

COUNSELLING FOR 21ST CENTURY POLITICAL CHANGES IN ACHIEVING NIGERIA’S VISION 20:2020

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Abstract

Comparatively, the rate at which men participate in politics is incredibly higher than their female counterparts. Though there has been a progressive increase in the trend of women participation in politics, it has been more in the areas of appointments and not elections. The participation is considered very low considering the international standard of 30% benchmark. The major thrust of this paper is to bring into focus the existing level of political participation of Nigeria women. The place of women in the different political dispensations was highlighted. Thereafter, counselling for political change in attitudes and pre-dispositions were made towards achieving better participation of women in politics to achieve the Nation’s vision 20:2020.

Keywords: Female, politics, underrepresentation

Introduction

Politics is a process by which groups of people make collective decision. The term is generally applied to the art of running governmental or state affairs. The essence of political participation in any society, either civilized or primitive is to seek control of power, acquisition of power and dispensing power to organise society, harness and distribute resources to influence decision making in line with organised or individual interests (Arowolo & Abe, 2003).

Women therefore also seek to influence the dispensation of power in line with their articulated interest as a fundamental motive of political participation. According to Arowolo & Aluko (2010), women, in their gradual consciousness of state of mind also, in recent times, increasingly seek power equation and distribution and redistribution of resources in their favour.

Cursory observations reveal that women in Nigeria politics are largely noticeable at the level of campaign mobilisation, voting and latent support while their presence fizzles out at the level of real political decision making. Opinions seem to be divided on whether the role of women is predominately in the home fronts or women can also engage in other socio-economic and political activities like their male counterparts.

According to McDonald (1998) intelligence is not sex linked i.e. women are equally as intelligent as men. It seems therefore that the absence or under-representation of women in the world of politics may not be due to inadequate intelligence to participate but to other cultural and environmentally imposed obstacles.

Women and the Political History of Nigeria

The political history of Nigeria presents itself in three parts: the Pre-colonial, Colonial as well as Post-Colonial dispensations.

Women and the Pre-colonial Politics

The history of the participation and contribution of Nigeria women to political development dates back to the Pre-colonial period. Culturally, societal roles were defined and roles ascribed to women were connected to their status as wives and mothers. Though they were allowed to play the so called subordinate roles, women were able to make unvaluable contributions to societal development politically. They have individually and severally played dynamic and constructive roles and thus contributed tremendously to societal development. Odah (2003) & Awe (1992) have documented the political influence of Nigerian women in the pre-colonial period. Mention was made of Bakwa Turunku of Zaria who because of her dexterity in politics and vast agricultural holdings became the first Saraunya of Zaria. More important than Bakwa was Queen Amina, who took over the throne by popular consent in 1576. She displayed skills which at that time were expected of men.

Yoruba oral traditions recall female who were political successes. Among these were Princess Moremi who lived in the second half of the sixteen century, earned herself a political position in Ile Ife through her solid personal achievement. According to history, Madam Tinubu ruled in Lagos from 1830-1887 and was a seasoned political stalwart who used her political weight to support Akintoye the rightful king of Lagos over his feud with Kosoko and helped in returning him to the throne instead of Kosoko.

The Nigerian women seem to have been active participants in the development of their societies and have excelled politically, economically and their successes are sometimes recognised and rewarded by their societies in view of the titles bestowed on such women. According to Odah (2003) when the colonial government introduced electoral politics, Nigerian women were excluded. Nigeria women who were politically active in the pre-colonial period were suddenly excluded and were no longer qualified to vote or be voted for. Ityavyar (2001) has suggested that with this colonial assault on the political right of Nigerian women, one would not be far from right to suggest that colonialism is the midwife of the political marginalisation.

In spite of the exclusion of women in the political parties some women still participated in the formation of pressure groups. According to history, in 1901, Mrs. Obasa formed the Lagos women's league as a pressure group for better sanitary conditions and women education while Mrs. Ransom Kuti found the Abeokuta women's union in 1946 aimed at raising the standard of womanhood by wiping out illiteracy among women.

Though the ideology of patriarchy (defined as the belief in the natural superiority of the male gender) dominates Nigerian society as in most other societies in Africa, women should be encouraged to forge ahead. Infact women in this century should be encouraged to strive for nothing else than the best both politically and otherwise having had many role models who rose above all the stumbling blocks the society placed before them to contribute their quota to the nation's development.

