

# WOMEN AND POLITICS IN NIGERIA

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## Abstract

*Over the years, women participation in Nigeria politics has been appalling they were not recognized in the Nigeria politics. The men tend adhered strictly to the popular saying that the position of women ends in the kitchen or in household. Women were so neglected in the sense that they were often regarded as weak gender in decision making as well as implementation. The issue has been that women had never been given the opportunity to partake in politics in Nigeria. But things have changed, and this work intends to highlight the positivity of such a change, outline factors that had militated against women participation in politics in Nigeria.*

## Introduction

Since the emergence of politics in Nigeria women had never had their own share of the quota. This problem was traced back to the olden days, when our fathers preferred to train the boys instead of both sexes.

Our parents then were gender specific, and that culminated to the abuse and neglect of women till date. But that was then and for now, things are taking a new look, thanks to the increasing number of women in schools these days; little wonder Prof. Eyisi (2006) of the Department of English Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka once said "behind any successful man, there is a strong woman" that woman has come out to voice their minds by saying that women are the bedrock of all the achievements men folk have recorded over the years. Women cannot fold their arms and watch men roll over them like rags ready to be disposed off. People should now know that women with their procreation role as the mother of all nations deserve some respect. People should not argue that the weak nature of women cannot match men in politics or the modern labour sector to women to equate them with men is an over protection or a negative change in women status quo.

The wind of change is particularly explosive because women in Nigeria have resolved not to fold their hands and watch the men folks overrun them. They believe they have the golden tools such as tenderness, massive strength, moderating influence, endurance prudence and above all, exclusive partnership with their spouses and children as to enable them achieve their political objectives.

## Criticism against Women Participation in Nigerian Politics.

Chief Adams (2010) in his article "why I won't allow my wife to join politics in Nigeria" published in daily sun page 11, of Wednesday December 2010, said that the campaign for 35 percent of Nigeria women participation in politics, would be inimical for

Nigeria and her future. The OPC leader who said he would never allow his wife go into active politics, lamented the criminal tendencies of few Nigeria women in politics.

His words; òI will be the last person to encourage my wife to go into politics because I realize women are agitating that they should be given, more percentage in politics.ö The culture of the black race does not allow too many women to go into politics. However, the few that go into it should do so with integrity. He condemned the involvement of women in criminal activities and corruption in the country warning that such portends great danger for the country. The record is there, between six to seven women are being jailed. The more you encourage them to go into politics to seek power the more reduction in integrity we see in women.

- (1) That woman is not often critical in judgment.
- (2) Women are too harsh when in top position and uncompromising.
- (3) Most women are emotional and not too refined in diplomatic language.
- (4) That no matter how brilliant or skilled, consciously or unconsciously, that a woman depends on the advice or support of the spouse to perform in her office.

That no matter what a woman would often direct all her instincts, emerge and influence more on materials things. Some spiritual cultural inhibitions put certain mandate roles on women.

They are created as helpers to a man, and so must act on instructions and by permission, anything short of that is a taboo or unacceptable despite western education.

### **Argument in Favor of Nigerian Women Participation in Nigerian Politics**

According to Aderiye (2009)öWomen and politics he saidö in Nigeria today, the exemplary roles and relevance of women public administrators and quality governance have been clearly demonstrated.

Nigerian women should allow a place in our politics because they have led the country out of her pariah status once again. The likes of Mrs. Abigail Ukpabi who championed the constituent assembly in the outlawing of discriminating provisions to include protection from sex discrimination, the likes of Prof. Mrs. OkoujiIweala, Prof. Dora Akunyili (NAFDAC) Dr. Ngozi Ezekwesli (madam due process) have demonstrated the ability of women as catalyst for total change from the unacceptable. These women earlier mentioned are embodiment of probity, in own body polity. They worked as a team to remove Nigeria from her pariah status. Their God endowed wisdom has directed the course of economy, legislation and good governance of this country.

