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Women Power and Powerlessness through Changing Scenes in Nigeria: Pre-Colonial - 2012

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Abstract

Although a lot of studies have been carried out on the activities of women in the Nigeria political sphere, there is the need to even do more as new data continue to emerge to supplement the existing ones. Applying the primary and secondary source materials, this article examined the levels of women involvement in the Nigeria government and politics since pre 1900 and found that the extent of their involvement, particularly, between 1960 and 1999, was very disheartening and unfruitfully low. This paper also brings to the fore the forces of insincerity on the part of the men, who remain the major stakeholders, and how these forces could be effectively tackled to ensure an increased level of politico-governmental empowerment of women in Nigeria. Significantly, it also underpinned that the several attempts by some stakeholders in the political terrain to assign politico-administrative responsibilities to women with a view to bringing them into the mainstream of political activities was largely unsuccessful. Although, admittedly, women like Sarah Jubril, Okonjo Iweala, Dora Akunyili, Obi Ezekwesili and so on, have made their marks, within their limited power and influence, by breaking into the centre of governmental affairs, their efforts have only warranted scant attention as they have not made much resounding impact in their respective spheres. The paper concluded that the insincerity of the main stakeholders, who had generally treated women with disdain in their empowerment programmes within the politico-economic environment, was responsible for ebb and flow that characterized the Nigerian woman's involvement in politico-governmental affairs.

Key Words: Empowerment, Government, Nigeria, Politics, Women

Theoretical Perspectives on the Study of Women

This discourse on women, particularly, Nigerian women participation in government/politics is examined from various theoretical angles. This is because previous methodologies, which were challenged in the 1980s and 1990s, have helped in rebutting some of the prejudicial notions about women. Although literature has expanded rapidly since the work of Simone de Beauvoir (1952) generated theoretical controversies between biological and cultural explanations of women's subordination, there is still no consensus on appropriate theory and methodology. The need for alternative theory and methodology has been more greatly felt by third world women.

The best known of the modern perspectives on the study of women is the structural functionalism theory, which was developed by a most distinguished sociologist, Talcott Parsons.¹ He looks at the family as a system on its own and submits that the social division of labour within the family is functional not only for itself, but most especially, for the type of occupational structure dominant in the society. The concern has been with the processes and functions within social systems of action, which must be performed if the systems are to survive. The processes and functions, which Parsons referred to as the functional imperatives of social systems, are adaptation, goal attainment, integration and tension management or pattern maintenance. The Parsonian perspective of the division of labour assigns primary responsibility for the adaptation and goal attainment functions of the family to the husband- father- the 'instrumental leader', whereas the integration within the family and the community and pattern maintenance functions is apportioned to the wife-mother- 'the expressive leader'.

In the Marxist thought, Marx and Engels predicted that the abolition of the system of capitalism would bring with it the elimination of the community of women springing from the system of prostitution both public and private.² It is important to note, as some feminists have come to realize, that Marx was not interested in women. He was primarily concerned with the role categories of proletariats and capitalists, and this fact is responsible for his failure to deal with gender-based forms.

Gender inequality remains a fundamental global issue. Women cannot claim to have equal access as the men to decision-making structures, processes and institutions that affect their lives. This is most apposite in a democratic environment where women are often called

upon to play vital roles in the struggle for 'freedom, change and democracy'³, though the proceeds from the battle are rarely shared equally. However, women movement developed significantly in most western countries in the late 1960s and early 1970s.⁴

Background to Women Participation in Politics in Nigeria: Pre-Colonial and Colonial Accounts

Turning towards the distant past, it is noticeable that exploits performed by women are a preponderant feature in Nigeria legends and historical traditions. In fact, women's exploits in the Nigerian socio-cultural and governmental milieu predates the colonial period. In Hausa land, women founded cities, led migrations and even conquered kingdoms. Songhai groups still remember the names of celebrated ancestress who governed them. In Katsina, Queen Amina became famous during the first half of the fifteenth century through her widespread conquests. She extended her influence as far as the Nupe, built many cities, received tributes from powerful chiefs, and is still held to have been responsible for introducing kolanut to the region.⁵

In many of the traditions concerning the founding of kingdoms, there is a constantly recurring theme with variations of a woman, the queen or daughter of a chief, who married a stranger to whom she handed over the insignia of power invested in her. There was the Queen of Daura, who married Bayajjida, the progenitor of the Hausa kings. The often told Hausa legend of origin relates that at an unspecified date in the remote past, one Bayajjida, who fled from Baghdad to Kanem-Bornu, married the daughter of the Mai.⁶

The Yoruba system of groups was partly due to the existence of big towns and its objectives are mutual aid, defense of common interests and the organization of markets. The Oyo associations are called '*Egbelyalode*', the '*Iyalode*' being the title of the leader of these associations, which were consulted by the political authorities. The '*Iyalode*' of Ibadan, for instance, was a member of the council of state down to 1914.⁷

Generally speaking, women in Africa had tended to form groups for the purpose of carrying out their various activities. Such groups, whose existence predated the colonial period, have become powerful organizations. It is important to note that the Igbo villages in south-eastern Nigeria had women's councils. In large Igbo towns, each district nominated its own spokes woman, which together formed the

council. Each council was presided over by an elected woman, not on account of her seniority or wealth, but because of her personality and experiences. The colonial Igbo women strength and cohesion can be measured by the widespread nature of the Aba protest movement for the assertion of their rights, which they comprehensively organized and articulated.