Women during the first republic politics

In the first republic, the parliamentary system inherited from the British colonial administration was fraught with several anomalies that the generality of Nigeria populace was less favoured and the women were worse hit (Faseke, 2001). Many scholars (Odah, 2003, Salihu 1999) have made the point that the British created a geo-polity that was

structurally imbalance. Consequently Nigeria was dominated by the ‘big’ North and since the North generally was an Islamic State with less of its population in other religion, the women were hardly heard in the first republic.

With the sudden termination of democratic rule in 1966, the military took over. Arguably, there were no women ministers in Gowon’s cabinet but pockets of women in the states cabinets and civil service (Ighodalo, 1990). Even the Muritala/Obasanjo administrations did not bring in more women into their cabinets howbeit, more children especially the girl child got the benefit of Western Education. (Ityavvar, 2001)

According to her, the Buhari/Idiagbon regime of 1983-1985 was also very repressive for women as women became invisible in the political arena of the nation.

The year 1985 witnessed yet another administration, the Babangida administration. During this regime, the Better life for Rural Women Programme was launched in 1987. This programme achieved a lot for the women. It became the focal point for mobilising rural and urban women for self development and political awareness in the country. In addition, a women’s Commission was set up and a minister for women’s affairs was appointed. Furthermore, between 1993-1998 Maryan Sanni-Abacha the wife of the then head of state changed the nomenclature of the programme from Better Life for Rural Women to Family Support Programme (FSP). The FSP like the better life, made it possible for many women to realise their full potentials. It dawn on the women that they too could hold their own heads up in a male dominated world.

Although the short period of justice Fatima Abubakar, wife of Major General Abdul Salam Abubakar, Abacha’s successor was very short, she came up with the Women’s Right Advancement Association. This was a legal outfit to help needy women seek redress and obtain legal assistance free of charge.

The big question now is ‘has the lot of the generality of Nigerian women improved politically?’

The five political parties registered in 1978 were each formed by people who had been members of the constituent Assembly, an assembly made up of people nominated by the military, ninety eight percent of which were men (Faseke, 2001). The names of the leaders of the parties were the frontline politicians of the first republic. Under this circumstance therefore, any party that was going to be totally different would have undertaken a substantial re-ordering of the political life of the nation. In any case, even if there was a woman so

endowed with financial and intellectual acumen, it is doubtful if Nigeria as a nation was ready for such political engineering.

The very fact that all the political aspirants had been conspicuous figures in the first republic was enough to intimidate any woman. The reasons normally was that not only do these men have political experience but also the financial wherewithal to meet electoral requirements.

This system should not be allowed to continue, new people especially women should be allowed to come on board. A situation whereby a set of people just rotate the leadership of the nation among themselves may not give room for a dynamic and multifacet national development.

The Political Condition of Women in the Democratic Dispensation

A striking fact about the Nigerian state is that there seems not to have been any political space for women in independent Nigeria. Women in Nigeria have been under domination, be it under civilian administration or military rule. Tokenism in politics has been the lot of Nigerian Women.

In the first republic (i.e. the period (1965-1969) for example, in northern Nigeria, the ruling party, the Northern People's Congress (NPC) did not allow women to participate in politics (Odah, 2003). According to her, Northern People Congress (NPC) emotionally insisted that the domestic and not political space belonged to women.

Additionally, some evoked the injunction of Islamic religion and argued that women were supposed to be in seclusion and therefore could not participate in politics even as voters (Hyauver, 2001). Furthermore, others argued that politics was a dirty game and women as mothers of the nation needed not to participate in politics.

Minority parties which seem to be more progressive supported the participation of women in politics. However, these women were confined to women's wings.

In most government that comes into power, any attempt to take care of women's interest was only demonstrated by tokenism in appointment. Though women participated actively in the civilian politics of 1979 also they were poorly represented in the ruling bodies of all the parties and so they did not control essential decisions which is what is most needed to enhance political participation. They are usually pushed to the women's wing of the political parties to continue to act as voter catchers for the male contestants.

