



## Women Participation and Political Leadership in Africa: A Case of Nigeria

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**ABSTRACT:** *The task of development in the creation of a strong state in Africa requires the participation of all regardless of gender. The involvement of women in political leadership of a nation would add more value to its domestic politics because women are also a major stakeholder in the development project. Yet, they are sidelined in virtually all spheres of political life. In many Africa countries, such as Nigeria, obnoxious, social norms and political exclusion hinder the participation of women in political affairs. This paper, therefore, examines critically some challenges facing women participation in Nigeria's politics. Using both historical and descriptive approaches and supported by patriarchy and liberal feminism theorist, the paper argues that household care, money politics and political violence serve as obstacles to effective participation in politics, governance and decision making in Nigeria. The paper concludes that, for greater women participation and the attainment of leadership position in Nigeria politics, government and party leaders as well as stakeholders should engage in programmes and policies that would encourage women politically.*

**Keywords:** *Women Participation, Politics, Leadership, Political Development, Nigeria*

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### I. INTRODUCTION

Leadership, particularly political leadership, is crucial to the development of any nation. The progress, development and fortunes of any nation are tied to the type and quality of the political leadership it has had and continues to have. However, leadership like other processes is gendered. Leadership of and in institutions, like institutionalized practices and the institutional structures themselves, is also gendered. These processes, practices, structures, and institutions exist within hierarchies that generally privilege men over women. Women and men who cross these institutions and processes do so as a lived experience, bringing all their characteristics (e.g., sex, class, education), beliefs and life lessons of individual bodies with them. As a consequence, women and men who attempt to lead in the political realm go through institutionalized gender power that shapes and structures their lived experience of leadership. Each reality is more than an individual choice or individualized discrimination. It is more of the product of institutionalized gender structures. As a result of this, women and men have different experiences. All women and men do not have the same experiences because their heterogeneity and lived experiences also shape their leadership (Aluko, 2011) Moreover, oftentimes leadership as a concept in itself is not well understood. Public and/or political leadership is assumed to exist when someone holds appointive or elective office and acts in a formal capacity.

Women have traditionally been excluded from the structures of state that determine political and legislative priorities. In recent years, Africa has witnessed rapid escalation in female political representation when compared to the low rates that existed in the 1960s. Participation of women in decision-making has more and more been placed at heart of the global agenda (Ndlovu & Mutale, 2013). Confirmatory developments in African governance, which have been eased by the ever-increasing consolidation of democracy in the continent, have led to increase in women's participation in politics. Numerous achievements have been recorded in the advancement of gender equality and women's empowerment and various policies, programmes and projects are in place to advance gender equality and women's empowerment (Republic of Zimbabwe, Ministry of Women Affairs, 1995). These changes have engendered the potential for increasing women's entrance to political power. The new trends in women's political participation have been aided by an amalgamation of numerous factors. Changes taking place in the African region have positively provided an opportunity for more women to assume

positions of leadership. Despite the fact that African women have made significant trends in political participation worldwide a colossal gap is still in existence. Women have a gargantuan task before they can be acknowledged as full equals and partners to their male counterparts. This paper seeks to demonstrate the emerging trends in women's political participation in Africa. The factors that have facilitated the trends will be discussed. The barriers to women's participation will also be analyzed and finally recommendations would be drawn on how to improve women's participation.

The leadership roles played by both Mrs. Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti and Mrs. Margaret Ekpo in the Nigerian pre-independence political struggles of the 1950s are incontrovertible (Sklar cited in Okafor, 2015). Mrs Kuti was a strong advocate and campaigner for women's rights across the country. Mrs. Margret Ekpo, on her part, was the only female member of the seven-man committee set up in 1951 to organize a national political organization geared toward achieving self-government within five years. She became the Vice-President of the Eastern House of Chiefs in 1959. Indeed, it may well be that the women who spearheaded the 1929 Aba Women's Riots in South-Eastern Nigeria were the precursors and role models of the two better known female political activists (Nduka, 2001).

