form cost huge amount of money depending on the post whether local State or national position. In the recently just concluded 2019 election, a form for senate and House of Representative cost 4 million and 1.5 million respectively for People Democratic Party (PDP), while that of All Progressive Congress (APC) for senate and House of Representative were 7 million and 3.85 million respectively. Moreover, there are issues of campaigns, bill board, posters, fliers etc. and all these requires large sum of money to finance them.

Again during election i.e. voting, it has become a ritual that if voters and electoral officer are not properly bribed, there is every tendency that one might lose such places. Nigeria's politics is highly monetized and clinching to such seat for a woman becomes a mirage or an illusion. According to Ngara, 2013 women live below poverty line, so the cost of realizing electoral ambition is still far beyond the reach of even the most highly placed women in the absence of "God father" who foot the bill in anticipation for unlimited favors when the seat is eventually secured" Yahaya, 2012. And financiers of politician in Nigeria prefer the male aspirant to female ones based on the societal value assumption that political activities are masculine and male candidates are believing to stand better chance of winning election.

5. Time factor- Politics is time consuming, it involves a lot of travels to attend seminar, symposium, meeting, rally, campaign, convention amongst others, that could take one off home for long and timing of political meeting are mostly at late hours/or from dusk to dawn. Based on this, some see it as not compatible to women. This also constitute a barrier to women involvement in politics.
6. Violence unhealthy men - Nigeria politics are awash with violence; the rate of violence is extremely high and no woman can withstand it. It is marred by optimization, harassment, ballot box snatching, blackmails, maiming, assassination, thuggery, etc. which further deter women from participation. Agbalajobi, 2010 has opined that winning public election in Nigeria is a matter of force or "do or die affairs". Therefore, those who possess physical stamina and strength to use brutal force are men. As a result, women have to give way to take whatever is available by force. Political violence negates women chances at the polls and in political participation. Insecurity, such as destruction of lives and properties that characterized a typical electoral process in Nigeria makes politics undesirable for women (Ngara 2013).
7. Lack of internal party democracy/structure of political parties - Political party is the framework for attainment of political ambition, and also launching pad for political position in most democracies (Agishi, 2014), but its hierarchy,

membership and funding are still male dominated, which give them the leverage to be influencing party's internal politics and often sideline the women from vying for such position. The dearth of women in political party leadership is historic (ologede, 1999); Agishi, 2004, and could be as a result of women not featuring prominently in the formation of political parties. The Political parties discriminate women in politics as a deliberate effort to humiliate and frustrate them into losing focus and exclude them from active participation in politics. The governing structure play critical role on who get nominated to vie for elective position. The highest position held by women in a number of key political party include most insignificant position of ex-officio member and women leader whose importance is only for mobilizing women to vote for men. Thus women in most cases are unable to assert themselves or push for the interest of women during nomination. In addition, most Nigeria political parties marginalized and discriminates against female political aspirant by excluding them from politics through tradition, based on male centered interpretation of culture and religion. Sometime when a female candidate who has clearly scale through party nomination and is eligible to contest is simply asked to step down for a more suitable candidate (mostly men); through compensating the female with either waiving the fee in obtaining the party nomination form or given her special seat when the party form government.

Conclusion

Women have been under-represented in politics in Nigeria and in Yobe State in particular. Since the inception of the fourth republic women have always been left behind in compared to their male counterpart despite the affirmative action of 30 percent gender equality. The paper has point out that no-woman in the history of the state has ever occupy a seat in the State Assembly after almost six rounds of national election in the country. There was only one single female occupying a seat in the lower chamber of the national Assembly and recently a single chairperson emerged in the recently concluded local government election in 2021 from Fika Local Government area. It is therefore imperative to imbibe the culture of allowing more women to come to the fore to contribute

meaningfully as nation builders. But this can only be realized if the state and relevant agencies pursued enforcement of gender equality legislation in order to address all forms of discrimination against women. More so, legislature can only be made more vibrant, responsive and result oriented if more women are elected into the chamber. Male and female must work together in order to solve the myriad of problems in their countries and to meet worldwide developmental goals and build strong sustainable democracies, women must be encouraged, empowered and supported in becoming strong political and community leaders (NCWD, 2017).

Recommendations

Recommendation has become imperative having cited challenges hindering women from participating in politics. It is believing that if this recommendation is fully implemented and adhered to, it will help in addressing/ improving participation of women in Yobe state.

- Government should implement all existing gender policies to increase political participation and representation of women in all elective and appointive position in line with 30 percent, Affirmative action, in order to ensure optimal women contribution to national development.
- Internal democracy needs to be strengthened and monitored to pave way for more women to participate in politics, as lack of internal party democracy has thwarted women aspiration. There is need to press for appointment of more women in internal party structure, because the only avenue to power and position are the political parties, so that women who seek office survive the selection process at party level. Political party should be compelled to adopt a gender quota that will reserve certain number of seat in state and national assembly as well as other elective position for female aspirant.
- The use of negative derogating names, abusive language and expression to describe women who engaged into politics should be discourage through sensitization and public enlightenment campaigns. Women in politics should be perceived as partners in progress for the well-being of the nation.
- There should be a spending limit for political campaign. Having an issue-based campaign can

reduce the role of money in politics but a lot of the burden for achieving this, rest on INEC as the electoral umpire and management body to ensure this negative influences is reducing. This will give women a level playing field in politics and election in general. And INEC should partner with law enforcement agencies to prosecute electoral offenders.

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