The Aba women war, which has also been identified as a tax revolt, actually began in December, 1929. Just when the British colonial government was beginning to jubilate and congratulate itself upon the success with which the introduction of direct taxation was accomplished in southern Nigeria, 'rioting of very serious nature broke out in Owerri and parts of Calabar provinces.'⁸ Following a rumour that the government was about to introduce a tax on women's property, the latter initiated a counter measure which was targeted at making the colonial government have a rethink. But the entire issue soon decline and degenerated into a riot, which initially broke out in Aba and then spread through the two provinces of Owerri and Calabar, mobilizing more than two million people, very few of whom were men.⁹

Government troops were sent in, and approximately fifty women were killed in the conflict. Perham had noted that the Aba women riot was 'a sad and unfortunate comment on the administration of the past, while the lessons they taught had largely governed subsequent policy.'¹⁰ But sadly, this women's struggle left in its wake only a little more than the 'memory and wounds of battle' while the riots, more or less, expanded women awareness on what they were capable of achieving collectively. It also went down in the history of Nigeria as the beginning of what women were capable of achieving whenever provoked.

During the 1930s and 1940s, colonial governments began to pay greater attention to African women when it became evident that even female group could constitute a potential force of resistance in the colonies, a fact which had not been seriously anticipated before that time. As a result of this realization, the colonial authorities were constrained to commission research at times and in places where it was observed or suspected that women could, in some special ways, constitute serious challenge(s) to colonial policies or envisaged changes.

In spite of this extra care taken by the colonial authority, in 1947/48, women in Egba land, under the leadership of Mrs. Olufunmilayo Ransome Kuti, militantly questioned the character of

governance again; world attention was once more drawn to the 'authoritarianism of the men on the spot' and the arbitrary nature of decision-making by the Sole Native Authority. Mrs. Kuti led women on a protest movement against the payment of tax in Egba land, and through uncompromising militancy and the evocation of cultural threats such as the baring of their bodies at the *Oba's* palace, they succeeded in laying the foundations for women's emancipation. This movement culminated in the exile of the then *Alake* of Egbaland, *Oba* Ladapo Ademola 11 to Osogbo.¹¹

She actually came into public prominence in 1947 when she was invited to join the National Council of Nigerian Citizens' (N.C.N.C.) delegation to London. She was, indeed, a first-class champion of women's right in Nigeria who rose to defend women against "alleged unfair taxation... and indiscriminate arrests."¹² These were issues of injustice and insensitivity, which were prevalent in the Nigerian socio-cultural environment where the British colonial government operated. It was, therefore, inevitable that the '*Beere*', (as she was popularly called), who had been exposed to the British culture and its demands as a result of her sojourn in Britain, recognized the double standard, which was being played out by the British colonial government. Her resultant reactions were, therefore, not to be wondered at; it epitomized the innate courage and strength in the African woman in general and *Beere's* Africanness in particular.

The Union, which she set up and led, successfully fought against a constituted predatory and parasitic government that was said to have outlived its usefulness in terms of service to the host community it was meant to serve. The Union was affiliated to the worldwide Women's International Democratic Federation with its headquarters in France.¹³ Its tentacles spread beyond south-western Nigeria and metamorphosed into the Federation of Nigerian Women Societies (FNWS) in 1953. Since it was political in character and content, it called for political participation and direct representation of women in all legislative houses.¹⁴

The anti-colonial struggle saw women protesting, strongly, against traditional rulers who were not conforming to the customary practices of the land, and against the colonial authorities who were found to be insensitive to the plight of the people they ruled over. Gambo Sawaba and Mrs. Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti were clear cases of a solo feminine powers who mobilized others to fight corruption and

unwarranted desecration of traditions held in awe. During British rule in Nigeria, the Nigerian women's search for relevance and actualization at both the local and international domains were largely successful. They were able to articulate and bring their issues to global attention, thus, attracting popular support and sympathy for their modest and justifiable demands.

As various groups in Africa began to articulate their challenges, they also concurrently organized a common front against colonialism, which was identified as the common threat to freedom. And as the struggle for national independence became more intensified, many of the political parties started recruiting women supporters. Thus, in the 1950s and 1960s, women's organizations and/or wings of political parties were proliferated in virtually every independent African state.

Women Participation in Nigerian Politics, 1960-1999

The establishment in Africa of the United Nations (UN) Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) provided another kind of region-wide focus on women's questions. The ECA sponsored a series of conferences and seminars, which attracted the participation of highly placed and highly trained African women. These women came together, primarily, to recommend ways of encouraging the participation of women in public life and nation building. It was widely assumed at the time that increased opportunities in education and training, formal employment, and the institution of legal reforms would be a panacea for women of the newly independent African states. By 1960, social changes and economic conditions helped to expand the role of women out of the home into the factory and office, and they began to demand equality.

The Nigeria First Republic ushered some women into the political corridor though their entry into the governmental terrain was not so much by merit, but premised on what their male counterparts regarded as a needed cosmetic arrangement. This period saw the emergence of educated women such as Mrs. Bernince Kerry, Wuraola Esan and Margaret Ekpo in the Senate who busied themselves in conformity with the cultural expectations of the country. It would be recalled that when Nigeria attained independence in 1960, no woman held any sensitive party position. Worse still, there was only one woman in the Nigeria 1st Republic senate which had thirty six (36) members. No woman was fortunate enough to be elected by any of the three hundred

and twelve (312) federal constituencies into the House of Representatives. There was no female in the federal cabinet,¹⁵ and this speaks volumes on the level of involvement of women in the Nigerian politico-governmental field of that period.

