THE DYNAMICS OF WOMEN POLITICAL EMANCIPATION AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN NIGERIA

Oni, Ebenezer Oluwole

Department Of Political Science and International Relations, Crescent University, Abeokuta

ABSTRACT

The role of women in the organization of society and more importantly government cannot be underestimated. Women, through ages, have contributed significantly to the socio-economic and political developments of their countries and have brought dynamism to the changing global environment. However, the feat achieved by women in the development of ancient pre-colonial Nigeria was disarticulated by the advent of colonialism laced with gender oppression and exploitation and accompanied by cultural/traditional practices, marital injunctions and religious doctrines that all disempowered women from participating in public decision making processes. It is against this background that this essay examines the dynamics of women political emancipation and political participation in Nigeria. It argues that political movement, activism and various affirmative actions toward eradicating all forms of discrimination against women have helped in liberating Nigerian women from political seclusion. The paper concludes that only institutionalized and justiceable policies can guarantee the right of women to political participation.

Keywords: Dynamics, Women, Political Emancipation, Political participation, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary world, democracy has become the template upon which nation-states achieve sustainable development, and a template for promoting citizens participation in public decision making processes. However, politics whose etymology, practice and tradition conceptualize as male dominated, specific to the public sphere is not women friendly. The theory and practice of politics and by extension governance in Africa has inadvertently excluded the women folk for a number of reasons largely connected to colonialism, religion, culture and tradition which perceive the exercise of power as a male exclusive preserve, with women always at the receiving ends. The historical experience of the African continent from slavery to colonialism and neo-colonialism has forced a particular kind of identify on Africans- the identity of subjugation, subservience and oppression. In fact, African continent is yet to fully recover from these historical realities, despite the fact that some countries have made tremendous progress. It is instructive to mention that Africa's historical trajectories added other layers of identities and oppressions for African women which explain the nature and context of women political socialization in Africa and their response to political activities. For decades, women have confronted the problem of marginalization and exclusion from political affairs and have fought for emancipation with the view to instituting a new political order.

Political emancipation and political participation are two important concepts that are vital and fundamental to democratic sustainability. Both are intrinsically related, in that the extent to which women are politically emancipated- defined in terms of freedom and removal of obstacles to access to political rights, the greater the level of participation in politics and ultimately this has implication for democratic sustenance and development. This paper argues that the level of women political participation in Nigeria is low, a development that can be located within the various historical trajectories of the nation particularly colonialism and the various anti-women socio-cultural and traditional practices which have disempowered women and confined them to the private realm. However, various feminist movements, international treaties and conventions on women, and reformulation of self-identities and reconstruction of cultural values have improved the fortunes of women thereby increasing the level of political participation. The paper concludes that women political rights remain an integral and non negotiable part of human rights and by extension an important aspect of any democratic framework. It suggested that the institutionalization and enforcement of the affirmative actions on gender equality and women political empowerment are the needed impetus for addressing the women question in Nigeria.

CONCEPTUAL DISCOURSE ON WOMEN POLITICAL EMANCIPATION AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN NIGERIA

Any meaningful discussion or assessment of the role of women in governance and decision-making processes must necessarily make recourse to the historical trajectories of the entity called Nigeria. It can be decently argued that the voicelessness of women in public decision-making in contemporary Nigeria has its root in the colonial experience the country went through and the pattern of colonial administration which arguably secluded women and disempowered them economically, politically and socially, thereby overturning a feat already achieved in the pre-colonial days. To therefore speak of emancipation is to admit that some form of disempowerment, deprivation, seclusion, exploitation and slavery has been dominantly experienced. Prior to colonialism the exploits performed by women were a prominent feature in Nigeria's

historical traditions. For instance, women founded cities, led migrations and even conquered kingdoms (Afolabi, 2013:38). In the organization of various traditional governments in the pre-colonial era, women held powerful positions and thus have voice in the decision making processes. In the Yoruba system of government for instance, the Iyalode, a title of the leader of women groups, was a member of the council of state down to 1914 (Afolabi, 2013). In the same vein, Queen Amina of Kastina was a powerful woman famous for her many conquests. This was an era when women participation in governance especially at the public realm contributed immensely to societal growth and development. The role of women in political organization as Afolabi (2013) further noted may be defined in terms of their participation, direct or indirect in the activities of government. Women were thus seen as instrument of social cohesion and mobilization in the pre-colonial days. Observably, pre-colonial governments or administrations encouraged women political participation by deliberately creating positions to be held by women so that they could be involved in the life of the society.