Professor (Mrs.) Grace Alele-Williams did not only distinguish herself in the field of mathematics education, but also rose to become the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Benin-the first female Nigerian academic to be so honoured (Nduka, 2001). Similarly, late Prof. Dora Nkem Akunyili (OFR), who was the former Director of National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control reduced the incidence of fake drugs from about 90% to 68% of drugs in 2001 (Akunyili, 2006). Dr. (Mrs.) Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, successfully transformed the Nigerian economic platform when she succeeded in negotiating a debt relief package for Nigeria as the Finance Minister (July, 2003-June, 2006) under the Obasanjo regime and also spearheaded the unpopular fuel subsidy removal policy by the Nigerian government, which led to protests in January 2012 under the Goodluck Jonathan regime (Aina, 2012; McGroarty, 2012). Also, she stressed the need to reduce the country's recurrent expenditure, which is currently 74% of the national budget, and embark on capital projects which could improve the 14% unemployment rate in the country (Osa-Okunbor, 2012). In all developing countries, women leaders abound, not just in politics, but also in academia, private and public sector/organizations (O

kafor, Fagbemi and Hassan, 2011). The foregoing are appropriate clarion calls for action, the rationale of which is the development of leadership and leadership culture in Nigeria.

### **Historical Overview of Nigerian Women and Electoral Politics**

The political marginalization of women in Nigeria was well played out during the First Republic (1960-1966) when there were only two female legislators, Mrs. Wuraola Esan and Mrs. Bernice Kerry in the Federal Parliament, and two others, Mrs. Margaret Ekpo and Mrs. Janet Muokelu in the Eastern House of Assembly. There was no female minister. During the Second Republic (1979- 1984), there was one female senator out of 571, and 11 members of the House of Representatives out of 445. In the 19 states of the Federation then there was no female representation in all the State Houses of Assembly, neither was there a female chairperson nor councillor at the local government level (Agina-Ude, 2003: 3; Oleru cited in Aluko, Y.A, 2011).

Under the infamous transition programme of General Babangida, the longest and most expensive in Nigeria (1985-1993), women were also grossly alienated. For instance, in the 19-member Political Bureau of 1986, only two were women. In the 1990 local government elections, 3 women were elected out of 591. In the State Houses of Assembly, there were 27 out of 1,172 members, whereas there was no women legislator in 14 States. In the House of Representatives, women constituted only 14 out of 589, and 1 out of 91 in the Senate. Of the 3000 presidential aspirants in 1991, only 8 were women (Agina Ude, 2003; Ako-Nai, 2005.; Mohammed, 2006.; Okoosi-Simbine, 2006:).

Under General Sani Abacha, there were 20 women out of 360 members of the House of Representatives, and 9 out of 109 Senators (Agina-Ude, 2003: 4). On the socio-economic front, there is no significant difference. For example, the percentage of women in the labour force, which was 35.9% in 1994, stood at 34.3% and 38.1% in 1993 and 1994 respectively. Since 1986, the proportion of female primary school dropouts is larger than male (Dauda, 2004). By 1999, at the dawn of the Fourth Republic, the story was still the same. Out of a total of 11,117 electable positions available during the 1999 elections, only 631 women contested, which is a mere 5.6%, not of the total number of contestants, but of the number of positions available for contest. Of the 631 female contestants, only 180 (143 of whom were elected as ward councillors) managed to win, representing just 1.6% of the electable positions. In other words, of all electable positions available during the 1999 elections, only 1.6% was occupied by women. In 2003, men occupied 105 out of 109 seats leaving 4 for women representing 3.7%. There was an increase in 2007 as women occupied 9 seats out of 109 representing 8.3% (Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) Country Report, 2008).

### **Historical Antecedents Of Women In Political Leadership In Nigeria**

Leadership in pre-colonial Nigeria involved men and few outstanding women in various spheres of the society. There existed several historical perspectives of bravery displayed by women in several dangerous circumstances either as individuals or in a group. Nigerian women in pre-colonial and colonial African states confronted and overcame oppression and violence. Women were able to confront the government and make it to reverse their decisions. According to Kolawole (cited in Ajayi, 2007), Nineteenth century was an outstanding period in African women's mobilization. During the trans-Atlantic slave trade, some of the greatest acts of resistance and tenacious rejection of slave traders were led by women citing the invincibility of the Amazon women of Dahomey. In what later became Nigeria, women have been active socially and politically in the affairs of their communities. In Northern Nigeria, the reign of the first Queen in Zazzau, Amina ushered in a new era for the state. The collapse of Songhay Empire created a new drive towards the reinforcement of authority by the dependent Zarakuna (rulers of the Hausa Land). Queen Kambasa, in the traditions of the Bonny kingdom is remembered as a warrior queen. She became a patron of the artistic activities of men's cultural group. The queen trained a formidable army which ransacked the formation of Opuoko for killing some members of the cultural groups.