Within Europe and the United States, the growth of feminist consciousness and women's movement has combined with world focus on women's questions under the auspices of a changing UN (especially the world conferences on women, which held in 1975 in Mexico and in 1980 in Denmark. The declarations of the United Nations Decade for Women (1976-1985) produced an unprecedented interest by women of the western world in the study of African women. Within the past four decades, the international women's movement made great strides in lobbying states to criminalize violence against women.¹⁶ Also, the National Organization for Women (NOW), at a conference in Washington DC, promoted equal rights for women, passed legislation to prevent gender discrimination and campaigned to increase the number of women holding political office at all levels of government.¹⁷

These have had several important consequences for scholarship in the field; first, the internationalization of the debate on women has widened the scope and deepened the quality of research work on African women. Secondly, it has inspired useful critiques by European and American women scholars of the male bias in studying African women, which characterized the early work of western male scholars. Thirdly, it has helped to consolidate work on women's questions as a valid area of social enquiry.

Nigerian women could not remain in the dark indefinitely because, first, women education, which was largely backward in the past, brought them to more awareness of their rights and how best to serve their country with the knowledge acquired. Second was that majority of women began to discover that the quality of their existence was inevitably declining and degenerating. A combination of these factors brought women into a fuller awareness of a need to change, not only a system that was not meeting their expectations, but also failing to integrate them into the national system so that they could begin to play key roles in governmental affairs.

Unfortunately, General Obasanjo Constitution Drafting Committee of 1975 did not even give a passing glance to gender issues; not one of its 50 members was a woman. But during his transition programme, women flooded the 'women wing' of the political parties

that emerged.¹⁸ Significantly, one should note that the experiences of women in both the northern and southern-Nigeria were different. Whereas women from the South were enfranchised at independence in 1960, women in the North were not until 1979.¹⁹ Women's political awareness increased in the Nigeria 2nd Republic as a few more women emerged in the public domain. There were only three ministers in the Shagari government.²⁰ Chief Franca Afegbua was the only woman in the Senate, while Mrs. Egun Oyagbola, Chief (Mrs.) Janet Akinrinade and Dr. Simi Johnson were appointed Ministers.

However, poverty, the burden of most African women, deprived them of voting according to their conscience, but according to the political candidate who could offer more incentive. The politicians on their part kept the women sedated with the creation of 'Women's Wings' of their political parties. The created women wings were assigned no name, goal or function. Men's role in relation to the females' was highly hypocritical and manipulative at this critical stage of our development. It is important to note that membership of the women wing was of great importance to the men as it was a tool for subordinating them, and generally speaking, at this point, the minds of the prime stake holders in the Nigerian politico-governmental environment were not disposed towards bringing the women folks into the mainstream of governmental activities. Rather, the women were simply meant to serve aesthetic values.

Women in Nigeria (WIN) was formed in the early 1980s, a period regarded as the UN decade on women.²¹ It was a non political social group with its main focus on how women would not be perceived from the gender perspective but from their individual characteristics. WIN organized a political debate in 1987 to ascertain and promote the wishes of women in the country. They came out with various recommendations: reservation of 50% of positions for women in the executive and legislative areas, that the policies of the UN Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) be applied by Nigeria, that the International Women's Day be celebrated as proclaimed by the UN for women all over the world, and that women be integrated into decision making positions in Nigeria by allowing them equal opportunities with the men.²² etc.

Although the advent of civil rule in 1979 offered a fresh breadth of renewed hope for women, the Shagari government only gave three ministerial slots to women (one was actually not of cabinet rank) out of

a long list of forty-one (41). Indeed, only three females were elected throughout the country to the House of Representatives between 1979 and 1983, and within the top echelon of the federal bureaucracy, there was only one female Permanent Secretary out of a large number of twenty nine (29). And in 1983 when Shagari's landslide victory gave him a new tenure, no woman was privileged to make his cabinet, which had thirty five (35) men.²³

The regimes of Buhari/Idiagbon and Ibrahim Babangida sustained the age long discrimination against women as no woman was accommodated in their cabinets as they were completely excluded from any form of involvement. In fact, Buhari military government erased and reversed the few gains women had made in previous political involvements. However, Babangida, who set out on August 27th 1985 with an all male cabinet only had a rethink and allowed a few women towards the end of his tenure. As at 1990, out of forty-four (44) Federal Permanent Secretaries (then styled Directors General), there were five women, which though an improvement, was a far cry from the expectation of the womenfolk.²⁴

During the inauguration of the Political Bureau at Abuja on Monday, 13th January, 1986, General Ibrahim Babangida directed members of the Bureau to chart a new course, which would facilitate a new political arrangement and ensure the creation of a new social order for Nigeria. His administration probably later saw the need to remove women from the stereotyped image of housewives they were accustomed to, and placed them in a position of self-actualization.²⁵ 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 administrations under the military governors had at least one woman holding a portfolio in their executives. It would appear that Babangida regime empowered women, but a closer examination reveals disempowerment and personalization of power by him and his wife. Though he appointed two women as Deputy Governors in two states, Lagos and Kaduna, improvement galore was not experienced by women, 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 all a fluke.

It was also during the regime of Babangida that women had what seemed like the first real opportunity to break into the main stream

of politics/governance, but it was not real. Before then, they were not merely relegated to the background when it mattered most, and were largely regarded as second class citizens. It is also believed in some quarters that the problems encountered by the womenfolk were largely self-inflicted. It is often said that they are the architect of their own problems when it comes to the issues of marginalization and gender equity, though some women in Nigeria would not agree with this position.²⁶

Women like the former Minister of Industry in 1999, Chief Mrs. Onikepo Akande, would not subscribe to this stand point. Maryam initiated the first ever consciousness arousing programme towards the plights of women- Better Life for Rural Women, which was designed, among others, to stimulate an improved standard of life, bring women closer for a better understanding and resolution of their problems through collective action, raise the consciousness of women about socio-economic and political responsibilities etc. The centre at Abuja was christened after her- Maryam Babangida Centre for Women Development. Even while IBB was still in office, many people began to refer cynically to her programme as 'Better Life for Better Women', suggesting that the centre only served the interests of the affluent in the Nigerian society of her time. But no sooner had she left office when her successor embarked on the destruction of her legacies and initiated another programme, which some people believed was, designed to make a mockery of her, all because of petty jealousy and show-off, which are hallmarks of women. If women are not their own enemies, why did they not take full advantage of, and build on the modicum of success and the part cleared by Mrs. Maryam Babangida when she was the first lady?

