# Education as a Panacea to Women Active Participation in Nigerian Politics

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*Abstract*

*The purpose of this study is to investigate into the acute and perennial under-representation of women in Nigerian Politics. In Nigeria women make up half of the population and they have been known to have contributed in no small measure to the development and sustenance of the society yet they are hardly there in the political scene. We have tried in this paper to establish the ethical and theoretical basis for women active participation in Nigerian politics which among other things border on their personhood and the concept of equality, justice and human rights. The African and indeed Nigerian value system explored in this paper point to the complementarity that exists between both sexes for social harmony and cohesion. This study shows that the major militating factors against women participation in politics include; lack of democratic culture among Nigerian populace, and the general negative mind-set about the nature and ability of women. This paper therefore, proffered strategies for addressing the issue of empowering women politically.*

## Introduction

It is a well known fact that women participation in Nigerian politics has been peripheral and trivial. This situation has impacted negatively on Nigerian march to development. In Okoh's (2002) view, "men have always dominated the Nigerian political science. The attempt by women to penetrate this male domain has yielded minimum success as a result of the unwritten laws which favour men over women as leaders." Morrison, (1992) has however cautioned at the disadvantages of discrimination is practiced" In order words, he is stressing the fact that any society; Nigeria inclusive where colour, race or sex deny a section of the population to opportunity to share in the benefits provided by the state, or where a segment of the society is able to arrogate to itself the privileges of grater socio-economic and political opportunities in such a society, economic and social progress will be at best painfully slow. In modern times too, the analysis of the concept of development as Furtado, (1997) pointed out presupposes that societies are more developed to the extent that there is greater participation in decision making process and no one group completely dominates another. From the above views expressed by Okoh, Morrison and Furtado, to really articulate and get to the root of women marginalization in Nigerian politics and look for a way forward, it is pertinent to x-ray their involvement in politics in the three main periods in Nigerian history. These include the pre-colonial era, the colonial and the contemporary Nigeria politics.

## Trends in women Participation in Nigeria Politics

### Pre-Colonial Period

Many Scholars have acknowledge that a number of Nigeria women in the pre-colonial times occupied key political and social positions and exercised political powers of one type or the other. Abdulahi, (2000) noted that women chiefs wielded considerable political, ritual and religious powers over their subjects.

In the Yoruba and Hausa societies for instance Ifeacho, (2004) opines that women have been politically relevant and have contributed greatly to governance and overall policies. For example the Queeen mother, the Iya Oba, the Iyamode in Yoruba areas and Queen Amina of Zaria and the Legendary Queen Daura in Hausa states were prominent women in Nigerian political history. Among the Igbo women, he further observes that although they did not produce individual female political leaders the real political power was based on the solidarity of women as expressed in their political institutions like meetings their kinship groups like the Umuada. These women groups could effect their decision with the use of strikes, boycotts and force.

It has however been pointed out that women in traditional Nigeria did not find it so easy in politics considering that patriarchy was already in existence  in pre-colonial Nigeria and the colonial patriarchy only built and consolidated in the traditional patriarchy that was already in existence. This could be true, but the type of patriarch system in the Nigerian traditional era posited complementarily as a means to attend the balance and

harmony which characterized indigenous African social system. From the above exposition it is evident that Nigerian women played active role in the socio-economic and political life in traditional Nigerian society.

## Colonial Period

Colonialism has been identified as the origin and the bane to women active participation in Nigerian politics. It made women to lose their economic as well as their political status. This was so because the colonialists did not realise that Nigerian women have political institutions and roles in their various communities. In his view Uchendu, (1995) observed that:

*"With the advent of Islam and Western colonialism things changes, such changes deprived women from the privileges, positions and the relative power they once enjoyed in their traditional settings. The colonial economy placed Nigerian women at structural disadvantage which became crucial to the new economic order was made available for fewer women than men."*

In a similar note, Chukwuma, (2004) notes that colonialism built its system on men which economically empowered the men and had the contrary effect on women. She further notes that the men by acquiring education and white collar jobs, abandoned the women to the circumscribed domains of home and farm. The political implication was that women lost their economic power and became dependent on the men. They in essence became voiceless and marginalized in the political arena and ever since, they have struggled to regain their political power with little success. This situation no doubt, led to the confrontational attitude of women to colonial authority. Women demanded among other things to be included in the decision policy of the colonial administration. These agitations yielded minimal results in favour of women.