As Agbaje (1999:193) usefully argues, "at the centre of the democratic idea is the notion of participation which describes the extent to which individual members of society share, take part or get involved in the life of that society. Political participation is therefore consequent upon the creation, recognition, encouragement and expansion of the opportunities for participation in the decision processes of a society. The decent, progressive achievements recorded by women in the public realm during the pre-colonial era were truncated by the advent of colonialism. Appreciable levels of economic, political and social developments of women noticeable in the pre-colonial days were dispossessed, devalued and reversed by colonial experience (Rodney 1972, Enemuo, 1999).

Colonialism thus systematically dislocated women's status from the public realm and confined it to the private realm. Various colonial policies that disenfranchised women such as the policy that stipulated the possession of 100 Pounds in order to be eligible to stand for elections and the one that disqualified women from voting, all put women in a form of 'bondage', dispossession, devaluation and disempowerment. It puts women in a position of inequality in terms of political rights. Women emancipation therefore became a serious challenge that was vigorously pursued by women scholars and activists of the colonial and post colonial Nigeria. Conceptually, the notion of political emancipation is basically an expression applied to illustrate the different effort to access political rights or equality, generally for a distinctively disenfranchised collection, or more commonly in debate of such matters (Shezan Shaikh, 2014). The term political emancipation was often applied in political matters of the 18th as well as 19th century political discourse, as in Catholic or Jewish liberation movements, even while female suffrage was the main aim of women's emancipation movement. Karl Marx was one of the individuals who popularized the notion of political emancipation in his essay written in 1844 known as the "on the Jewish Question" (Shezan, 2014).

In contemporary political discourse, political emancipation as a phrase is not applied outside academic, foreign or under activist circumstances. What is more emphasized in today's world is women political empowerment which emancipation logically seeks to achieve. Halfani (1993) noted that empowerment is a multi-dimensional process involving the transformation of the economic, social, psychological, political and legal circumstances of the powerless. The powerless here as noted by Halfani could be taken to conjure women who have been stereotypically characterized as submissive, illogical,

passive, talkative, emotional, easily moved to tears, weak and feeble (Udegbe, 1998: 3-4). Political emancipation as a matter of necessity entails positive changes that seek to dismantle cultural norms and traditional practices that devalue, disempower and dispossess women. It involves the process of empowerment which ultimate goals are the expansion of women's access to educational opportunities, provision of facilities for skills acquisition and access to positions of authority (Enemuo, 1999:233).

WOMEN AND THE BARRIERS TO POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN NIGERIA

The development of any nation requires the contributions of both men and women. Interestingly, there is a growing recognition all over the world of the untapped resources in women required for achieving sustainable socio-economic and political development. However, women have been historically marginalized politically, economically, socially, culturally and otherwise and this has had and still is having serious implications for their level of involvement in public decision making. The marginalization of different kinds women have suffered in Nigeria over time has undoubtedly hampered them from taking a big shot in the public/ political realm. In fact, the situation of women in Nigeria is precarious and this cannot be divorced from various practices which have limited them from realizing their potentials. This part of the essay therefore intends to discuss the practices, theories, norms, belief system and stereotypes which have become serious challenges to women's political participation in Nigeria. First, are the theories that have successfully confined women (Nigerian women inclusive) to the position of submission and subordination owing to their biological and psychological attributes. For instance, the work of Simone de Equalvoir (1952) generated theoretical controversies between biological and cultural explanations of women's subordination (Afolabi, 2013). It is commonly held that the biological traits of women account for their tenderness, passiveness and submissive tendencies. Again, Talcott Parson's structural functionalist theory provided another theoretical perspective to the study of women and their challenges of participation at the public realm.