The Abacha regime, which came on stream on the 17th of November, 1993, treated women much worse as it only appointed one woman, Chief Bola Kuforiji-Olubi, as the Commerce and Industry minister in the thirty six (36) member cabinet it constituted. On 20th March, 1995 when the late General Sanni Abacha reconstituted his cabinet, only three women made the list, and the three of them were junior ministers in Education, Federal Capital Territory (FCT) and Foreign Affairs. At the state level, the picture was less encouraging; no woman ever held the portfolio of Chief Executive whether during the long years of military rule in the country or during the years that the civilians have been on the saddle. All the women who aspired to rule

their states were, almost always, muzzled out by the men. On her part, Mrs. Maryam Abacha only followed the footsteps of her predecessor, consolidated her own power and wiped out the footsteps of Maryam Babangida. The two Maryams fundamentally usurped the voices of the women and personalized state power for their own interests.²⁷

The elections of Alhaja Sinatu Ojikutu and Senator Kofoworola Bucknor Akerele as Deputy Governors of Lagos State were the best that the women achieved at the state level at that time. Unfortunately, Mrs. Kofoworola Akerele Bucknor ended up resigning from her position as Deputy Governor of Lagos State amidst defiance of all known rules of decency, decorum and democracy, and in the opinion of some people, it was "good riddance to bad rubbish."²⁸ Her decision to align with the politicians most closely associated with the Abacha's era atrocities could not have been accidental. She was perceived as a military apologist, a fact that many attributed to her marriage to one of Abacha's associates. All her political life, she dined with the reactionary and military, while acting as spy within the rank of the progressive camps. Those who knew her closely felt that she deserved to be pitied not condemned²⁹ when her general sensitivity to the plight of fellow human beings was placed on scale. She also really undermined democracy in Lagos State through her unproved war on cabinet colleagues and unconstitutional battle for supremacy with her boss-*Asiwaju* Bola Ahmed Tinubu, the then Governor of Lagos State. It did not take very long before she lost all her electoral values as it soon became apparent that there was really no basis for her claim of gender bias against the Governor. She quarrelled with almost all her colleagues.³⁰ The long years of military rule punctured women's quest for political equity in the distribution of political offices. This, in effect, is saying that between 1966 and 1979, no woman occupied any position in the legislative bodies of the succeeding regimes, nor were any of them appointed to the executive body at the centre, from where they could have initiated or championed changes in their status. A handful of women like Professor (Mrs.) Bolanle Awe, who headed the National Council for Women Affairs, continued to function by giving appropriate recommendations on women matters.

The Power and Powerlessness of the Nigerian Women, 1999 - 2012

Evidences abound in Nigeria of women in both public and private sectors who have performed creditably well in areas previously

dominated by men, areas such as engineering, banking, politics etc. However, their contributions have been minimal as a result of hindrances, social obstacles and cultural inhibition. Some of these issues derived from archaic traditional practices and limitation to female rights and privileges in the various ethnic societies. Some can even be associated with legal limitations enshrined in various statutes, while some are imposed by various religious belief systems. Limited access to educational opportunities as well as discriminatory practices in conditions and terms of employment in both public and private sectors were the order. All these have had restrictive impact on the roles and contributions of women in our national development.³¹

However, the position of women took a turn for the better with the inception of the 1999 democratic transition of President Obasanjo, who nominated as many as seven women for cabinet positions, which was unprecedented! Before this time, the political status of women in the Nigerian political landscape had largely been weighed down by the domineering dictates of the men folks. The issue of political emancipation of women is as old as the history of political activities in the country itself. Since the formation of the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP) in 1923 up to the 9th of June, 1998 Abdulsalami Abubakar³² midwifed transition programme, the political status of women in the Nigerian government and politics has been a recurrent issue. However, despite protestations by the women folks, the political arena and public office had continuously been dominated by the men as their exclusive reserve, with little 'concessions' only granted now and then.³³

Obasanjo in his 'inaugural speeches'³⁴ on the 29th of May, 1999, vividly captured the pitiable conditions that existed before the return of democracy in Nigeria. He recognized the need to place the right individuals in positions and aligned with ensuring that his government was women friendly. Consequently, the aviation ministry where Dr. Kema Chikwe became the minister recorded monumental progress and transformation. The Murtala Muhammad Airport, Lagos, was refurbished and the airport became travelers-friendly as commendations poured in from within and outside the country³⁵ such that women really began to come up in the areas of politico-governmental involvement. But Chikwe later alleged that that a prominent Nigerian male frustrated every effort by some foreign companies to turn around the airways.³⁶

Dr. Ngozi Okonjo Iweala, former Minister of Finance under Obasanjo, took the nation's economy out of the doldrums as she applied her wealth of experience to ensure that the World Bank wrote off Nigeria's debt, thus, extricating generations of unborn Nigerians from the shackles of indebtedness. The fear at the initial stage, though, was on how the 2003 budget³⁷ was to be financed as expected revenue was much lower than expenditure. She also introduced the E-payment into government financial transactions and tackled the hydra-headed pension issue in the country. She was invited and she joined President Goodluck Jonathan government as Minister of Finance for the second time. Obi Ezekwezi, on her part, worked as the Director General, the Bureau for Public Procurement (BPP), and she brought a measure of sanity into the process of awarding and executing contracts, which later earned her the position of Minister of Education.