## Contemporary Nigerian Politics

The political involvement of women in Nigeria continued to lag far behind that of their men counterpart in contemporary times. Although a handful of women have occupied administrative and political posts in recent time. Such posts are not commensurate with women's teeming population. Ifeacho, (2004) has noted that "since independcence, women have made significant impact in roads into Nigerian politics but these look abysmal when juxtaposed with the population of women in relation to men in Nigeria." One can rightly conclude that so far discrimination and marginalisation of women in politics has continued. This situation has led to the proliferation of women organisations in Nigeria like the Ministry of women Affairs, the National Council of Women Societies and other non-governmental organisations (NGOs).  International bodies like the United Nations (UN) is not left out in the campaign against poor women representation in governance both in Nigeria and Worldwide.

## Ethical Basis for Women Participation in Nigerian Politics

The marginalization of women in Nigerian Politics is no longer news. What is really important is to justify these trends or to prove it wrong. Thus in this section of the paper we shall examine the moral bases for women to participate actively in Nigerian politics. In other words, what are the implications of the continued marginalisation of women in decision making in Nigeria? This question would lead us to the analysis of the concepts of person, respect for person and the concept of justice. The exposition of these ethical principles and concepts would no doubt provide a strong ethical basis for women to participate in Nigerian politics.

### The concept of Person

The term 'person' functions as a description of the status which we grant human beings over and above other animals and inanimate objects. Relatedily a person according to Harris, (1968) "is a self-conscious self-objectifying rational being, who sees reason as a constructive organizing principle of thought in service of passion" In other words, it follows from this views that anybody with the least potentiality of human rationality and moral development or to whom such potentiality can be imputed qualifies as a person. In consonance with the above assertion, Eboh, (2002) contends that intelligence and freedom makes a woman a self-active, moral subject, responsible for her actions, because whoever is endowed with the thinking faculty and the freewill ipso facto has the ability to exercise freedom of decisions and executes them is answered for his actions.

An upshot of the concept of person according to Maclagn, (2003) is the principle of respect for person. To feel respect for person, is to be moved by the thought that another subject is after all a person like oneself and as such

he should be treated with consideration. For Harrison J. And Meyer C. (1971) respect for persons is the moral principle with three rules:

"*that teach and every person should be regarded as worthy of sympathetic consideration and should be so treated that no person should be regarded by another as a mere possession, or used as an object to another's satisfactory; that persons are not and ought never to be treated in any understanding as a mere expendables*"

The above views on respect of persons, indicate that any person  as such has intrinsic worth and value irrespective of his achievements which is dealing with other persons would neither be ignored or discounted. Ogundipe, (2005) summarizes the above views by saying that "if you do not treat a person as a human being, then that means you are not human yourself. It speaks of our common humanity. The social imperative that we recognise the existential needs of others and therefore our responsibilities to each other"

Our exposition on the concept of personhood and the need for respect for person has indeed strongly questioned the continued discrimination against women in Nigerian politics. In other words, since the personhood of women has been established is the subjugation of women in Nigeria justified?

## The concept of Equality

The issue of inequality between men and women in politics was long enunciated by Locke, the British political philosopher. Mangena (2000) quotes Locke to have stated that "only the male person is capable of establishing managing and controlling democracy, because it rests on rationality a quality which female lacks" Locke's theory on women has effects even in modern times and has further led to the marginalization of women in politics. However Mill, (1912) another political philosopher in a contrary view states that "if the principle of democracy is true, we ought to act as if to ordain that to be born a girl instead of a boy any more that to be born black instead of a nobleman shall decide the persons position throughout life" Mills' argument indeed demonstrates the potential quality of women with men in politics. The assumed superiority of male sex over the female sex has further been debunked by Ango, (2002) as he noted that after studies by endocrinologists, it is now proven that male intelligent quotients is not higher than females. Thus Nigerian women like their male counterparts have the natural capacity and potential to participate equally in politics. In addition, in modern times women leaders worldwide like Margaret Thatcher, Britain, Angela Merckel, Germany, Elle Johnson Sir leaf, Liberia have consistently proved that they are capable of controlling democracies. In a related manner Article 1 of the universal Declaration of Human Rights state that "all human being are born and free and equal in dignity and right. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood. Article 7 also states that all are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of law. If the above assertion is accepted by all nation, Nigeria, inclusive, why then are Nigerian women discriminated against when it comes to politics?