According to Matynia (1995)ö Women movement in global perspective, Amritsa, West view press, said òWomen are led by moral examples to preserve their countries entity and values.ö Women have proved their ability to lead with foresight to foresee and forestall inevitable problems that can arise now and in future. She foresees a situation where some country's president or vice president will be women in the near future. She can see God

making women the bearer of hope for many countries and families. She can see the hope of raising positive society in the negative world despite the wide gap between men and women in public offices.

Mr. Adebunmi (2004) "The realistic position of women in Nigeria politics," said "That the best in life comes in small packages. Rome was not built in a day and of course the journey of one million miles starts in a step. Women today in Africa and Nigeria in particular are grateful to God, the federal government, the state and local governments for president recognition of women folk especially the 7 in appointive positions."

### **Position of women in Nigerian politics:**

That women are politically oppressed by their male counterparts in Nigeria is not in doubt. In Nigeria politics, the issue has always been that a woman politician still has natural roles as a wife, mother, daughter and mother or daughter-in-law here in Nigeria.

However, in ancient times, Nigerian women had excelled in the field of politics and decision making. She is replete with outstanding women like Queen Amina of Zaria, The Omu of Onitsha, Madame Tinubu of Lagos, Chief Mrs. Funmilayo Kuti, Mrs Bolarinwa of Action group and the likes. These materials commanded vast resources and wielded political leadership. They probably did more than the men folk.

Osadahum (2006) "Realistic position of women in Nigeria politics" (Amure sport printers) stated that:

- (1) Equally qualified men and women are unequally evaluated when applying for jobs or position.
- (2) Women are often discriminated against by those making decision on hiring, promotion and salary (Rosen and Jardee 1974).
- (3) Women are under represented in professionally political and managerial positions in Nigeria though there were a little improvement between 2005 to date.
- (4) Glazies (1976) and Wallace (1978) observed that women populate corporations but they rarely run them.
- (5) A variety of field report and personal observations show that women are conspicuously absent, though there are few at the upper or managerial levels in industrial and governmental organizations especially in politics.
- (6) At family levels, men are to be the heads and controller of women and production.

Generally speaking all the above resulted into major gaps between reality and the universally acceptable women right appalling that the few female leaders often experience high dependence on men of authority that appointed them. They sometime face double marginalization from both the men and women themselves who see them as sacred, different or privileged: Therefore the position of women in politics in Nigeria is still inadequate.

### **Factors That Still Militate Against Women participating in Nigeria politics.**

The transformation of nations throughout history has in most cases been brought about by the type of leadership; male or female. Leadership is a serious determination of development in any society. The need to understand its role is crucial and of course devoid of feminist sentiments. It is a statement of fact that there are a lot of discriminations against women folk for reasons of beliefs, attitudes, norms, men's selfishness, or lack of respect for right of women. This has resulted to the wide gap between men and women in all spheres of life. The militating factors are as follows:

**(1) Home Challenges:**

It must be emphasized that no matter the career of a woman, her penury, the care of her home and children should be done with pride and joy. Women in politics are wives and mothers and in fulfilling these various roles, they are likely to be faced with the problems of balancing the interest in the home front with, that of their political life. In doing this, the consent of the spouse is a condition for the woman politician's success.

Naturally, a pregnant woman or a nursing mother may not be too effective in politics so also the aged, it must be emphasized too that sleeping away from home occasionally on political trips or passing the night or a night in place other than with one's husband or children could be very challenging especially for young mothers.

The truth of the matter is that men cherish the food and companionship of their wives. Therefore a negative suspicion or disagreement of the husband at any stage of a woman in politics could spell doom of that career or ambition however determined.

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**(2) Building a trust based home:**

Women politicians in Nigeria are expected to maintain public decorum as not to give her family bad names and to avoid gossips about her at all time. After wards politics is not synonymous with irresponsibility or flirting. More importantly, unnecessary outing must be avoided and the opinion of the husband must be honoured in the choice of political associates or god fathers.