Dora Akunyili, functioned as the Minister for Information/Communication and impacted on the Nigeria communication industry. Despite many failed attempts, she successfully found a private suitor for the Nigerian Telecommunications Limited (NITEL) in the name of Globacom,³⁸ and other GSM networks. She prevented the Executive Chairman of the National Communication Commission, (NCC) Dr. Ernest Ndukwe, from supervising the sale of a radio frequency, even though the latter had earlier successfully supervised the auction of GSM licenses. This particular sale, however, generated a lot of furore because Akunyili and her supporters believed that the NCC did not follow the due process, and the sale advertisement did not follow transparent manner. Indeed, she imposed her political stature on Ndukwe and was able to prevent the sale.³⁹ This is a practical demonstration of what the women folks are capable of doing whenever/wherever they enjoyed the backing of the powerful men in the Nigerian setting.

No doubt, Dora Akunyili, the former Director of the National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control, (NAFDAC) who earlier bestrode the organization like a colossus, was a very strong and courageous woman who worked relentlessly to ensure the enthronement of Goodluck Jonathan as president after the demise of Musa Yar-Adua in office. She, indeed, represented the women folk very well while in office. Interestingly, as early as June 2009, speculations were rife that she was interested in Peter Obi's job,⁴⁰ and she went on to contest but lost the Anambra State senatorial seat in

2011 to Chris Ngige. No doubt, the women folk need more of such daring females in governance. She even tried to transform the character⁴¹ of Nigerians and rebrand⁴² the country by cutting a better image for her globally.

But not even another woman, apart from Sarah Jubril, has aspired to occupy Aso Rock Presidential Villa since 1999. For several years, she contested at the primary level and was not elected. She only got one vote in the primary which was held early in 2011. As at 2011, Nigeria was yet to have a woman governor and women had only succeeded at the deputy governorship level as Mrs. Funmilayo Olayinka also emerged in Ekiti State in the 2011 polls. The best the women were able to secure was the positions of speaker, ministers, chairman, and the likes. The proportions of women, who have succeeded even at those positions, were insignificant when compared with the men.

While Chief Mrs. Titilayo Ajanaku was the Special Adviser, Ministry of Women Affairs between 1999 and 2003,⁴³ Mrs. Dupe Adelaja was the solid mineral minister in year 2002 while then President Olusegun Obasanjo was at the helm of affairs in Nigeria. The department, which she presided over, organised in conjunction with some private companies, Nigeria's mineral event in London and her goal was to create awareness about the quality and abundance of solid minerals in the country.⁴⁴

The Minister for Women Affairs and Social Development, Mrs. Salamotu Sulaimon, visited Abia State and advocated the thirty percent participation figure for women in all tiers of government. The Governor of the State, Theodore Orji, also itemized strategies adopted by his administration to ensure gender balance in government. Apart from contributing to the well being of the women in the State, doubts were expressed on how realistic the 'thirty percent affirmative action' was. This action was proposed in favour of women participation in both elective and appointive positions as women then occupied about ten (10%) percent of decision-making positions in the country.

In Anambra, it was the State Commissioner for special duties, Dr. (Mrs) Ngozi Okoye's desire to positively affect lives that informed her desire to come into the political terrain. She was a Special Adviser to the Governor on special projects. The Governors faith in her was not misplaced; she worked diligently until the end of her tenure and her integrity remained intact. Although during this period, some politicians

doubted her competence and wondered why she was made a Commissioner in the first place. The Governor, on the other hand, after observing her effectiveness and activities, assigned to her a higher responsibility- the Information and Culture portfolio.⁴⁵

It is important to note that during this period, out of a hundred and nine (109) senate members in the National Assembly, only six (6) were women, and of the three hundred and sixty (360) House of Representatives members, only twenty-five (25) were women. Again, out of the forty one (41) cabinet ministers, only eight (8) were women, and out of the one thousand and two (1002) State House of Assembly members nationwide, only fifty four (54) were women. Yet, of the seven hundred and seventy four (774) Local Government Chairmen, fewer than a hundred (100) were women.⁴⁶

Senator Florence Ita-Giwa had served in the legislative house before she became a part of the executive arm of government. She also held the Chairmanship position in the new Bakassi Resettlement Committee after she had served as Special Adviser to former President Obasanjo on National Assembly matters.⁴⁷ Senator Eme UfotEkaete, on her part, functioned in the upper house. Her first bill to the National Assembly was a controversial one as it touched on indecent dressing by the youths.⁴⁸ Abike Dabiri-Erewa, along with others, worked relentlessly in order to see the Freedom of Information Bill (FoIB) through in the House of Representatives, and they succeeded!

It was in this same lower legislative house still that Patricia Olubunmi Etteh started as the Deputy Chief Whip of the House and rose to become the Speaker. She was highly in favour of women participation in politics/government and was fully in support of the thirty percent 'affirmative action' of women participation in politics.⁴⁹ But the experience of the House under her leadership left a sour taste in the mouth, while her 'misconduct' was even considered by some as a minus for the ambition of Hon. Mulikat Adeola-Akande of the PDP in the House of Representatives. She aspired to become the Speaker in 2011.