Parson (1940) identified adaptation, goal attainment, integration and tension management or pattern maintenance as the functional imperatives of the society. He contends that these processes and functions must be performed within the social system if the systems are to survive. Talcott Parson thus undertook a division of labour within the family system and consequently assigns the primary responsibility for the adaptation and goal attainment functions to the husband-father who he calls the "instrumental leader" while he appropriates the functions of integration within the family and the community and pattern maintenance responsibility to the wife-mother otherwise known as the "expressive leader". These theories have created a clear demarcation between men and women, and reflect them as belonging to opposite ends of bipolar adjectives in which men have desirable qualities (as actors, providers and final authority) while women have undesirable ones (Udegbe, 1998: 3-4). This provided enough opportunities for societies to construct stereotypes that portray women as inferior and unfit for leadership at the public arena. Enemuo (1999, 228) puts it thus:

> What is to be reiterated of male and female are not determined by nature but have been constructed by society. Their overall impact has been to put women in a subordinate position vis-à-vis men.

Second, are the cultural and traditional societal practices that subjugate women, devalue and dispossess them of their potentials. Some of the cultural and traditional practices are products of societal structure and composition as a result of commonly held norms while some others were foistered by colonial experiences. Dominant among these is the patriarchal societal system in Africa and Nigeria in particular. It is a common belief in most African societies that men are the heads of the family and are therefore responsible for providing for the needs of the family members and also play the gods since they are the custodian of final authority. This also has bearing on the division of domestic responsibilities in which female children are assigned domestic roles while their male counterparts are allowed to play around. This patriarchal relation at the family level reinforces the devaluation of women works at the public realm. Pogoson (2012) Observes usefully thus:

> Patriarchy has also been identified as a major social system which has legitimized the domination of women by their male counterpart. Patriarchy is a social system in which the role of man, as the main authority person, is fundamental to social groups and association.

The damaging effect of patriarchy on women's political participation in the public arena is summarized by Egbue (2010) in the following terms:

> ...the patriarchy relations at the household level and the consequent lack of adequate male participation in family domestic work, as well as current non provision of adequate and affordable child care and other care facilities, constitute the background within which the devaluation of women's work at the public level is facilitated.

Still within cultural/traditional barriers are marriage norms that confine women to the private realm. The notion is that women are traditionally imbued with capacity for kitchen/home management and child rearing since social dispositions ascribe family domestic roles to female children, marriage institution thus provides the necessary latitude for this home training to be practicalized. They are to prepare foods, ensure the maintenance of home and environment as well as rear and nurture children. These cultural practices on the whole have excluded women for many years from leadership positions and this has consequentially robbed mankind of their unique potential for governance (Enemuo, 1999:232). The resultant effect of this is the perpetration of gender inequality in different aspects of Nigeria's social life, a by-product of gender insensitivity in the planning, design and implementation of public policies. Another dormant barrier to women political participation in Nigeria is religious precepts. Some religious injunctions are sometimes deployed to subjugate women. In some other instances, women are not even reckoned with and therefore excluded from among the children when numbered. A good example of this is found in the Holy Bible where Jacob had thirteen children, twelve male and one female. But throughout the passages where the names of the children of Jacob (also called Israel) were mentioned, the name of Dinah the only female was always excluded. This situation further exacerbated the 'feminization of poverty' syndrome because female children have no right of inheritance especially on landed property and this has further disempowered women economically. In the Islamic faith certain injunctions are often relied upon as justification for confining women in 'Purdah' (house seclusion of women) as is usually practiced in the northern part of Nigeria. The implication of this is the deprivation of female children from being adequately educated like their male counterparts and this undoubtedly affects their pattern of socialization into active participation in leadership positions both at the private and public realms. In sum, the barriers to women's political

participation in Nigeria's historical trajectories are multifaceted combining cultural and traditional, marital, economic and religious factors all of which have debased the position of women in the scheme of power equation.