In the Yoruba land, the most famous warrior was Efunsetan Aniwura who rose to become Iyalode or leader of women in Ibadan. Her business acumen has given her undisputed influence not only in commerce but also in political and social life. Madam Tinubu was also powerful that she supplied arms to Egba people in the 19th century. The Ijaw and Igbo women of Southern Nigeria were resourceful with trade guilds as their strong points of mobilization. Among the Igbo, the Omu signified strong economic and political influence. People with foresight like Okwei popularly remembered as Omu, prevented the imposition of British sterling pounds on the trading groups of Eastern Nigeria. The British firms paid for produce in silver coins and currency notes. The local producers were unwilling to accept half the new currency in exchange for the old. The Okwei (Omu) had to contract to exchange currency notes paid to the producers by the firms with the local currency in circulation. This was made possible with the cooperation of the Niger Company and bank managers at Onitsha and other trading stations.

Ekejuiba (2001) describes Madam Okwei who was crowned Omu, the queen of Osomari in 1935 as an illustrious Nigerian woman. Okwei's duties as Omu included advising the King and assisting him in settling disputes, especially advise that concerned women. She also gifted out some of her trinkets to those that could not afford it. In addition to her royal status, Madam Okwei (Omu) had military, religious and administrative functions. She was the field marshal and her canoe had to lead others in any military expedition. Madam Olajumoke Obasa became involved in voluntary social acts in Lagos. She was deeply interested in women and performed a great deal of task by promoting their welfare and championing their interest in 1930, when the market women were asked to pay rent for stalls in Ebute Ero. She led a delegation to A.W.S. members of the Lagos town council to protest against the order for rent payment. As a waiver, the order that women should pay monthly fees for their stalls was put on hold. Mrs. Olufunmilayo Ransome-kuti founded Abeokuta Women's Union (AWU) whose objectives ranged from alleviation of hardship to removal of cause of hardship. She insisted on equality of all women and initiated that illiterate women were much bolder and more willing to sacrifice their personal comfort than the educated women. The objectives of the A.W.U. were the abolition of Sole Native Authority (SNA) which was not gender-sensitive, and representation and participation of women in the reformed system of administration. Between 1946 and 1947, the AWU employed the strategy of writing petitions to colonial authorities to repeal taxation on women because women helped their husbands to pay taxes; usually the women were responsible for the feeding and education of their children, women were already paying water rates. On May 10, 1944, about 12 women gathered to present their views on the need for a national woman's organizational. They resolved to form Nigeria's Women Party (NWP) because according to Johnson-Odim (2001: 182), "women were being cheated by our men and the government" and she told the founding members that "we must as women demand our rights".

During the inter-war era, two decades after the first world war, there was a mass protest against colonial policies by the Aba women in South eastern Nigeria in 1929. The Igbo market women were upset with a number of colonial policies that threatened their economic and social position. In 1929, the women staged a series of protests. The largest included more than 10,000 women, who had covered their faces with blue paints and carried fern-covered sticks. The women were able to destroy a number of colonial buildings before soldiers stopped the protest killing more than fifty women in the process. Not surprisingly in contemporary Nigeria, the Aba women are considered to be natural heroes.

The history of women's resistance to male reconstruction of traditional government level has certainly not abated, Mba (cited in Fajomi, 2009), reveals that between 1974-78 in Onitsha, Ikporo Onitsha (women of Onitsha) under the leadership of Veronica Uwechia Umekwulu Odogwu and Nneka Chugbo and a host of others, led the entire community against the administration of Ukpabi Asika, whose policy had a disastrous effect of diminishing the economic resources of Onitsha women. In deciding to fight the government policy,

what the Ikporo Onitsha found outrageously bad was the cavalier manner in which the interest and urgent need of resources for women were dismissed as irrelevant. In the course of the protracted struggle, the officers of Ikporo Onitsha, including a number of seventy and eighty year old women, were routinely wounded by the police, arrested and detained on the ground that they had convened an illegal government. These battles by women may seem ineffectual but they are not without casualties.

