

## STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT OF GENDER PROBLEMS IN NIGERIA

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### **Abstract**

*The paper discusses the gender problems in Nigeria. It tries to explain the problem inherent in the exclusion of women folk in the Nigerian political system in the democratic dispensation and economic development of the nation. The paper unraveled the issue of marginalization and discrimination and went on to analyze the percentage of women that have held political positions in different administrations in Nigeria. It came up with the view that only Jonathan Goodluck administration that favoured women in Nigeria. The paper was of the opinion that it is because of this gender problem that the United Nations in 1975 declared it the international year for women, supported by Beijing affirmative support. In conclusion, the paper stated that the women if given their rightful place in politics could rise to the top like other women in advanced countries of the world. The paper gave a way forward which among others, is that the government of Nigeria should give more support to the National women strategy for the well being of the women.*

**Keyword:** *Nigeria, Gender, discrimination, political exclusion, affirmative declaration.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Gender issues have taken a very prominent place in Nigerian democratic system particularly since the third republic 1999 till date. Most past regimes in Nigeria were confronted with this problem of how to handle this issue in a manner to show their concern

about it. The 1999 constitution prohibits discrimination on the ground of sex, but that notwithstanding some customary and religious laws affirm the restriction of women's rights. A typical example is the case in the Bible 1 Cor. 11:8-9, Gen. 3:16 where women are made subjects to men; Sharia also imposes some restriction on women. The issue of Gender has become very prominent and influential everywhere both in Nigeria and other parts of the world today following the declaration of 1975 as the international women's year. The 15<sup>th</sup> of October every year is declared an international day for rural women to be honoured. Olabisi (1999) was of the view that the cosmic preference accorded to the male folk is responsible for the marginalization of women in Nigeria. The commonplace is that unless a woman delivers a male child, it is believed that she has not fully arrived. This view places women in a low pedestal than men and thus restricts them from participating in some socio economic activities.

Some have argued that the seed of gender was sown by the colonial masters. The colonial masters introduced half baked education in Nigeria, which was mainly to serve specific issues and interest based on their need to satisfy certain colonial demands for socio economic activities and for work force. When the colonial masters left, the African leaders who inherited powers continued on that same level whereby certain jobs such as white collar ones were exclusively reserved for men and the women were asked to go to the kitchen and take care of their families. Only very few women as at that time were admitted into schools and colleges (Stacey, 1993 and Omolewa 2002).

Despite the level of education attained, maturity and development in Nigeria, the majority of Nigerians do not see women as mature and qualified to handle serious elective positions. Many factors still restrain them from being qualified to handle such positions as governors and presidents. No wonder all through the years of military administrations in Nigeria, the military did not see any woman qualified to handle important positions. Even as Nigeria returned to democratic rule, the same stigmatization and marginalization continued. For example in 1999, 2003, 2007 and 2011, only 3%, 4%, 6% and less than 20% respectively found themselves in contestable positions (Makama, 2013).

In Nigeria, there is a National Gender policy that tries to empower women and Government from time to time to make commitment to eliminate discrimination and oppression against women folk. Although, there was a bill aimed at abolishing all forms of discrimination against women in Nigeria and other related matters which was presented in the mid-2000s to the national Assembly but was not passed. The Bill tends to prevent all forms of discriminatory act against women. Though the Bill was not passed, but Nigerian Government ratified the convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against women in 1985, and the optional protocol in 2004 (UN Treaty collection 2011). Nigeria also ratified the protocol to the African charter on human and peoples rights on the rights of women in Africa in 2005 (African Union (2010). Recently also, the House of Representatives passed the violence against persons prohibition bill, which aimed at eliminating cases of gender based violence including a more comprehensive definition of rape (Osefam 2013).

In an effort to safeguard the rights of women in our society, the United Nations in 1975 declared that year as the international year for women and the world conference was held in Belgium where scholars and participants deliberated on the plight of women as well as their empowerment in the contemporary society. All these underscore the importance of Gender issues just as political issues are important in Nigeria. To assess the importance

and performance of any government in Nigeria, gender issue is seriously put in to consideration. This has made it imperative to consider the level and the percentage of women participation and involvement in leadership and governance. Also, the United Nations target for 30% minimum female representation in National parliament has been in place for more than a decade. There, has been a clarion call and demand across the world that women be granted at least 30% political right across the countries (UNIFEM 2002).

The independent National Electoral commission (INEC) in collaboration with UNDP, DGD, supported by the EU, DFID, CIDA, KOICA have developed a framework for the implementation of at least 35% Affirmative action on women's advancement and representation in democratic governance in Nigeria (Udodinma Okoronkwo 2013). There is a law in place in Nigeria that forbids the dismissal of pregnant women from office. So there are many laws in place in Nigeria to protect the interests of women. All these are serious evidences indicating the seriousness of the issue of gender in Nigeria.

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF ANALYSIS**

This feminism theory is based on ground that the world is the men's own. This is the reason why they occupied and dominated all aspects of the reigns of life. It is only very few women who by a stroke of luck are able to get to the top. It is only very few women who tries to get to the top of their career in politics. Most feminist argued that this was the reason why men dominated all aspects of life. The theory argued that men dominance has made it possible for the states to be aggressive and favourably disposed towards conflict and terrorism. This theory was of the opinion that because men dominate the whole aspect of politics and administration, it has produced men oriented biases. They believe that women are there to harmonise issues and make a very favourable contribution to the political process.