FIRST LADYISM, WOMEN MOBILIZATION AND PUBLIC CONSCIOUSNESS IN NIGERIA

After the dislocation of women from Public management by the advent of colonialism through colonial economic and political policies there was dearth of alternative platforms to mobilize and champion women's course. As Pat Ama (1997; 221) puts it "there was no dramatic difference in the position women occupied in Nigerian politics during the first and second republics. Between 1960 and 1966 three women were elected to the Eastern House of Assembly. But there were no female Ministers in the regional government. The Action Group (AG) and the National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) had allowed women wings in their parties, but no women occupied the top echelon of the parties where decisions were made. This scenario can not but happen because there was no rallying point for women to articulate and address the women question. The emergent phenomenon of First Ladyism thus explored the gap and became entrenched in Nigeria's political developments.

In the history of political development of Nigeria, the office of the wife of the President, civilian or military, has never been so profound as that of Maryam Babangida, the late wife of former self-styled military President- General Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida. In fact, hardly can anyone resonate with the activities of that office in whatever form from 1960 to 1987 before Maryam Babangida embarked on the Better Life for Rural Women Programme in 1987. Of course, there were international and regional establishments such as the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) to provide region-wide focus on women's questions but their impact on women public consciousness and empowerment was not significant in Nigeria. Importantly, the Better Life for Rural women programme was initiated to improve the living conditions of women and uplift their socio-economic status (Ishajobi, 2012:48). The programme trained women farmers and other women in various economic ventures at the Federal and State multi-purpose Centers in their relevant fields in order to become self-sufficient. The idea behind this arguably was that unskilled and economically disadvantaged women can not compete for public space. Women that would compete for public space must have what it takes to do so- education, exposure, network and economic power. To enhance the attainment of these goals BLRWP intensified adult literacy programmes and encouraged the establishment of cooperatives. It ensured greater access of women to credit facilities and in fact it became an important tool to mobilize women on voting behaviour. This was evident in the increased number of women over men that came out to register as party members of the two political parties-National Republican Convention (NRC)and the Social Democratic Party (PDP) established by the government in 1989 (Ishajobi, 2012;49).

Another milestone achieved by the BLRWP was the establishment of the National Commission for Women (NCW) by the federal government Decree No 30 of 1989. The NCW became a national rallying point for women mobilization and public consciousness and saw to the emergence of femocracy in Nigeria (Amina, 2000). Afolabi (2013, 43) puts it in more colourful terms:

Through Mrs Maryam Babangida's Better Life for Rural Women' Programme, the consciousness of the Nigerian woman, especially in the rural areas, was aroused. The previous state administrators under the military governors had at least one woman holding a portfolio in their executives. Babangida showed by example when he appointed two women as Deputy Governors in two States, Lagos and Kaduna. Since then, there has been improvement galore, especially in Lagos State, where the Civilian Deputy Governor and the Secretary to the Lagos State Government were females in the persons of Mrs Sinotu Ojikutu and Professor (Mrs) Abba Sagoe respectively. It was during Babangida regime that women had the first real opportunity to break into the main stream of politics /governance.

While this essay is not crediting the Babangida regime for providing answers to the women questions, it observes that it kick-started a national policy for the emancipation of women. In a further demonstration of this commitment, the regime arguably with the influence of the office of the first Lady, appointed one woman out of every four local government councilors. It also appointed one woman in every Board or establishment. More still, it appointed two women as Vice-Chancellors of Universities. (Iyoha and Oviasuyi, 2010:402). The first lady in the regime of General Sanni Abacha, Mrs Mariam Abacha did little in consolidating on the gains of her predecessor. Although her husband established the ministry of women Affairs to articulate and coordinate all women related issues, the first Lady's Family Support Programme nosedived the public consciousness drive already imbued in women by the previous occupier of the office. Amina (2000) observed of the Family Support Programme as retrogressive because it once again relegated the articulated needs of women to the background in an attempt to embrace family projects with the hope that the present ills of society would be alleviated.