Nzegwe (2000) describes the first casualty in the battle between Ikporo Onitsha and the East central state government was the Obi of Onitsha, Ofala Okagbue. The community ostracized him to protest his abdication of his constitutional obligation to fight for the traditional rights of Onitsha women. The second casualty was rights of Onitsha women. The second casualty was Adazia Enwonwu, the Ndichie who openly taunted women for lacking significance. He could not be buried after his sudden death as initially planned by his family until a formal rite of recantation was performed. The third casualty in line were the members of Asika family who publicly supported the administrator Ukpabi, They were shunned and could not interact with the rest of the community. The women continued their action even after Asika's rule abruptly ended following the coup d'état of General Muritala Mohammed. As events unfolded, the Owelle of Onitsha and the former president of Nigeria, Dr. Nnamdi Azikwe, became a casualty when he assumed that the fall of his nemesis, Ukpabi Asika, automatically implied the end of women's grievances. Although he had once been a firm supporter of Ikporo Onitsha, his new position was defined as self-serving and antagonistic to what the women had defined as promoting their welfare. The women asserted that since they were dealing with a government policy that was still in place rather than an individual, it was mischievous of the Owelle to collapse the two and divert attention from the task at hand. Faced with the women's wrath and their continuous public assault on his person, the Owelle harshly retreated to Nsukka to live out the rest of his days in peace.

Furthermore, given the disappointment of women concerning how Nigerian government has approached issues affecting the rights and welfare of women in general, there is a growing discontent among women groups and activists. Women organization and women tend to spend resources researching, generating data and new form of knowledge on the problem of violence against women. This is an attempt to convince the government of gravity and importance of this matter.

### **The Political Leadership Of Nigerian Women In The Post-Colonial Era**

The roles and responsibilities of women in post colonial period has witnessed tremendous changes than it was in the pre-colonial and colonial era in Nigeria but it still showed a low participation level in leadership in Nigeria (Aina, 2004). Leadership in Nigeria in the post-independence era became ethnic, paternalistic and personality based. The role of women have been to support the male folk from their ethnic area without any consideration whatsoever for their personal interest. It is important to note according to Ikpe (2004) that party and ethnic allegiance became more important than gender solidarity; women lost their power of collective action, which was important in their agitations during the colonial era.

From 1960-1965, only four women legislators were members of the House of Assembly. In 1966, there was presence of the military which was obviously male-dominated and which was detrimental to Nigerian women. In essence, men were at the helms of affair while the women played a peripheral role irrespective of the qualifications they possessed during the military regime. The regime had little or no regard for constitutional interest balancing. It's interesting to note that no woman was appointed into the fifty-member Constitutional Drafting Committee; very few women were elected to the local government councils during the 1976 elections, and only Mrs Janet Akinrinade was elected to the Constituent Assembly (Ajayi, 2007).

However, the military leadership of General Ibrahim Babangida in 1985 changed the attitude of military rulers to women leadership. It was in his time that the concept of First Lady Syndrome came to reality (Aina, 2004). Closely followed was the Better Life for Rural Women but later renamed by the then First Lady, Mariam Babangida as Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP). Afterwards, women intensified their interests in various leadership positions. Some recorded success while others recorded failures. Only one woman, by Sarah Jubril, made several attempts for the presidential position which turned out unsuccessful.

The 1989 constitution that was drafted by the Constituent Assembly had only 5 women out of a total membership of 150 while in 1990, out of 1,297 local government positions worldwide, women won just 206 (Babatunde, 2003). The gloomy representation of women in leadership positions was witnessed in Abacha's regime. The Senate had 3 women, the House of Representatives had 12 women out of the 360 members, and the State House of Assembly across the nation had 12 women out of 990 members. At the local government level, out of 8,810 councilors across the nation, 143 were women while 9 out of 774 local government chairpersons were women (Akande cited in Ajayi, 2007). It is observed that from independence in 1960 to 1999, only about 3.1% of women were elected into political office and 5% into appointive position respectively.