The tenure of Etteh came to an unpleasant end because she was alleged to have been involved in corruption and crime related offences in the House of Representatives, while she was the Speaker.⁵⁰ However, Adeola-Akande was optimistic and beleived that the issue of gender would not arise because she had the capability and

leadership quality that could withstand the rigor and demands required of the House of Representatives Speaker. She also held that transparency would be the key factor to smooth leadership in the House of Representatives, whether male or female. The question may even be asked: what financial crimes had the women folks committed in the lower House that their male counterpart had not been involved in on a higher dimension, especially when we consider the over 40 billion naira loan charge against the lower house leadership?⁵¹

At the judicial level, Obasanjo saw the need to tackle corruption. He, therefore, placed NuhuRibadu in charge of Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC). Ribadu performed creditably well as Nigerians then began to commit financial crimes with trepidation. But unfortunately, with the coming of Mrs. Farida Wazari, the activities of the anti-graft commission went into a lull and people began to insinuate that she was imposed by the agents of graft to cover up their tracks and do nothing. Even the U.S. Secretary of State, Mrs. Hilary Clinton stated that the Commission, which Wazari led, was not a vigorous one.⁵²

In fact, across the federation, some women were elected as councilors, chief executive of local councils, state assembly legislators and federal legislators. Conversely, however, many of the states that appointed Commissioners followed the established practice of naming just one or two from among the women folk. In Kogi, Akwa Ibom and Benue State, the elected Governors broke new ground in their states' history. For instance, Alhaji Abu-Bakra Abu, Kogi State Governor, announced the appointment of Mrs. Justine Abanida.⁵³

Although Nigerian women have been identified as high performers, the question may still be asked: what has actually been responsible for their low representation in governance and politics? Some people have suggested that it may be necessary for women to put up a more assertive and more aggressive stance in order to occupy politico-administrative positions rather than waiting for the males to drop crumbs under the table for them. Rather than waiting for the women to wear the toga of confrontation, Abia State government carried women along in her political appointments and other programmes,⁵⁴ realizing that the nation had not done too well in the area of women involvement in governance.

In fact, the Nigerian women have always had difficulties in holding their own against men in political contests, considering

cultural, traditional and financial factors as Akerele Bucknor admitted that she had not the kind of money that former Governor Tinubu could throw around in the political arena. It appears the men have greater access to the resources required in order to make meaningful impact in the political terrain, and this perhaps explains why political power is still controlled and distributed by the Nigerian men folk who can better articulate the male vision of the world in the concept of governance/rulership.

Women were notoriously under-represented, occupying only 17.1 percent of parliamentary seat worldwide in 2007,⁵⁵ a period when opportunities opened to Nigerian women to participate in politics was still low. Unfortunately, women numerical strength had not impacted positively on the political life and decision-making structure of the nation due to the unfavorable political environment characterized by violence and chaos. But despite the gloomy picture painted above, Mrs. Salamotu Sulaimon held that the progressive agitation for thirty percent (30%) women participation in political position was a task that must be realized in the country,⁵⁶ though we soon began to hear them sing a new song by way of reduction to twenty five percent (25%) women representation instead of thirty.

Women involvement in politics and even their participation in the transition period could also be seen from the fact that they began to come in their numbers to contest for both local and state elections. Also, in the course of campaigning, they went out in large number to canvas for votes for candidates of their choice. However, despite these improvements, a lot still need to be done, especially within the constitution and other institutional obstacles to equality between the sexes. Indeed, a major deterrence to women involvement in politics in Nigeria was the re-emphasized 'do or die' syndrome, and women are, no doubt, unfit for such 'war'. The Nigerian society condoned violence to enforce inequality between men and women, preferring women to conform to expectations of child bearing/rearing and household work. We cannot pretend not to know that violence and the threat of violence constrain the hope and choices of women.⁵⁷ They are capable of sapping women's energy, compromising their physical and mental health, thereby eroding their self-esteem.

Some have also raised religious issues as standing against women relevance and leadership in Muslim dominated environments, while sexual factors, which allows women only the roles of

mother/wife, sees them as the weaker sex who cannot match the men folks in competing for political roles. And questions were asked: How would Sarah Jubril have floored former Vice President Atiku Abubakar or President Goodluck Jonathan to secure the PDP ticket in the PDP primaries? How would Dora Akunyile have dusted Chris Ngige in Anambra State even if the elections were conducted ten times?⁵⁸

The consolation for the women was that part of the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) was intended to promote gender equality and women empowerment. There was, indeed, the need for gender mainstreaming and budgeting in our policies and programmes. It was hoped that the eggheads among the stock holders in Nigeria would honestly come together and fashion out women-friendly policies in order to achieve, at least, the thirty percent (30%) women involvement in the politico-governmental playing field. At least, that would be a good starting point towards achieving a level playing field for both genders in future, considering that the universal declaration of Human Right adopted by the General Assembly on the 10th of December, 1948⁵⁹ was unequivocal on the elimination of discrimination against women. Indeed, Human Right should be for all and not an exclusive right of certain minority group in power.

Conclusion

The important issue in the Nigerian women involvement in politico-governmental activities, particularly since 1999, is that their influence and power were not restricted to women affairs; they ventured into the hitherto male dominated terrains. They functioned in the legislative, executive and the judicial fronts to the extent that the men folk allowed them. Indeed, men have been responsible for both the limitations and advancements that women have encountered and made respectively in the political terrain in the last few decades. This is because the politico-governmental terrain was not 'configured' by the men- the major stock-holders- to be women-friendly. This is why major changes have been slow in coming regarding their roles in government.

In fact, women continued to occupy a very small niche in the political arena and exercised less power than men, though we began to see more women in the limelight from 1999. This is saying that although they are no longer spectators in the political/power-wielding arena in Nigeria, and the number of women in the socio-political and

economic positions in the country is getting higher, the authority they wielded and positions occupied derived from the recognition of the male leaders who appointed them and to whom they answered. The point is that in the Nigerian government and gender ideology, men remained the lead actors in the theater of politics.