The successive civilian first ladies have also been remarkable in mobilizing women for action but observably, they politicize women struggle for emancipation and political equality by recruiting women mostly to support the political ambitions or continued stay in office of their husbands. Karunwi (2003, 196) cast an aspersion on this scenario when she observed that 'First Ladyism' has further disempowered women and brought about the personalization of power. It should however be stated that the 'supporters' role played by women under the auspices of First Ladies has also not gone unrewarded with certain 'concessions' granted now and then.

SOCIAL MOVEMENTS, ACTIVISM AND WOMEN POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN NIGERIA

The dynamism in the changing world order in every facet is also affecting the women question. There have been several attempts at institutionalizing human rights to promote equality and justice on the globe. Women issues are particularly stressed in these attempts. These global gender policies and laws have stimulated women activism and movements across Africa generally and Nigeria in particular. The import of these movements and activism is to enhance women economic and political empowerment in order to take up the challenge of public space. The global instruments that have committed countries across the work to the promotion of human rights specifically enshrine women's rights to political participation. These instruments according to UNDP (2010) include:

1. The Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR) which was adopted and proclaimed in 1948 by the UN General Assembly as a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations

2. Convention on the Political Rights of women (1952)
3. International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966)
4. International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966).

It is imperative to mention that the combined above documents provide the foundation for women's rights to participate in local, national and international decision making processes. The documents helped to produce women specific instruments that include:

1. The Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), adopted in 1979 by the UN General Assembly. Among other rights, it upholds the importance of women's involvement in the political process of state parties. It is often described as an international bill of rights for women.

2. The convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) adopted in 1989 by the UN General Assembly as a result of the recognition of the human rights of children (under 18, including girl child)

3. The Beijing Declaration and platform for Action (BPFA) which reiterates that levels of women's participation in power and decision-making were still far too low. In 1995, the BPFA was adopted to facilitate the achievement of women's participation worldwide. It recognized that "without the active participation of women and the incorporation of women's perspective at all levels of decision-making, the goals of equality, development and peace cannot be achieved (UNDP, 2010).

As mentioned above, the instruments for advancing women's course not only gave rise to several women movements and activism, but also introduced a new dimension into feminist theories and scholarship. Feminism as Wikipedia puts it, can be conceived as political, cultural and economic movements aimed at establishing greater rights and protection for women, as well as movements that campaign for women's rights and interests. Instructively, feminist theory emerged from these feminist movements and is manifest in a variety of disciplines. It is quite instructive to note that the issue of political emancipation of women in Nigeria is as old as the history of political activities in the country itself (Afolabi, 2013:44). Women of immense attributes including Mrs Funmilayo Ransome Kuti, Wuraola Esan, Margaret Ekpo, Gambo Sawaba and Many others have been at the forefront of women liberation from economic, political, cultural and social shackles that have held them captives for many years. Unfortunately, most of these liberation struggles were not done under formal, coordinated movements or platforms that could enhance the sustainability of whatever they might have achieved. Contemporary women movements and activism have been more coordinated, and well institutionalized, which puts them in a vantage position to better engage authorities and the society to demand gender equality and justice in public policy, legislations and policy implementation.

The many years of the movements and activism culminated for instance in the adoption of the National policy on Women (NPW) approved by the federal government of Nigeria under President Obasanjo shortly after the inauguration of the current fourth Republic in 1999. The policy among other things seeks to address the plethora of problems and issues being confronted by the women fold and the need to integrate women fully into national development in order to remove those

gender inequalities that have evolved in our society overtime through structure and processes created by patriarchy, colonialism and capitalism (Oke, 2013:63).

