

## Gender Imbalance and The Nigeria's Democratizing Process

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This paper attempts to analyse the gender imbalance existing in the Nigeria's democratizing process. Gender imbalance has been a permanent feature in the democratic politics of most countries of the world, including Nigeria, with women being relegated to the background. Thus, women remain the marginalised gender. This marginalisation, the paper argued, is partly derived from the pattern of socialisation of men and women into the different roles in the society and which subsequently results in unequal access to and unfair distribution of resources. This impedes development and productivity. Various attempts were made by the international community and national governments to address this problem. However, in spite of these efforts, the representation of women in the Nigerian democratising process, even though could be said to have relatively improved, is still very low. This is because the female gender in Nigeria, often, are besieged with many challenges which militate against their effective participation in the country's democratic process and the continued male dominance in this area of human endeavour. These challenges, as discussed in the work, include among others, the patriarchal ideology, money politics, illiteracy and the general nature of the country's political terrain. Based on the foregoing, some recommendations were made such as intensifying efforts on gender affirmative actions, need for the ratification of protocols and treaties on gender equality to which Nigeria is a signatory, change in our attitudes, among other things.

**Keywords:** Gender; Democracy; Nigeria

### Introduction

There is currently a growing academic interest in the level of participation of women in democratic politics. The 'third wave' of globalisation emphasizes the issue of democratizing process, women and human rights. Almost all over the world the female gender are exploited and marginalized. One area in which this disparity is very apparent is in the area of democratic politics. Although women account for roughly one half of almost every country's population in the world, they are yet to be proportionately represented in the democratic process of most if not all countries in the world. In fact, a global survey of women in politics revealed that most countries register five per cent or less of women at every level and in every sphere of government (Nwankwo, 2002). Again, within the structure of political parties which provided the basis for participation in the democratic process, women are prevented from occupying leadership positions as less than 11 per cent of party leaders worldwide are the female gender (Shvedova, 2002 cited in Dantake, 2011). This imbalance slows down development as development cannot be very well achieved in the face of inequalities. Various attempts were made by International and National Organisations as well as National Governments to curb this anomaly but with a little success as most countries of the world could not meet up with the 30 per cent representation of women in national governance as suggested by the international communities. Nigeria, which is a signatory to many treaties and protocols on gender affirmative actions, is also yet to meet the 30% target even though it has pledged in its National Gender Policy, a 35% female representation in its democratising process.

This study, therefore, aimed at analysing the gender imbalance that existed and which still exists in the Nigerian democratising process. In doing so, the authors took a look at the country's four democratic republics; the First Republic (1960-1966), the Second Republic (1979-1984), the Third Republic (1991-1993) and the Fourth Republic (1999-Date). After unveiling some of the factors responsible for that imbalance and the continued male dominance in the Nigerian democratic scene, the paper concludes by offering some policy recommendations and ways through which the problem can be corrected and, by

extension, gender balance assured.

### **Gender Imbalance and the Nigeria's Democratizing Process**

Gender imbalance is, not simply a Nigerian or African phenomenon but a global one and it is found in all facets of our day-to-day activities. One area in which this disparity is very apparent is in the area of democratic politics. Although women account for roughly one half of almost every country's population in the world, they are yet to be proportionately represented in the democratic process of any country in the world. For instance, as observed by Nwankwo (2002), the United Kingdom and the United States which are among the oldest democracies in the world had just 9.1% and 9.0% female representation respectively in their parliaments as at 1994. Yet, these figures are a major improvement considering what obtained in 1980 when they were 2.9% and 3.7% UK and US respectively. Although some Scandinavian countries like Norway and Sweden have as high as 38% women in their parliaments (Nwankwo, 2002) and some African countries like Rwanda which has 48.8 per cent, Tanzania having 23.3% and South Africa with 29.8% (Ogidefa, 2008), Nigeria is far from attaining such heights.