The National Policy on Women (2000) section 15 subsection 15.1.2 stated that:

“Women’s numerical strength in the population is not reflected in the political life and decision-making process and structures of the nation. They are inadequately represented at the Senate, National and state legislatures and the House of Representatives. At the state Houses of Assembly and at the Local Government Councils, women are either completely absent or grossly under-represented, as well as at the highest decision-making levels (executive, legislature, judiciary) in the country. There is the need to correct the situation to ensure the full realisation of democracy.”

It is very obvious that this situation will be far from being corrected if there is no re-orientation of the women folk and the society in general towards female participation in the nation’s politics.

Arowolo & Aluko (2010) in their survey of 300 participants (150 men and 150 women) found that 101 out of the 300 participants representing 50.3% believed that women can do better if actually given the opportunity to participate in politics. A total of 156 respondents representing 52.0% could never allow their wives to participate in politics. They also found that 125 participants representing 41.7% believed that women have certain form of embargo/hindrance from participating in politics. They also found that aside the fact that majority of husbands do not allow their wives to participate in politics a lot of female respondents also believed that politics would prevent them from taking absolute care of their families. Fear of broken homes, breeding irresponsible children, need to perform domestic chores, political violence, thuggery, intimidation and money politics and lots more were found to be some of the factors militating against women’s participation in politics.

Although there seems to be a progressive increase in the trend of women participation in politics in terms of appointment and elections, but the participation is still considered very low considering the international standard of 30% benchmark.

Table 1: Some Appointments made by the Civilian Government at the Federal Level in the Fourth Republic Between May 29th 1999-May 2003.

APPOINTMENT	TOTAL	MEN	%	WOMEN	%	SOURCE
Federal Government Appointed	35	33	94.3	2	5.7	Vanguard Newspaper
Permanent Secretaries	4	4	100	0	0	June 9th 1999

Principal Officers in the vice President office	49	37	75.5	12	24.5	Vanguard Newspaper June 10th 1999
Federal Executive council on Death and mysterious deaths	38	37	97.4	1	2.6	Vanguard Newspaper July 7th 1999
Members of Revenues Mobilisation, Allocation and fiscal commissioner	12	10	83.3	2	16.7	Vanguard Newspaper August 20th 1999
Probe panel of failed contracts in Buhari/IBB	9	9	100	0	0	Vanguard Newspaper June 16th 1999
Other Federal appointment Services Chiefs, CBN Governor, MD/NNPC	7	6	85.7	1	14.3	Vanguard Newspaper June 28th 1999
Probe panel on landed property (Transition involving landed property between 1984 to May 1999)	106	96	90.6	10	9.4	Vanguard Newspaper June 23rd 1999 This Day Newspaper

Ambassadorial Nominees						August 20th 1999
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Table 1 revealed that during the first republic no woman was appointed into offices in the Vice-President or as Federal Service Chiefs. While 37 (97.4%) out of the total 38 members of revenue mobilisation commissions were men. only one (1) 2.6% was a woman.

Ten (10) women representing 9.4% were nominated for ambassadorial post while 96 (90.6%) men were nominated.

Table 2:Some State Commissioners in Between May 29th 1999-2003

STATE	TOTAL	MEN	%	WOMEN	%	SOURCES
Oyo State	11	10	90.9	1	9.1	This Day Newspaper June 10th 1999
Akwa Ibom	13	10	76.9	3	23.1	This Day Newspaper June 14th 1999
Ebonyi	10	9	90.0	1	10.0	Guardian Newspaper June 14th 1999
Osun	11	9	81.8	1	18.2	Guardian Newspaper June 14th 1999
Imo	12	10	83.3	2	16.7	This Day Newspaper June 16th 1999
Abia	14	12	85.7	3	14.3	Guardian Newspaper June 10th 1999
Edo	9	9	100.0	0	0	This Day Newspaper June 10th 1999
Lagos	14	12	85.7	2	14.3	Guardian Newspaper June 21st 1999
Zamfara	11	11	100.0	0	0.00	This Day Newspaper June 10th 1999
Enugu	11	10	90.9	1	9.1	This Day Newspaper June 10th 1999
Kano	12	11	91.7	1	8.3	Guardian Newspaper June 21st 1999
Skoto	11	10	90.9	1	9.1	This Day Newspaper June 10th 1999
Cross River	9	8	88.9	1	11.1	Guardian Newspaper June 21st 1999
Delta	10	9	90.0	1	10.0	This Day Newspaper June