Furthermore, the year 1999 marked the beginning of a new dawn as Nigeria returned to civilian government (Ngara & Ayabam, 2013). With the re-introduction of democracy, there has been a drastic increase in women political participation in both elective and appointive capacities. In spite of these increase, women are

still highly marginalized considering the disparity in the proportion of men to women in leadership and decision making positions. For instance, during the 1999 general elections, out of 11,881 available positions throughout the country, women won just 181 positions (Akiyode-Afolabi, 2003). Only one female was recorded as Deputy Governor of Lagos State (1999-2003) Chief Kofoworola Akerere-Bucknor. The dismal performance of women in this election led to the national summit for all women politicians organised by the Gender and Development Action (GADA) International Human Rights Law Group, Centre for Development and Population Activities (CEDPA) June 28, 2002 in Abuja. It was organised to enhance women's active participation in politics and other leadership positions in Nigeria (Arogundade & Akiyode-Afolabi, 2003). Despite countless efforts put in place to ensure a significant increase in the number or percentage of women in leadership positions, the 2003 elections proved otherwise. Women just had a representation of 8.8percent in national parliament ( UNDP Report, 2005).

Also, the Independence National Electoral Commission (INEC) records showed in the 2007 elections held in April, a total of 7160 candidates which comprises men and women that contested. Of this number only 628 women representing 8.8% of the total participated. In spite of the poor performance of women in the 2011 National Assembly elections, there is an improvement in the number of women political appointees as reflected in the number of women in the current Federal Executive Council (FEC) led by President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Goodluck Jonathan. Out of the 42 ministers appointed before the 13th September 2013 cabinet reshuffle, 13 are women, representing 31.0 percent (Ngara & Ayabam, 2013).

It is interesting to note that handful of women have occupied important and key administrative and leadership positions since 1999. In most instances, these women have performed creditably well, thereby leaving no doubt about the ability and capability of women to perform when saddled with responsibilities at all levels. The performances of such women are as follows:

Dr. Sarah Alade, Deputy Governor of Central Bank; Mrs. Omobola Johnson, Minister of Communication Technology; Hajia Zaniab Mania, Minister of Women Affairs and Social Development; Mrs. Sarah Ocheke, Minister of Water Resources; Mrs. Akon Eyakeny, Minister of Land, Housing and Urban Development; Ndi Okereke Onyiuke, former Managing Director of the Nigerian Stock Exchange; Prof. Dora Akunyili, former Director General, National Agency for Food and Drugs Control (NAFDAC); Minister of Education; Dr. Obiageli Ezekweseli; former Senior Special Assistant to former President Obasanjo on Budget Monitoring and Price Intelligence Unit (otherwise known as Due Process Unit); Allison Maduekwe - Minister of Petroleum Resources; Mrs Evelyn Oputu, Managing Director of Nigerian Bank of Industry; Prof. (Mrs) Ruqayyatu Ahmed Rufai, former Minister of Education; Mrs. Ifueko Omoigui Okauru, Immediate past Executive, Chair Federal Inland Revenue Service; Prof. (Mrs.) Grace Alele William, former Vice Chancellor, University of Benin; and Dr. Okonjo- Iweala who as Minister of Finance during Obasanjo's administration and currently in Jonathan's administration worked indefatigably and secured a reprieve for Nigeria's external debt among others. The role of these women have no doubt lifted the pedigree and profile of Nigeria's women as hard working, disciplined, thorough, creative, enterprising and productive. Their enormous contribution to national development is gradually engineering re-evaluation of the role, and capabilities of women in public capacities in positive light.

## **II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK:**

### **Patriarchy Approach to Women's low Participation in Leadership in Nigeria**

Theories of gender oppression describe women's situation as the consequence of a direct power relationship between men and women in which men have fundamental and that is, in concrete interests in controlling, using, and oppressing women – the practice of domination. By domination, oppression theories mean any relationship in which one party (individual or collective), the dominant, succeeds in making the other party (individual or collective) the subordinate, an instrument of the dominant's will. Instrumentality, by definition, is understood as involving the denial of the subordinate's independent subjectivity (Lengermann & Niebrugge- Brantley cited in Okafor & Akowuwebe, 2015). In spite of the international declarations affirming the rights and equality between men and women, of which Nigeria is a signatory, the available literature shows that women still constitute a disproportionately small percentage of those participating in political decision-making and leadership (Kasomo, 2012). Many global conferences, including the Cairo Conference on Population and Development (1994), the Fourth World Conference on Women (1995), and the World Summit for Social Development (1995) have recognised that, despite the progress made globally in improving the status of women, gender disparities still exist, especially with regard to participation in electoral politics. Women's situation, for theorists of gender oppression, is centrally that of being dominated and oppressed by men (Ritzer, 2008). This pattern of gender oppression is incorporated in the deepest and most pervasive ways into society's organization, a basic arrangement, and a basic arrangement of domination most commonly called patriarchy, in which society is organized to privilege men in all aspects of social life. Patriarchy is not the unintended be it biology or socialization and secondary consequence of some other sets of factors – or sex roles or the class

system. It is a primary power arrangement sustained by strong and deliberate intention. Indeed, to theorists of gender oppression, gender differences and gender inequality are byproducts of patriarchy.