### **The First Republic (1960-1966)**

In the Nigeria's First Republic (1960-1966), both the President and the Prime Minister were males. Again, there was no female minister while there were only 3 women legislators (Maduagwu, 2009). In the 1961 general elections, 3 women were elected to the Eastern House of Assembly. Throughout this period, there were no female minister in any of the regional governments (Nwankwo, 2002), no woman was in the top positions of any of the political parties and while women in the Southern part of the country voted and few among them contested for seats in the House of Representatives, those in the North were not allowed to do so and, thus, could neither stand as candidates in the elections nor even allowed to elect candidates of their choice (Dantake, 2011). However, the 1966 coup brought an end to this democratic dispensation, paving a way for 13 years period of military rule in the country through series of other coups.

### **The Second Republic (1979-1983)**

In the elaborate preparation for the return of civil rule, new constitution modelled after the American Presidential system was drafted and approved by the constituent assembly. When the ban on political activities was lifted in 1978, women, including those in the North came out to participate in full force; some even attempted to form their own political parties. Five (5) political parties – the Great Nigeria Political Party (GNPP), the National Party of Nigeria (NPN), the Nigerian Peoples Party (NPP), the People's Redemption Party (PRP) and the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN), out of the 52 competing political associations were registered and elections were held at the Local, State and Federal levels, and a civilian government was sworn in October, 1979 (Nwankwo, 2002). During this period, there was a significant improvement in the status of women in the Nigerian democratic process particularly in the North where the women, for the first time were allowed to exercise franchise and, for the first time, a woman was appointed as a State Commissioner there. Another remarkable achievement was the presentation of a woman by the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) as its Vice Presidential candidate during the 1979 elections. However, the registration of political parties that contested elections during this period was done in favour of the male as none of the women's political associations was registered and, thus the women only resorted to forming women's wings within the registered political parties to campaign for the men. Consequently, in the 1979 general elections, no woman contested for the position of President and State Governor in any of the then 19 states while only 4 women contested for the 45-member Senate, yet, none of them won. In the House of Representative 17 women contested while only 3 of them won and in the States House of Assembly, 42 women contested but only 5 won. Again, only 6 women were appointed as ministers throughout the period of the Second Republic and every State had at least, only 1 commissioner (Nwankwo, 2002 and Dantake, 2011). Similarly, in the 1983 general elections only 1 woman and 2 women won in the Senate and in the House of Representative respectively, and in the Houses of Assembly of then 19 States of the Federation, only 5 women won. The little progress in the position of women in the

democratic process made during this period was, however, eroded by the re-emergence of military government in 1983.

### **The Third Republic (1991-1993)**

In preparation for the return to civilian government, the then military regime designed two political parties – the National Republican Convention (NRC) and the Social Democratic Party (SDP). Elections for Local and State Governments were held and winners sworn in; in 1990 and 1992 respectively. The Presidential election was held in June, 1993 though was subsequently annulled by the military government on grounds of irregularities. During this period, although women showed an impressive participation to the extent that a woman contested the Presidential primaries, yet they generally remained underrepresented. Dantake (2011:304) summarised the outcome of the various election held during the period thus:

Out of a total of 1,297 positions nationwide, women only won 206. No woman made it to the governorship position.... Results for the National Assembly indicate that, out of a total 95 seats for the Senate, only one (1) woman made it, while a total of twelve (12) won elections into the 638- member House of Representatives. For the 30 State Houses of Assembly ... women won only 27 seats.

In addition to the above, only 2 women were chosen as Deputy Governors. This Republic was, however short lived following its abortion by the then Military Government and the subsequent seizure of power from the then interim government by the military in 1993.

### **The Fourth Republic (1999-Date)**

In preparation for a return to another Republic, new political parties were registered and elections were held in 1999. Following the handing over of power to another civilian government in 1999, leading to the emergence of the Fourth Republic (1999-date), gender imbalance in the Nigeria's democracy, though could be said to have relatively reduced, yet, it persists. For instance, the representation of women in contestable positions has increased from less than 3% in the previous Republics to 3% in 1999, 4% in 2003 and 6% in 2007 (Agbalajobi, 2009). In the 1999 general elections, there was no female Presidential and Governorship candidate, 3 females out of 109 won in the Senate and 13 out of 360 won in the House of Representatives. In the 36 States of the Federation only 1 female got her way to the Deputy Governorship position, only 12 out of 990 won in the Houses of Assembly (Agena, 2007), and of the 36 Speakers of the Houses of Assembly, there was only one woman (Nwankwo, 2002). At the Local Government level, only 9 females out of 774 won as Local Government Chairpersons while 143 out of 8,810 won as councillors (Agena, 2007). In short, the record of this election shows that out of a total of 631 women that contested for various positions, only 181 won. In terms of political appointments, out of the 49 nominees that were appointed as ministers in the first tenure of Obasanjo's administration, only 6 were women and out of these, only 2 were substantive ministers, while the remaining 4 were state ministers (Dantake, 2011), and out of 36 people appointed as Special Advisers, only 1 was a female. In fact, throughout this tenure women constituted only 9.5% of Obasanjo's political appointments (Maduagwu, 2009).