Kwara	11	9	81.8	2	18.2	15th 1999
Benu	14	11	78.6	3	21.4	This Day Newspaper June 10th 1999
Ogun	9	9	100.0	0	0.00	This Day Newspaper June 23rd 1999
Rivers	14	12	85.7	2	14.3	This Day Newspaper June 10th 1999
Taraba	10	9	90.0	1	10.0	This Day Newspaper June 10th 1999
Kaduna	14	13	92.9	1	7.1	Vanguard Newspaper June 25th 1999
						Vanguard Newspaper June 20th 1999
						This Day Newspaper June 19th 1999
						This Day Newspaper June 1st 1999
						This Day Newspaper June 11th 1999
						This Day Newspaper June 16th 1999
						Vanguard Newspaper July 26th 1999
						Tribune Newspaper July 1st 1999

Table 2 showed that very few women were appointed as commissioners during the fourth republic while three states had no women commissioners at all.

Table 3: Statistics of Local Government Chairmen in the Fourth Republic

S/N	STATE	MALE	FEMALE
1.	Abia	17	0
2.	Adamawa	20	0
3.	Akwa-Ibom	31	0
4.	Anambra	20	1
5.	Bauche	20	0
6.	Bayelsa	8	0
7.	Benue	22	1
8.	Borno	27	0
9.	Cross Rivers	18	0
10.	Delta	25	0
11.	Ebonyi	13	0
12.	Edo	18	0
13.	Ekiti	16	0
14.	Enugu	17	0
15.	FCT	5	1
16.	Gombe	11	0
17.	Imo	26	1
18.	Jigawa	27	0
19.	Kaduna	22	1
20.	Kano	44	0
21.	Katsina	33	1
22.	Kebbi	21	0
23.	kogi	21	0
24.	Kwara	16	0
25.	Lagos	20	0

26.	Nasarawa	12	0
27.	Niger	25	0
28.	Ogun	20	0
29.	Ondo	18	0
30.	Osun	29	1
31.	Oyo	33	0
32.	Plateau	16	1
33.	Rivers	23	0
34.	Sokoto	33	0
35.	Taraba	16	0
36.	Yobe	17	0
37.	Zamfara	14	0
	Total	774	8

Source: Nda (2003) Women in the Power Equation of Nigerian Politics. Lagos: Dat and Partners Logistics Ltd.

Table 3 revealed that out of the 774 seats in the Nigeria Local Government which represent the National grassroot only 8 were occupied by women representing only 1.03% as against 98.97% for men.

Table 4: Gender Statistics on State Governors and Deputy Governors in the Fourth Republic.

S/N	STATE	GOVERNOR		DEPUTY GOVERNOR	
		MALE	FEMALE	MALE	FEMALE
1.	Abia	1	0	1	0
2.	Adamawa	1	0	1	0
3.	Akwa-Ibom	1	0	1	0
4.	Anambra	1	0	1	0

5.	Bauche	1	0	1	0
6.	Bayelsa	1	0	1	0
7.	Benue	1	0	1	0
8.	Borno	1	0	1	0
9.	Cross Rivers	1	0	1	0
10.	Delta	1	0	1	0
11.	Ebonyi	1	0	1	0
12.	Edo	1	0	1	0
13.	Ekiti	1	0	1	0
14.	Enugu	1	0	1	0
15.	FCT	1	0	1	0
16.	Gombe	1	0	1	0
17.	Imo	1	0	1	0
18.	Jigawa	1	0	1	0
19.	Kaduna	1	0	1	0
20.	Kano	1	0	1	0
21.	Katsina	1	0	1	0
22.	Kebbi	1	0	1	0
23.	kogi	1	0	1	0
24.	Kwara	1	0	0	1
25.	Lagos	1	0	1	0
26.	Nasarawa	1	0	1	0
27.	Niger	1	0	1	0
28.	Ogun	1	0	1	0
29.	Ondo	1	0	1	0
30..		1	0	1	0

31.	Osun	1	0	1	0
32.	Oyo	1	0	1	0
33.	Plateau	1	0	1	0
34.	Rivers	1	0	1	0
35.	Sokoto	1	0	1	0
36.	Taraba	1	0	1	0
37.	Yobe	1	0	1	0
	Zamfara	36	0	35	1
	Total-				

Source: Nda (2003) Women in the Power Equation of Nigerian Politics. Lagos: Dat and Partner Logistic Ltd

Table 4 indicated that in the fourth republic, out of 36 states, no woman was elected as a Governor while only one woman emerged as a Deputy Governor, 2.7% as against 97.2% for men.