Women movements and activism in Nigeria have turned veritable tools of demanding the domestication of the numerous instruments of enhancing women involvement in public decision making processes particularly the 35% affirmation for women political participation in elective positions. Fayemi, Bisi-Adeleye (2013:6) usefully observed that:

> *The women's movement has been able to build consensus around key issues of importance to women, such as rights to livelihoods and economic empowerment, access to decision-making, reproductive rights and health, non-discrimination and the critical importance of peace. In addition, scholars, activists, community leaders, writers, thinkers, professionals, rural women and politicians who are part of a progressive women's movement have been able to create a body of knowledge, thought and activism on women's rights and gender equality.*

This essay contends that women movements and activism from grassroots level and up have introduced dynamism into women political emancipation and the enhancement of women political participation through networking, strategies including strike and protest, research and analysis, lobbying and institution building.

WOMEN POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN NIGERIA'S FOURTH REPUBLIC

Women involvement in public decision making processes in the evolving present fourth republic in Nigeria has been characterized by misfortune. While women have recorded robust improved participation in some areas, the story has been quite unpleasant in certain other areas. However, there is a marked significant difference from what used to obtain in the past as shown in the table below:

Table 1: **Women's Participation in the Political Process, 1979 and 1999**

Post	% in 1979	% in 1999
LGA Chairperson	2	1
State Governor	0	0
House of Reps	1	4
Senate	0	3
Fed. Minister	6	13

Source: Ishajobi (2012)

Instructively, women have particularly demanded the implementation of affirmative actions toward the integration of at least 35% of women in all elective positions in line with global democratic practice and in fulfillment of United Nations agenda for gender mainstreaming, women political empowerment and development as enshrined in Nigeria's National Gender Policy. It is useful to mention that globally, women representation has increased from 13% to 18% (Igbuzor, 2014). But it is worrisome to note that while the increase in Africa is Phenomena from 10% to 17%, the growth rate in Nigeria remains

stunted. The clamour for the attainment of the 35% affirmative action for women political integration has remained a far cry from what is obtainable in other continents particularly the African continent. Igbuzor (2014) attempted a comparative assessment thus:

> Burundi has 30% quota for women representation in the constitution while there is 50% local representation in South African Local Governments. African National Congress (ANC) has 30% women representation enshrined in the party's constitution. Nigeria has remained stagnated in development because it had excluded women's involvement in governance.

A Comparative study of election results from 1999 to 2011 reveals vividly that election positions still elude women despite huge investments in mobilization, advocacy, lobbying and the likes. The table below shows a significant milestones of difference between what has been attained in terms of elective positions vis-à-vis the demand for 35% affirmative action on women political participation.

Table 2: Women Elected to Public Offices in Nigeria 1999-2011.

	1999		2003		2007		2011	
Office	Seat Available	Women	Seat Available	Women	Seat Available	Women	Seat Available	Women
President	1	0		0		0		0
Senate	109	3(2.8%)	109	4(3.7%)	109	9(8.3%)	109	7(6.4%)
House of Representatives	360	7(1.9%)	360	21(5.8%)	360	27(7.5%)	360	25(6.9%)
Governor	36	0	36	0	36	0	36	0
State House Assembly(SHA)	900	24(2.4%)	900	40(3.9%)	900	57(5.8%)	900	68(6.9%)
SHACommittee Chairperson	829	18(2.2%)	881	32(3.6%)	887	52(5.9%)	887	NA
LGAChairperson	710	13(1.8%)	774	15(1.9%)	740	27(3.6%)	740	NA
Councilors	6368	67(1.1%)	6368	267(4.2%0	6368	235(3.7%)	6368	NA

Source: Ibrahim, J., and Salihu, A., (eds.) (2004)

However, it is impressive to observe that women public consciousness has improved significantly in the fourth republic. They have come to the realization that a 'closed mouth, is a closed destiny '. Women have put themselves forward in virtually every position to be contested for in the current political dispensation unlike the poor showing at other eras. Women public consciousness was particularly fascinating and impressive in the 2011 General elections as captured by the table below:

Table 3: Number of Female Contestants / Winners in the 2011 Elections

Types of election	No of female candidates	No of female winners
State House of Assembly	414	55
House of Representative	170	18
Senate	86	7
Deputy Governor	57	1
Governorship	13	0
Vice President	2	0
President	1	0
Total	643	81

Source: Ishajobi (2012)

It is sympathetic to observe that only few women emerged winners in the various positions they contested for both at the party primaries and in the general elections. Despite improved political consciousness of women and the various objectives of the National Gender Policy, it is disappointing that women still occupy less than eight percent of elective positions at all levels of governance in the country (Oke, 2013:67). The 'domino theory' of patriarchy and masculinity which predominantly characterize the Nigerian society, is still a dominant force that explains the entire polity in Nigeria. Men still exclusively dominate gender discourse in Nigeria's political landscape and this reflects the gap in the number of seats won in general elections from 1999 till date on the basis of gender as captured by the table below:

Table 4: Number of Seats Won in General Elections from 1999-2011 by Gender

	Total number of seats Available	Number won by men		Number won by women	
Year		Number	%	Number	%
1999	1533	1504	98.23	27	1.76
2003	1533	1464	95.62	67	4.38
2007	1533	1435	93.73	96	6.27
2011	1533	1452	94.8	81	5.2

Source: National Gender Data Bank (2011)

Be that as it may, women have benefitted prominently in selective or appointive positions since 1999 and in fact, in some instances, they have been compensated with 35% inclusion in all appointive positions. Women have occupied many sensitive appointive positions which have expectedly, improved their voices in public affairs. Prof. Dora Akunyili, formerly the Director General of National Agency for Foods, Drugs Administration and Control (NAFDAC) and later Minister of Information and Communications, Dr Mrs Kema Chikwe, former Minister of Aviation, Dr. Mrs Obi Ezekwezili, former Director-General of the Bureau of Public Procurement(BPP) and later Minister of Education, Dr Nzogi Okonjo Iweala,

former World Bank Director and now Minister of finance and the coordinating Minister of the economy, Mrs Serah Ochekpe, the Minister of water resources, Mrs Omobolaji Johnson, the current Minister of communications, Mrs Ama Pepple, former Minister of housing development, Hajia Mailafia, former Minister of environment, Princess Stella Oduah, former Minister of Aviation and prof. Viola Onwuliri of the foreign affairs ministry are some of the women who have held key positions under various administrations in the current fourth republic. Many also occupy the positions of Special Advisers and choice Ambassadorial postings.

CONCLUSION: TOWARD INSTITUTIONALIZED WOMEN POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN NIGERIA

Thus far, this essay has revealed that cultural/traditional practice, marriage institutions, religious injunctions and the left-over of colonial legacies have negatively impacted on the status of women and this has resulted in low political participation for women at all levels in Nigeria. The situation has also been worsened by the entrenched patriarchal structures in the Nigerian political landscape with its attendant marginalization of women in the public arena. The study observes instructively that steady progress towards women political emancipation and political participation has always been hampered by lack of political will on the part of government. To therefore consolidate on the gains achieved by women in the process of restoring a new political order devoid of marginalization and inequality, women must as a matter of reality improve their capacity in the areas of education and skill acquisition to be able to compete favourably at the same level with their male counterparts. The feminization of poverty can only be deconstructed if women acquire the requisite education and skills which give them access to economic resources. With improved self-esteem, they can challenge cultural biases and patriarchal structures that have always constituted obstacles on their way of political reckoning.

Having done this, government needs to encourage women by institutionalizing affirmative actions against women political marginalization and inequality. Government, through its policies should encourage political parties to entrench in their constitutions and manifestoes quota system which reserves certain percentage of elective positions for women at all levels of political structure. This should be accompanied by entrenching same in the constitution of the federal republic of Nigeria and be made justiceable if breached by concerned parties.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Oni Ebenezer Oluwole teaches in the Department of Political Science and International Relations, Crescent University Abeokuta, Ogun State Nigeria.