After the 2003 general elections which gave way to Obasanjo's second tenure, records has revealed that no female contested for President, and, although 7 of the contestants in the State Governorship positions were females, none of them was successful. Only 2 women emerged as State Deputy Governors. In the Senate, there were 624 contestants out of which only 35 were females, yet, only 3 of them won, while in the House of Representatives, out of the 1,736 people that contested the election, 89 were females but only 21 of them won (Maduagwu, 2009). In the States Houses of Assembly only 38 females won. In fact, some States like Adamawa, Kastina and Kebbi had no female representation in all the elective posts (Dantake, 2011).

The 2007 and 2011 election results have recorded some remarkable progress. Although the influential seats of power are still male dominated but still there is some little push in the senate chamber where women have won 8 and 7 seats, in the house of Representatives 23 and 26 seats was won, ministerial appointments women have captured 7 out of 40 and 12 out of 30, special advisers women got only 2 while men take 34, and women take 4 while men go with 16 in 2007 and 2011 respectively. In the state house of assembly men take the lion share of 938 and 928 seats while women were able to win 52 seats in 2007 and 62 seats in 2011 respectively. There was only one woman house of assembly speaker in the whole of the 36 states. The election of 2015 has shown some drawback from the previous success recorded because only 4 women emerged as deputy governors from the 36 states, in the senate chamber 101 were males only 8 seats was captured by women, the House of Representatives men take over 341 seats and women win only 19 seats. The ministerial appointment has come up with 24 men and 6 women this was a bit fair as it met only 20% of the required 30% Beijing benchmark (Oluyemi , 2016; Ekpenyong et al, 2015).

This general scenario of the Nigeria's democratic process, making it seemingly the "politics of female gender exclusion" results in unequal access to and unfair distribution of resources which impede development and productivity. In the history of Nigeria's democracy, no female gender has ever won as the President or Governor of any of the States of the Federation while up to the present time, the composition of both the Federal and State legislatures has never reached 10%. This situation is the same in terms of political appointments in both the Federal and State levels. People perceive development in several ways, but it is generally agreed that "it is a process that leads to increased capacity of people to have control over material assets, intellectual resources and ideology and obtain physical necessities of life (food, clothing and shelter), equality in employment, participation in government, political and economic independence, adequate education, gender equality, sustainable development and peace" (Igbuzor, 2006:3). Thus, development cannot be achieved in the face of increasing inequalities and, therefore, any development strategy that ignores equity strategies can be likened to "an attempt to treat the symptoms of a disease while ignoring its already diagnosed root cause".

### **Factors Associated with Gender Imbalance in the Nigeria's Democratizing Process**

Looking at the various attempts by the International Community and the Nigerian Government to ensure gender balance but with only a little success, it, therefore, suggest the existence of some impediments that hinders the realisation of this aim. Consequently, various factors were put forward by scholars, politicians and human rights activists regarding what may be considered 'stumbling blocks' to the realisation of gender balance in Nigeria. These, include, among others:

#### **i. Patriarchal Ideology**

The patriarchal system, on which our society is based, constitutes one of the major hindrances to gender balance in Nigeria. In Nigeria, men dominate women in all social institutions (family, economy, polity, etc.). This domination, according to Best and Abdul-Qadir (2007), is a result of a societal conspiracy nurtured in the family institution through socialisation. Men defined roles of everybody in the society, including the rights of female from the family level; they defined women's roles as those of sweeping, cleaning, cooking, fetching water and the likes while they define their roles as those of leadership, decision-making and control over women.