In Nigeria, the low participation of women in these positions affects their progress in improving the legal and regulatory framework for promoting gender equality since very few women are influencing the legislative process. The rationale for promoting women's participation in political dispensation is based on equity, quality and development (Kasomo, 2012). Given the nominally higher population of women (49%) in Nigeria, it is only right for them to equally participate in political decisions on matters affecting them.

There are two major variants of gender oppression theory: psychoanalytic feminism and radical feminism. Like all oppression theorists, psychoanalytic theorists see patriarchy as a system, in which men subjugate women, a universally pervasive system durable over time and space, and steadfastly maintained in the face of occasional challenge. Distinctive to psychoanalytic feminism, however, is the view that this system is one that all men, in their individual daily actions, work to create and sustain. Women resist only occasionally but more often either acquiesce in or actively work for their own subordination. This theory then explains women's oppression in terms of men's deep emotional need to control women, a drive arising from ambivalence toward the women who reared them (Lengermann & Niebrugge, 2008). Several factors have been identified as responsible for not women advancing to political spheres in Nigeria. Adhiambo-Oduol (2003) identifies socio-cultural beliefs, attitudes, biases and stereotypes as major barriers. These emphasize the superiority of men and the inferiority of women. They form the integral part of socialisation process in form of gender education and training that men and women are exposed to from childhood (Kasomo, 2012).

Radical feminists see in every institution and in society's most basic stratification arrangements – heterosexuality, systems of domination and class, caste, race, ethnicity, age, and gender – subordination, the most fundamental structure of which is the system of patriarchy. Not only is patriarchy historically the first structure of domination and submission, but it also continues as the most pervasive and enduring system of inequality, the basic societal model of domination (Lerner, 1986). Through participation in patriarchy, men learn how to hold women in contempt, to see them as non-human, and to control them.

Another formidable barrier is the institutional framework guiding gender division of labour, recruitment, and vertical mobility. Available studies have shown that women are particularly disadvantaged, with their labour often under-valued and under-utilized. Women are more likely to be employed than men, yet their average income is lower (Kasomo, 2012).

Another factor confronting women's participation in leadership is lack of enough participation and empowerment in decisions that affect their lives in political and social processes. According to Kasomo (2012) note that, since men dominate public decision-making processes, it is the male values that are reflected in the decision-making bodies. Nigeria's development record and its demographic composition suggest a need for active involvement of women in key decision-making bodies. There is a clear indication that, even though women form the majority votes in Nigeria's last general elections, they are still under-represented in leadership positions. Women's participation in electoral politics since Nigeria's independence in 1960 has been limited to providing support to male politicians. With the new political dispensation in Nigeria, there is a greater need for equal gender participation in acquisition and exercise of political powers.

### **Liberal Feminism Approach to Women's Low Participation in Leadership in Nigeria**

The major expression of gender inequality theory is liberal feminism, which argues that women may claim equality with men on the basis of an essential human capacity for reasoned moral agency, that gender inequality is the result of a sexist patterning of the division of labour, and that gender equality can be produced by transforming the division of labour through the repatterning of key institutions –law, work, family, education, and media (Friedan,; Bem,; Lorber,; Rhode,; Pateman cited in Okafor & Akokuwebe,2015; Schaeffer, 2001).

Historically, the first element in the liberal feminist argument is the claim for gender equality. This claim was first politically articulated in the Declaration of Sentiments drafted as Seneca Falls, New York, in 1848, with the express purpose of paralleling and expanding the Declaration of Independence to include women.