## The concept of Justice

Justice, farness and impartiality are overlapping moral concepts. They are procedural values for the reconciliation of divergent interests, and for security harmony and peace among different interests and interest groups (Akinpelu, 2005). In a related view, Amingo, (1999) explains further that justice basically seek to promote social peace and harmony in human society by eliminating partiality arbitrariness unjustified social and economic inequalities, infringement on peoples human rights and freedom." Since it has been proved that all human beings are fundamentally equal they ought to be treated as equals. To treat either of the sexes unequally amounts to injustices. What we are arguing in essence is that both men and women in Nigeria should be given equal opportunity to prove their mettle in politics and contribute effectively to national development. It is only then that justice will appear to have been done in Nigeria.

## Factors that Dilapidate Women's Efforts at Participating Actively in Nigerian Politics

A number of factors have been identified by Ogundipe (2005), Osokoya (2008) and ICEHD (2010) as militating against women quest for political participation in Nigeria. They include the following;

- Lack of formal education which has led to high prevalence of poverty among the women folk. This is mainly due to their unequal access to formal education with their male counterpart. Another is unfavourable inheritance customs and lack of access to credit facilities.

- Patriarchal culture and stereotyping of sex roles which has permeated the government, religions and the society subordinates women. The prolonged military rule in Nigeria which alienated women and distributed political position along patriarchal lines stereotyping of sex roles in the family and public life, which has led to the unacceptability of women for leadership roles by men

- Lack of political awareness and solidarity among the rural women as most women organisations and NGOs do not actually reach this all important grass root political structure.

- Women's lack of confidence and poor self esteem which results from years of internationalization of debilitating social norms.

- Lack of effective and comprehensive national programme to ensure gender equality in Nigeria

- Political violence and intimidation which scare the women fold.

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**The Concept of Education and Democracy**

Education as a concept has a wide meaning and application. Any broad definition of education however should take into account the formal education. In its broad sense, it not only enables a person to develop his intellect and acquire skills, but also his morals. These qualities are necessary for combating problems of life and to fit the individual into the company of his fellow human beings. A related but radical view on education which is also relevant to this paper is expressed by Harrison and Mayer (1971) when they contended that;

"*Education is the key that unlocks the door to modernisation. Education does not mean teaching people to know what they do not know. Rather it means teaching them to act, to think and to behave as they were not accustomed to act; think or behave before*"

In other words education teaches new ways of thinking, seeing and doing things in an ever-changing modern society. In specific term, education as we intend to argue in this paper would in addition to improving the intellect and providing skills change existing attitudes, modify the behaviour of the individuals for adequate adjustment in the society. It will in essence re-orientate gender norms and stereotypes in Nigeria for effective women participation in politics. Education is a key factor in building women's capacity in politics. With good formal education women would be empowered economically in terms of good jobs and income and this in turn would help them compete favourably with their male counterparts in politics. Because there appears to be a link between one's economic power and his/her political power. Apart from formal education women also need functional education that would help to develop whatever skills they are working with presently. In essence there is the need for them to acquire scientific and technological knowledge that would enhance their output present field of endeavour to boost their economic status.

In the same vein, education is needed to develop women's intelligence for democracy requires high level of intelligence to enable people process information and make wise decisions. For all these to be possible more efforts should be made at promoting equal access to education between males and females in Nigeria.

There should be re-education and re-orientation of our men on the issues of patriarchal culture and stereotyping of sex role in the country. Patriarchy as a system recognizes the superiority of men over women. It has resulted in giving male preference over women in social and political sphere. It has equally led to the unacceptability of women by men as leaders. However our analysis of the concept of persons, equality of human beings and justice have proved that the discrimination against women based on patriarchal system amounts to injustice and a breach on their fundamental human rights. What is needed now is re-educating and re-orienting our men on the issues through our educational system and the mass media as gender stereotyping is learned and can change over time. Our men should be sensitized towards our indigenous cultural values concerning the status of women. Nigerian world view is rooted in philosophy of holistic harmony and communalism. This philosophy forms the African social order and the dual sex system of socio-political organization which was based on complementarily of both sexes before the colonial era. When there is this change in mind set, Nigerian women will take their rightful position in Nigerian politics.