The policy option, when one considers the rights and privileges of women in public life, which can necessarily lift women from the lowly state of involvement in government/politics should include, among others, the removal of laws discriminatory to women, identification and expunging of various discriminatory policies in both the labour codes and provisions in employment policies that tends to disfavour women, adequate representation of women in exalted public offices and the formulation of a new national policy for women in Nigeria. Moreover, female legislators should encourage the promotion and protection of the rights and privileges of women in public life by sponsoring legislative reforms and initiatives that would give women full and equal participation in national development.

Finally, activism can be a potent force for changing the nation social institutions that perpetuate violence and inequality against women. There is always the need to mobilize women by organizing seminars, workshops, conferences, symposia etc on the necessity of sensitization on the protection of their rights. The female legislators should ensure the implementation of the articles of the international convention of women. The challenge before Nigeria in 2012 was to create a conducive environment for women empowerment, enforcement of justice and equity on issues and matters relating to women, and defining their contributions and roles in national development.⁶⁰

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6. J.F.Ade Ajayi & Ian Espie, (1965). *A Thousand Years of West African History*, Ibadan University Press & Nelson, pp. 91- and 96.
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9. Leith-Ross: S. (1939), *African Women: A Study of the Ibo of Nigeria* (Faber), pp 23-39. Apparently, discontent with colonial rule led to this mass women protest.
10. Perham, M. (1960). *Lugard: The Years of Authority, 1889-1945*. London: Collins, p. 206.
11. 22nd Lisabi Day Celebration: Heroism and Youth Development, 3rd - 9th March, 2008. She was of Egba extraction in south-western Nigeria and was born around 1900. See also Democracy in Nigeria: Continuing Dialogue(s) for Nation-Building, (2000) *International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance*, (IDLEA), p. 110.
12. *University Herald*. December (1950). Vol. III, No. 3, p. 17.
13. Funmilayo was the first girl to be enrolled in Abeokuta Grammar School, hence the popular appellation 'Beere'. She was a great woman activist of international repute, an icon in woman empowerment and a quintessence for all women in education, socio-economic and political struggle in colonial Nigeria. She was, indeed, a heroine in the history of nation building in Nigeria. She died on the 13th of April, 1978 at age 78 following injuries she sustained at 'Kalakuta Republic' as a result of the invasion of the Unknown Soldiers'. See 22nd Lisabi Day Celebration: Heroism and Youth Development, 3rd - 9th

- March, 2008. See also University Herald. December 1950. Vol. III No. 3, p. 17. She was also the first woman to drive a car in Nigeria.
14. Democracy in Nigeria: Continuing Dialogue(s) for Nation-Building, (2000) *International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance*, (IDLEA), p. 110.
 15. *Nigerian Tribune*, August 1999, Women Grab Bigger Public Office Pie, but... Tunde Babalola,
 16. Duncan Green, (2008), *From Poverty to Power: How Active Citizens and Effective States can Change the World*. Oxfam International. P. 275. The 1979 Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discriminations Against Women (CEDAW) was expected to hold state accountable. Rape during conflict is now recognized as a war crime, and can, in principle, lead to prosecution as such. Though significant, these laws seldom protect women.
 17. Microsoft Encarta Premium, (2009), Contemporary Women movement began in the late 1960s to question the traditional role of women in the society. Women are no longer expected to stay at home and depend on men to provide their financial support.
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 21. Democracy in Nigeria: Continuing Dialogue(s) for Nation-Building, (2000) *International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance*, (IDLEA), p. 115.
 22. Leith-Ross.S. (1939). *African Women: A Study of the Ibo of Nigeria* (Faber). Pp. 12- 30.
 23. *Nigerian Tribune*, August 1999, Tunde Babalola, Women Grab Bigger Public Office Pie, but...
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- which was called 'Better life for Rural Women,' was soon codenamed and changed to 'Better life for Better Women' as it soon began to serve more the interests of the urban dwellers than those of the rural people it was originally intended to cater for.
25. Among agencies set up during the regime of Ibrahim Babangida was the National Commission for Women, the National Commission for Mass Literacy and non-formal education. This regime also openly identified with the political aspirations of Nigerian women and even encouraged them to run for political offices. Among the civilian deputy governors appointed in 1990 were two women. But all these were soon found to be just the façade intended to win the heart of the women folks.
 26. *Nigerian Tribune*, August 1999, Why Nigerian Women are not winning.
 27. Democracy in Nigeria: Continuing Dialogue(s) for Nation-Building, (2000) *International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance*, (IDLEA), p. 114.
 28. *Sunday Tribune*. 7th July, 2002. Of Tantrum and Treachery. Bensen Akintola. P. 5. Lagosians finally heaved a sigh of relief after her overdue exit from governance and politics. Apparently, her political career was filled with inconsistency, misrepresentation and outright treachery.
 29. *Sunday Tribune*, 7th July, 2002. Of Tantrum and Treachery. Bensen Akintola. P. 5.
 30. *Sunday Tribune*, 7th July, 2002. Of Tantrum and Treachery. Bensen Akintola. P. 5. Her ascendancy into the office of the Deputy Governor was against stiff opposition while the Governor and the Afenifere elders stood their ground that she would be their choice for deputy. It was a choice based on sentiment, magnanimity and large heartedness. It did not take very long before she betrayed the trust and confidence reposed on her. Senator K.A. Bucknor dropped her position as the Deputy Governor so that she could contest the governorship election of 2003. After about three years of bickering, rancour, and bad blood between her and former Governor Tinubu, she stunned the whole world with the withdrawal of her membership from Afenifera, the pan-yoruba socio-cultural association.