Women are a major force behind people's participation in the life of society today. Not only do they comprise the majority in terms of population, but they also play a crucial role in society as procreators of posterity as well as producers of goods and services. Although women have made great strides in obtaining a votes and rights to be elected in to political offices in many countries, they comprise less than 15 percent of the members of parliament, and less than 5 percent of heads of state worldwide. They hold only a fraction of other leadership positions nationally and internationally. In Nigeria, traditional perceptions of women as inferior to men prevail, as many people uphold cultural practices which enhance the subordination of women. Consequently, men continue to dominate women in political, economic, social, and religious realms. The latter's political endeavours, achievements and roles in society are hardly recognised or acknowledged. This situation

has necessitated the clarion call that women should be empowered by giving them due status, rights, and responsibilities to enable them participate actively in decision making at the political level (Kasomo, 2012).

#### **Factors that Limit Women's Access to Leadership positions**

Several factors exist in political parties in Nigeria which limit the aspirations of women and impede their access to leadership positions. These factors include: god-fatherism, male dominated party executives, labelling, violence, money politics as well as other social and cultural factors. Since men are usually in the majority in the political party setup, they tend to dominate the party hierarchy and are therefore at an advantage in influencing the party's internal politics. For instance, in Nara in Nkanu East Local Government (LG) of Enugu State, a female candidate, Mrs. Grace Ani, was reported to have contested for councillorship position in the last LG elections and won. To her greatest consternation, the position was given to a male candidate who lost in the elections on the basis of gender discrimination. The women in the community protested to no avail; rather Mrs Ani was compensated with a political appointment in the LG. Also, a well-known columnist and editor of a leading newspaper, *The Guardian*, Reuben Abati, in supporting this view laced his position with the story of Mrs. Lami Sadu, who was divorced by her husband in 1999 for having the effrontery to vote for the All People's Party against her husband's wish. In January 2011, Hajia Halima Tijjani (ACN, Kaduna Central) was battered and her elbow broken for daring to contest. Abati concluded that "the real problem is with the hypocrisy of the backward male elite in Nigerian politics which considers every woman seeking a role in public life, a "busybody" (Nwankwo, 2011).

The failure to remove these barriers will further perpetuate underrepresentation of women in governance. Democracy is about fair representation of all interest groups in the society; the low representation of women is a violation of the principle of democracy. Poor representation denies women mass participation in governance, which is another hallmark of democracy. The participation of women in the electoral process is important to any democracy. The inclusion of gender sensitive provisions in party constitutions and manifestoes can be an important tool for encouraging women to participate actively in political parties and holding the party accountable when it comes to affirmative action.

#### **Factors Militating against Women in Politics in Nigeria**

In many African countries, such as Nigeria, obnoxious social norms, political exclusion and economic lopsidedness dictate the presence and voice of women in public life. According to the 2006 Nigerian population census figure, women constituted 49% of the total population, yet, there has been a gross gender gap between men and women, especially in political representation, economic management and leadership. Political equality is still obscure in African countries, although some progress has been made. As men have control over assets and have relatively better education, they have a dominant position in terms of political power. For instance, male councilors may not necessarily be highly educated but such positions are not given to women who have the same low educational level with them. Lack of awareness leads to situations where they become dependent on male political positions or political parties. Men's participation in leadership will focus more on issues of men's interest than on women's concerns. In some cases, women are elected into a leadership position in the arm of government without actually participating in actual leadership. In Nigeria, a lot of women lack effective power or influence, especially in federal government structure. Many of them do not have the necessary skills to present ideas effectively. Lack of awareness of political participation means inadequate contribution to public affairs and women's empowerment. When women are given the opportunity of participation in leadership, they will recognize these problems and address them to accommodate full participation of women in leadership at all levels of the arms of government. One of the important reasons why women have not received adequate benefits from years of planning and development is their inadequate representation, non-participation and non-involvement in the preparation and execution of plans for their economic development and social justice through decentralized institutions. Most political parties do not even maintain data on their women membership and few women are granted tickets for elections (Shamim & Kumari, 2002). Since politics is traditionally a male domain and all financial, economic, commercial and political negotiations conducted outside the home are by males, Nigerian women have very limited access to decision-making process, and they have a severe lack of access to and control over financial resources. This effectively reduces women's chances of contesting elections. Factors and issues of women marginalization and low participation in political leadership and decision making have been attracting a lot of attention from scholars. Although women and men have different biological and physiological make-up, women may share common features with men in terms of educational qualifications, socio-economic status and occupation, among others. Yet, they are marginalised in virtually all spheres of public life. In emerging democracies, there are several factors that prevent women from participating fully in political leadership and governance in all forms of government and political positions/offices.