#### **ii. Poverty**

Lack of adequate finance is a crucial hindrance to effective female participation in Nigeria's democratic politics. A large portion of the Nigerian female population is not as financially strong as their male counterparts and, as a result, they could not compete with them especially now that Nigerian democracy is characterised by bribery and vote-buying. In addition, at the party level, potential female contestants are suppressed by their inability to cope with financial implications related to party registration, payment

of dues, purchasing nomination forms, political rallies and campaigns, etc. This makes the whole process 'a contest with a lot of Naira'. Although many parties are now exempting females from paying for nomination forms, other money demanding components persists, thus making it a 'no go area' for most females.

### **iii. Lack of Education**

Another problem facing women is lack of adequate education. Women constitute a larger percentage of the illiterate group in Nigeria. This could be attributed to the fact that in most families, parents prefer to send their sons to school, instead of their daughters whom they feel would eventually get married and thus get incorporated into another family. Thus, a larger percentage of the girls remain uneducated and (Effah-Attoe, 2002). Consequently, females are to with a disadvantage of lacking one of the requirements of seeking political office – educational qualification.

### **iv. The Nature of the Democratic Process**

The very nature of the Nigeria's democratic process is not female friendly. Nigerian democracy is characterised by violence, thuggery, intimidation and in some cases, it may even involve assassination. These hostile behaviours are completely against female nature and, thus, they find it difficult to cope with the situation as a result of their passive and compassionate nature. Furthermore, most political meetings are conducted in the night which will culturally not be alright for females, especially married ones to attend as it arouses suspicion against them.

### **v. Godfatherism**

The role played by godfathers in Nigeria politics also goes a long way in affecting the participation of females in the Nigeria's democratizing process. These people provide the financial and physical muscles for comparing in return for political favours. Godfathers would rather invest resources on men than women.

### **vi. Petty Jealousy**

There is a kind of natural jealousy amongst women. Consequently, many of them will prefer to vote for males than their fellow females. Hajiya Naja'atu Muhammed, a prominent politician in Nigeria confirmed this assertion when she stressed that: *"Sometimes we are the problems ourselves as women would prefer to vote and solicit support for men rather than their fellow women, based on petty jealousy."* (The Village Square, 2011:2)

### **vii. Marginalisation of Females in Political Parties**

Right from the party level, female aspirants are not given the needed support by the party leaders. The party leaders, in most cases, do not take female aspirants seriously; they do not give them adequate opportunity to secure nomination forms (Dantake, 2011) and even when they did, they usually are not supported by the leaders at primary elections. Furthermore, females face difficulties in occupying party leadership positions.

### **viii. Principle of Indigeneity**

Another factor associated with gender imbalance in the Nigeria's democratic politics is introduction of the issue of indigeneity into the 1979 constitution as a way of guaranteeing fair regional distribution of power. Consequently, women married outside their Local Government, Constituency or State suffer systematic discrimination because in their own area they are told that by getting married, they have lost their indigeneity and in their husband's society, they are considered as aliens. This issue is mostly invoked when

women tried to venture politics.

#### ix. Lack of Political will by the Nigerian Government to Implement Gender Affirmative Actions

Nigeria is a signatory to many treaties on gender affirmative actions, yet, it has not ratified them for domestication. For instance, up till now the bill on Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the only UN Human Rights Treaty which targets culture and tradition as influential forces shaping gender roles and family relations and the AU Women's Right Protocol are not domesticated for application into Nigeria's legal system.

#### Conclusion

In the light of some of the problems identified, which hindered the realisation of achieving gender balance in Nigeria, the paper, therefore concludes by suggesting that governments at all levels and its agencies need to back the implementation of gender affirmative actions to which the country is a signatory with the political will by ensuring their domestication and implementation into the national laws. Monitoring the implementation and direction of spending on gender issues is important. Women must themselves take charge of the affairs and become the defenders and promoters of their own cause. The recent attempt by some political parties of granting waivers to prospective female aspirants is commendable and should be maintained. Finally, change in both men's and women's knowledge, attitudes and behaviour are necessary conditions for the realisation of gender balance in the country.

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