Lack of political awareness and solidarity among the women folk has been identified as one of the bane to their political emancipation. It has been suggested by ICEHD, (2010) that women should strive and understand themselves and present a formidable united force. Women organizations and various NGOs should enlighten and sensitize especially the rural women about what women would gain if they politically conscious and active. Nigerian Women should capitalize on their numerical strength, empower themselves politically and avoid the "pull her down syndrome." For women to succeed politically they need to harness the cultural institutions that empowered women in the pre-colonial period. This could be done through group networking. They should mobilize themselves and carry one another along.

Decades of internalization of debilitating cultural norms has led to women's lack of participation in politics. Women have thus come to accept their subjugated position as the norm and it has sapped their energy to achieve even in politics. This situation stresses the need  to re-educate them on this negative mind sets. They should be enlightened the more on their human rights. Women should be motivated by the great heights attained by the few women who have served and who are serving currently in Nigerian government  These women have proved their mettle in politics.

The government should institute deliberate and viable programmes to enable women actively participate in politics. Nigerian government can learn from South African example where gender issues have been incorporated into the constitution in favour of women. Rwanda is another African country where their parliament has the highest number of female members in the world. If Rwanda can achieve this feat why not Nigeria. The token political appointments thrown out to women by various Nigerian governments is no longer acceptable to the woman folk. For it tantamount to injustice when compared with the tenets of democracy and the women population. It could even make women lose their focus in their quest for political participation.

The relationship between education and politics was long been conceived by Plato (1888) in his Republics when he noted that education is the one great thing by means of which the ruler can shape human nature in the right direction to produce a harmonious state. In world politics today, the vogue is the move from dictatorship, socialism, to democracy. The essence of democracy involves a system of government that is rooted in the notion that ultimate authority in governance of the people rightfully belong to the people, that everyone is entitled to equitable participation and share in the fortunes and misfortunes of the land of his birth citizenship (Babarinde, 1994). In a related manner, the International Press Union (IPU) (1993) stated that; "the concept of democracy will only assume true and dynamic significance when political policies and national legislation are decided upon by men and women with equitable regard for the interest and aptitude of both halves of the population"

In brief, then, the essence of democracy is participation, whether directly or indirectly by both men and women in a given country. Other principles that underlie the theory and practice of democracy have been outlined by Akinpelu (2005) to include; freedom, respect, equality, justice, fairness, impartiality for persons, intelligence, dialogue and reason. Akinpelu (2005) went further to explain that

*"We have accepted democracy as our political choice in Nigeria, but to inaugurate and sustain the democratic arrangement is much more the problem. The democratic culture has not in fact taken root, except we cultivate the democratic culture by embracing democratic values and skills, the democratic institutions being elaborately and most expensively put in place will barely survive the transitional exercise."*

From the above views one can easily deduce that for there to be any meaningful democratic governance in Nigeria, the citizenry must acquire and put into practice the democratic principles and values outline above in a similar note, until the women folk who form half of the population are treated as persons and allowed to participate fully in the democratic dispensation in Nigeria, the nation's quest for democracy will only be a mirage.

## Recommendations

- Sensitizing Nigerian women on their fundamental Human Rights through seminars, workshops and mass media.

- The Women Political Empowerment Offices (WPEO's) which is an arm of Federal Ministry of Women Affairs should intensify its efforts at women capacity-building to empower women in leadership skills to participate in leadership.

- Women organizations to form formidable networking to co-ordinate the efforts of both the rural and urban women towards political participation.

- There should be a national campaign by the Federal Ministry of Education and National Orientation Agency to change societal attitudes in favour of women participation in politics.

- More efforts should be made by both the Federal and State governments to ensure increase in women's literacy level, promote their Skills acquisition and other vocational training to empower women financially.

- The government to promulgate laws and policies for women greater participation in politics.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, it has been identified in this paper that education and re-orientation of our negative mind sets about women are very necessary for women's effective participation in Nigerian Politics. We must use education to cultivate in the mind of the citizenry the democratic principles and culture for the country to move forward politically. There is need for more solidarity and political awareness among women to enable them use their formidable number to overturn the status quo. Further subjugation and discrimination against women in Nigeria is unethical as both men and women are human persons and subjects of equal human rights.

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