Some of the factors include but are not limited to the following:

1. Obnoxious socio-cultural practices such as widowhood practices, female genital mutilation (FGM), restrictive religious practices (as observed in the Northern geo-political zone), and purdah system (observed in the northern part of the country). Many of these socio-cultural practices create barriers to women empowerment and gender equality, thereby placing a clearly greater burden on women. The shrouding different exclusions and deprivations faced by women in cultural and traditional beliefs often deprive them access to information, education and wealth-creating assets, such as land, capital (including credit facilities), labour, and entrepreneurial skills (Aina, 2012). These restrictions created by socio-cultural practices can be blamed on the poor participation of women in politics and organizational decision-making processes.
2. Dehumanizing treatment of widows, wife-battering and other subjugating tendencies that can eventually make a woman to lose self-confidence. Such practices keep women 'silent' in the public sphere and also private domain (Aina, 2012).
3. Stereotypical constraints against women in striving to attain political and organisational leadership roles to the top (Okafor, Fagbemi & Hassan, 2011).
4. Exclusion of girls from obtaining their share of family inheritance (this is common in the South-East of Nigeria). In almost all the states of the federation, women have no right over land and landed property as they cannot, under customary laws, inherit land/landed property, neither directly from their fathers nor from their husbands (Aina, 2012).
5. The traditional role of women and the girl-child in carrying out household chores, which often leaves them with little or no time for formal education and self-development.
6. Poor access to education and scholarship facilities in various professions: These restrictions also affect women's access to education and professions, which also limits their capacity to compete effectively with their male counterparts in the labour market for lucrative and more fulfilling jobs (Aina, 2012).
7. Patriarchal settings in African family societies: The low status of the Nigerian women is generally reproduced by the culture of male supremacy inherent in local traditions and cultures, including religious idiosyncrasies (Aina, 2012).
8. Crimes and corruption prevalent in emerging democracies do not provide favourable environment for women leaders to play their roles. Women may also be in less powerful positions to challenge corruption when it occurs. Alternatively, they may face gendered forms of corruption, such as the demand for sex in return for particular services or resources.
9. High rate of maternal mortality: The Nigerian health sector is plagued by a number of problems including mal-distribution of health facilities, poor management of the health systems, poor referral systems and the neglect of the rural areas, where a larger proportion of the population resides, especially women and children (Odebiyi, Aina & Raimi cited in Okafor and Akokuwuebe, 2015). Aina, Adewuyi, et al., 2002). The issue of women's health did not attract much attention both in health policies and in health research until recent times, when maternal mortality ratio (MMR) is 545 per 100,000 live births (Aina, 2012). For a long time, health research, especially in the area of maternal and child health in Nigeria, focused more on child health to the neglect of the woman's health. Even when the health of the woman is targeted, it remains at the level of reproductive health, with particular emphasis on family planning.
10. Non-extension of equal rights to all citizens, especially women, because they are seen as second-hand citizens in some parts of the country. In such cases, they are not allowed to participate in anything even at the grassroots levels. Women are made to see that their permanent position which they could occupy fully is in the kitchen. The above problems often contribute to the ability of many women in emerging democracies to acquire the knowledge and skills which will make them realise their rights and inspire in them the confidence necessary for leadership positions. The situation is made even more difficult by the fact that the girl-child is usually prepared for a second place position right from the home where the focus of her training is on how to be a good wife, a good mother and a good home-maker. Consequently, women are hardly equipped with public leadership tools, especially in the areas of education and social exposure. Emergence into public leadership position by Nigerian women is just as tough in Nigeria as it is in any nation in the same league. The situation, therefore, will enable women to explore their full potential so as to be able to play leadership roles, thereby contributing their parts to their countries' socio-economic development and nation building.

### **III. CONCLUSION**

Women participation in Politics has been dated back to pre colonial and colonial period in Nigeria and is quite within very minute in number. The rate at which women participate in politics and governance has been increasing most especially after the 1960 Independence when they have been actively involved and contributed to political development in Nigeria. The fact that women constitute half of Nigeria's population whose contribution are very essential and largely needful but the under representation of women has undermined fundamental concept of Nigeria's democratic form of governance which assumes that participation and representation in all areas and level of political life will be equally available to women. The hope for increased



women participation in governance will be brighten if Nigerian political environment encourages women with favorable cultural norm and liberal political policy.

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