31. *Nigerian Tribune*, Thursday, 17th June 1999. The Rights and Privileges of Women in Public Life: the Cultural Perspectives, V.R. Agofe, p. 27.
32. OSGF Bulletin, an In-House Publication of the office of the Secretary to the Government of the Federation: Nigeria's Independence Anniversary, Vol. 1 No. 16, p. 20.
33. *Nigerian Tribune*, August 1999, Women Grab Bigger Public Office Pie, but... Tunde Babalola. One could easily recall the efforts of Lady Oyinkon Abayomi, Mrs. Funmi Ransome Kuti, Chief Elizabeth Adegoke, Mrs. Wuraola Esan, Alhaja Humoani Alaga, Mrs. Margaret Ekpo, Janet Mokelu, Gambo Sawaba and others. As much as they tried, stemming the tides of intimidating 'maleocracy' was an herculean task.
34. *Nigerian Tribune*, Wednesday, 18th September, 2002, Obasanjo Administration: Vision, Mission and Igbo Interests. Kema Chikwe. P. 15.
35. Kano, Lagos, Abuja, Port Harcourt airports were upgraded to category 11 while Lagos and Abuja had their terminal approach system reactivated. Through these fresh breaths of improved structures, the country's image was regenerated abroad.
36. *Sunday Punch*, August 14th 2011, World Bank indicted el-Rufai, ex BPE Boss. P. 6.
37. *Saturday Tribune*, 21st September, 2003. Is Nigeria broke? P. 11. See also *Daily Times*, October 27th 2003. Negotiating Nigeria's Debt with Creditors. Through intense negotiations, she was able to "buy back" Nigeria debt from Paris Club and other creditors, and as a testimony to her competence in economic and financial matters, she was Vice-Chairman, World Bank. She became the Minister of Finance under President Jonathan's administration.
38. *Nigerian Tribune*, 7th October 2009. Nitel's Sale and Place of National Interest.
39. *Sunday Punch*, June 21, 2009. Akunyili\Ndukwe: The Sale of a Radio Frequency.
40. *Punch*, June 11th 2009. Is Mrs. Dora going for Obi's job? P. 37. As early as 2009, Akunyili's poster had begun to appear on the streets of Abuja. Her aspiration to govern Anambra State was annulled, not because she was incompetent but because the

- incumbent was far too entrenched to be upstaged. She ended up in the senate.
41. *Nigerian Tribune*, Wednesday 4th March, 2009, Memo to Akunyili on Restoring a Truly Nigerian Character. Femi Okurounmu, p. 11.
 42. *Nigerian Tribune*, 16th March, 2009, Re-branding Nigeria: FG Unveils Logo Tomorrow, p. 6.
 43. *Abeokuta: 175 years of Unity and Excellence plus Who is Who*. Sky Production, Ibadan & Gbemi Sodipo Press Ltd., Abeokuta. P. 140.
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 46. *Nigerian Tribune*, Tuesday 6th October 2009. Affirmative Action; Balancing Gender in Abia Government. Bola Azeez. P. 24.
 47. *Punch*. Tuesday, June 2nd 2009. Interview with Madaga Affe.
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 49. *Nigerian Tribune*, 3rd March, 2004. Fallout from Southwest PDP Zonal meeting, Jackson Udom and Sam Nnwaoko. P. 24 & 25.
 50. *Nigerian Tribune*, 30th May 2011, p. 43. Why I want to be Speaker- Mulikat Akande-Adeola. P. 43. About six hundred and twenty eight (628) million naira worth of utility was mishandled. But this amount is insignificant when compared to forty (40) billions of naira, which Dimeji Bankole was alleged to have mismanaged in the lower house.
 51. *The Punch*, Monday, June 13th, 2011, Bankole, Nafada may face N40 billion loan charge. House leaders took other multi-billion naira loans- EFCC. Pp. 1 & 2.
 52. *The Punch*, August 13th 2009. EFCC performed poorly in the last one year - Clinton. See also *The Punch*, June 1st 2009. Anti-graft War: Committee for Defense of Human Right (CDHR) Unimpressed by Wazari. Although Wazari led the EFCC team and police to Lagos in order to ensure that the bank debtors paid up, she did not escape Clinton hammer. The sacking of five of the nation's commercial banks by the CBN provided the agency

an opportunity to worm itself back into the hearts of Nigerians. And it appeared the Commission was coming up again when Dimeji Bankole, the former Speaker, House of Representatives, was alleged to have committed monumental criminal atrocities in the lower House and had to contend with the EFCC under Waziri. The nation waited vainly for the Commission to rise up fully from its 'sleepless slumber'.

53. *Nigerian Tribune*, August 1999, Women Grab Bigger Public Office Pie, but... Tunde Babalola
54. Abia State operated a gender sensitive administration where the Governor ensured the appointment of women into sensitive positions in government. They have more women judges and magistrate than men in Abia.
55. Duncan Green, (2008), *From Poverty to Power: How Active Citizens and Effective States can Change the World*. Oxfam International. P. 83.
56. *Nigerian Tribune*, Tuesday 6th October 2009. Affirmative Action; Balancing Gender in Abia Government. Bola Azeez. P.24. Interestingly, President Jonathan acceded to the 35% women participation in politics and governance.
57. Duncan Green, (2008), *From Poverty to Power: How Active Citizens and Effective States can Change the World*. Oxfam International, p. 274.
58. Mr. Rauf 'Aregbesola' asserted that if ten Dora Akunyilis had contested against Ngige for the Anambra State governorship position, the latter would still have come top. He added that the women feminine nature would always impede them from performing serious political/governmental roles in Nigeria. He noted that it would take the intervention of God for Jubril Sarah²⁰ (raised to power twenty) to defeat the likes of Atiku, Obasanjo, Jonathan etc at the polls.
59. *Sunday Herald*, December 1989, Human Right should be for all.
60. *Nigerian Tribune*, 17th June, 1999. V.R. Agofe. The Rights and Privileges of Women in Public Life: The Cultural Perspectives, p. 27.