Table 5: Women in the Nigerian National Assembly (1980-1992)

1980	Women	Men	% of Women	% of Men
Senate	1	56	1.8	98.2
House of Reps	3	442	0.7	99.3
1992	Women	Men	% of Women	% of Men
Senate	1	90	1.0	99
House of Reps	14	575	2.4	97.6

Source: The Nigerian CEDAW NGO Coalition Shadow Report (2008), New York, United Nations Committee on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women

Table 2: Women in the State Houses of Assembly and National Assembly (1999-2007)

House of Assembly	Total No of Seats	Men	Women	Percentage of Men	Percentage of Women
1999	978	966	12	98.8%	1.2%

2003	951	912	39	96%	4%
2007	990	936	54	94.15%	5.5%

Table 5 showed that 1.8% and 0.7% of women were in the senate and House of Representative respectively between 1980 and 1992 as against 98.2% and 99.3% of men in senate and House of representative during the same period.

The table also indicated that in 1999 only 12 women 1.2% were elected into House of Assembly. A total of 39 women were elected in 2003 (4%) while a total of 54 women were elected in 2007 representing 5.5%.

In the same vein, the only woman presidential aspirant in the just concluded 2010 elections scored only one vote which was suspected to be her's during the shadow elections at the party level in Abuja.

Implication for Counselling

It is evident that the road to gender equity and social justice in the area of politics is still very much far off for majority of Nigeria women. However, if the saying that 'the future starts today' is anything to hold onto, then strategies must be put in place that if carefully implemented will give hope to the Nigeria women politically.

It is counselled that the three arms of government should at the Federal, State and Local Government levels should raise awareness on the existing gender policy programmes. Analysis of the programmes should be embarked upon, involving the target grouping right from the onset.

The Federal Government should advocate for a review of the constitution to ensure gender sensitivity and ensure participation of the diverse groups and interest, especially women. Furthermore, the issue of children of old political colleagues replacing their parents in ruling the nation should as a matter of urgency come to an end. Citizens especially women should be allowed to come on board on their own merits.

Establishment of functional gender data banks should be put in place at the National Centre for Women Development in each state. Gender units also should be established at local government levels as well as Higher Institutions and Ministries. This may help to ensure gender sensitive appointments and decisions.

It may not also be out of place to have women trade unions which can intensify educational programmes to sensitize women workers on their rights and ensure integration of women into structures to ensure gender sensitivity and equity. In the same vein, women may form themselves into Non Government Organisations (NGO) to intensify sensitization of women to actively participate in politics. This can be done by public enlightenment on the importance of integrating women into politics and removal of all forms of traditional, cultural and religious barriers on women in the society through education and legislation.

Presently, Nigeria politics involve a lot of money which may prevent interested women from participating. There is the need to de-emphasise the dependence of politics on money. Even the legitimate money paid to enrol as an aspirant in purchasing forms should be drastically reduced. Moreover, Nigeria women need to be economically empowered. This can be done through acquisition of skills and education. Loan should also be made available to them to run their business without bureaucratic procedures which prevent easy access to loan. It is counselled that government should also minimize levies which are indiscriminately imposed on the informal sectors for it puts women entrepreneurs out of business.

Enlightenment campaigns must be embarked upon to re-orientate the public especially the men not to see female politicians as 'free' and promiscuous rather they should see them as responsible citizens who have also come out to contribute their quota to our nation's development.

It is counselled that men be re-orientated through seminars, workshop and media campaign to see that the significant factor for women in politics goes beyond the claims of equal right with men but that of achieving a sustainable democracy for the nation.

Home-career-management capacity building workshops and seminars should be constantly organised for women to assist them on how they can manage their homes successfully while still participating in politics.

Nigeria is a signatory to the United Nations resolutions on the recommended ratio of 30:70 women to men in top political positions. She must be seen to be implementing all the resolutions passed. Moreover, her size numerically and politically in Africa makes it imperative that Nigeria should be leading state to implement such Resolutions that affect more than fifty percent of her populace, in order to achieve the nation's vision 20:2020.

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