**(3) The Nigerian chauvinistic tradition:**

It is sad to note that even in this 21<sup>st</sup> century, the Nigerian society still have strong belief in some negative traditions as:-

- (a) That it is an abomination for women to claim equality with men, especially in a decision making programme such as politics or wanting to head a man under any circumstance. It's a taboo.
- (b) Women cannot own or inherit properties such as land, even though 80% of Nigerians subsistent farming is done by the women; it is no exaggeration to claim that Nigeria has more women farmers than men.
- (c) A woman does not take a separate or opposing decision apart from her spouse's.
- (d) Traditionally, a male child (even the least born) is assured to be superior to his mother who is a female.
- (e) The idea of women in politics is a rude agenda in Nigeria and an abomination to most men. No wonder the naturally stiff opposition from even educated men politicians to women. It would take only God's intervention to change such men's attitude towards women's participation.

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**(4) Women Poor Economic Base (Poverty).**

It is true that over 90% of women live below the poverty line in Nigeria. The educated ones are not rich and the rich ones are uneducated or are not politically inclined. This disadvantage cannot allow the women to match Naira for Naira in Nigeria's monetized politics;

**(5) Mass illiteracy (women's low education):**

This is a major social disadvantage for women in politics in Nigeria and unfortunately too. Only few educated women are active in politics. This challenge has to be taken up by NGOS. This illiterate is a society misfit not only in politics, irrespective of active party participations.

However, the official introduction and recognition of the place and role of women in governance in Nigeria had, it is a credit to General. Babangidas Military Administration in 1987. This ensured the active participation of women in the process of governance. This was amidst various criticisms.

This military creation of first ladyship gradually gradated into Association of wives of presidents, Governors and chairpersons, they often come together to initiate other programmes in continuation of women Empowerment programmes such as:

- (a) Better life programme (BLP) for rural women.
- (b) Family support programme (FSP)
- (c) Child care trust fund
- (d) Various Association of market women, women of traditional chiefs, women local industrialists, women farmers Association now women in Agriculture, Association of women professional Lawyers, women journalists women politicians and the likes. These programmes timely responded to the United Nations Global call for women emancipation and integrations.

The concept of chair person is a design of civilian rule of women integration into governance at all level, which definitely has become a necessity to balance the shortage of women in key positions.

**Conclusion**

It is true that the idea of women in politics is a rude agenda in Nigeria and an abomination to most men. No wonder the naturally stiff opposition from even educated men politicians to women. The foregoing in essence has come to emphasize the need for a complete re-orientation of the entire social norms and practices in order to achieve greater development for the nation.

We must do a progressive and positive appraisal of our women folk especially in the new democratic dispensation that is fast unfolding in the country. Without this, Nigeria cannot attain the desired political progress that all the developed countries have attained. We must accept that women are active agents of political progress and development.

Thus we must do everything possible to help enhance our women's political leadership potentials, since the task of nation building is not gender exclusive.

**Recommendation**

Women need a co-operative effort to subdue all the prejudices of men not only in politics, but also in all spheres of human endeavor. Ironically, it is sad to listen to derogatory comments of some women on their fellow women folk even before men. And very disappointing too, the few women in position seldom feel the need to help other less privileged women.

The adverse effects of women not participating in politics of the Nation's economy, and the society which are immediate recipient of these anomalies cannot be underrated and so the following recommendations are being proffered:-

Women should be self confident, complement, and versed in electoral practices and procedures at all times. They should be current on key political parliamentary issues. They should be skilled in delivering positive campaign messages. Develop appropriate lobbying skills and improved public speaking skills, have flexible and unassuming traits, i.e listen more and talk less. Shun pride in action and dressings remain diligent and focused, refined and cautious.

Globally relevant most especially in the 21<sup>st</sup> century information and communication technologies. Above all an appropriate legislation is recommended for statutory establishment of the offices of first ladies/chairpersons at federal, state and local government levels. Reasonable financial votes should be attached to the so-established offices to cater for particularly women in politics, in addition to the ministry of women Affairs. Though these first ladies /Chairpersons have crucial role to play in orientating, mobilizing and conscientising the women folk, there is need to avoid contradiction or duplication of role between them and Ministry of women Affairs.

Their programmes must not be self seeking; it should be formulated on the basis of collective responsibility of achieving desired goals for women of all races.

Above all women should demonstrate convincingly that programmes being pursued by the first ladies and other women organizations are in the best interest of the women and men, rather than whimsical imposition of narrow ideas.

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