The United Nation's report (1990) stated that fewer than 12 percent of the world's parliamentarians are female and thus indicating underrepresentation of women in the total world's parliamentarians. Moreover, it went on to state that only a very small minority of ambassadors to the United Nations are females.

Most Feminists like Francis (1998), rejects the view of biological determinism. Inorderwords, they do not agree that gender differences are biologically determined; they see it as socially constructed and pushed forward by the type of environment we belong to; they believe that there is no significant difference between males and females. In order words, women can contribute in the same way as do men with equal capability. It is only the political, economic and social factors that block women from getting to the top of their positions as do men. According to Francis (1998), the list of women who have held leadership positions includes Indira Gandhi of India, Golda Meir of Isreal, and Margaret Thatcher of Great Britain.

Perhaps, in corroboration of the work of fiancé Jodi (1992), so many women in the developing world have equally contributed greatly to Nation building. However, since women have contributed greatly to nation building, they should be given equal participation like their male counter part. They should not be discriminated, because of sex or gender.

### **THE LEVEL OF WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN GOVERNMENT**

Over the years, some traditional beliefs have made it necessary to discriminate against women in Government, but it is gradually changing in contemporary times. Today, there

has been attempt to increase the role of the Nigerian women in Government. Considering the immense role they have to play in politics. During the colonial period, women contributed to decolonization, notably the Aba women riot of 1928/29 where they fought the colonial masters boldly. But inspite of their contribution to the anti-colonial struggle, they have been marginalized in the present dispensation. During the first republic of Belewa 1960-till the end of that administration, no woman was appointed to the federal cabinet. In the National parliament there were only two women out of 348 seats, representing only 0.6% (AjayiUkeje 1998:170).

During the military regimes, starting from Aguyi Ironsi (1966) through Yakubu Gowon (1966-1975), Murtala/Obasanjo regime of (1975-1979) to Buhari/Idiagbon (1983-1985), there was no woman in their administrations. In the armed forces ruling council which is the highest ruling body, there was no single woman. It was only in the regime of Babangida (1985-1993) that a very insignificant number of women were accorded recognition. During the transition programme set up by the then regime, only (3.3%) women out of 91 members were appointed. This showed that the military regimes in Nigeria never saw or identified any capabilities in women and never realized that women could achieve something important in their administrations. The reason may not be different from the traditional belief that women's place is in the kitchen and not in governance or politics. Perhaps, this may be an official reflection on the limit of affirmative action and appointment as against the election of women into political positions (Omotola 2007:39-41).

The reasons for this may not be farfetched. The nature and pattern of Nigerian political campaigns and processes may be one of the discouraging factors. Sometimes, you find out that meetings are held very late in the Night. Some of the political opponents are murdered, if they do not go with heavy thugs. Some equally patronize the native doctors or employ their services. Sometimes equally, the politicians sleep outside their homes and even some get themselves initiated into one cult or the other, these factors and conditions make it difficult for women to cope in this kind of politics. The 'under-rated condition and fear nature' should be seen as a product of the social condition, religious and cultural indoctrination of women, which have made them believe that politics is mainly for the men folk. However, the negative nature of politics, violence, rigging, murder and arson are the bedrock of competitive politics, mostly, in Africa and in other developing nations. Women who are always regarded as the weaker sex, cannot, therefore be reasonable to submit that the fear of politics as a dirty game by other women will only consolidate feminine disqualification and exclusion from politics (Ajayi 2007).

With regard to the ugly character politics in Nigeria and other parts of the world, most women who seriously take part in politics inspite of these ugly conditions are regarded as harlots even by their fellow women folk. Political meetings take place in the night and in the Hotels and by our traditional belief, women are not expected to leave their homes and husbands at those odd hours. In Nigeria, female politicians are regarded as dangerous, dubious and immoral. Popular opinion has revealed that the violence against women aspirants and voters who have been kidnapped or beaten up, sexually assaulted and shot at is carried out in order to deter them from participating in elections.

The most dangerous factor that inhibits women from going into politics is the huge financial involvement. For example, to register for the position of presidency is above (₦10,000,000) ten million, that of the Governorship is about (₦500,000) five hundred thousand naira, the senate is about two hundred and fifty thousand naira, (₦250,000),

house of representative is about (₦150,000), one hundred and fifty thousand naira, the state assembly is about (₦100,000), one hundred thousand naira etc how many women on their own could afford this huge sum of money, politics in Nigeria is highly monetized and expensive. After registering with this huge sum of money, they will also need to settle some political leaders and spend some money to organize voters and other logistics.

### **REASONS WHY WOMEN ARE DISCRIMINATED**

One of the major reasons why women were marginalized is the cultural bearing. Most cultures do not believe that women should have equal right with men. It is a taboo for a woman to sit side by side with a man drinking wine. The women folk know that they have to bend down or stoop low before they can drink. Some churches do not believe that women should enter the sanctuary while they are in their monthly period. Several reasons advanced by Omotala (2007) include the constitutional inadequacies that no special provisions were made to ensure gender equality with only a very few un-serious ones, such as the non discrimination on the basis of sex, the general lack of political leadership by the women, harmful traditional practices such as humiliating widowhood rites, taboos against acquisition of property and exclusion from decision making in the family or community.

Also among other reasons, are the low level of education of women, political instability, religious belief, weak financial base and the masculine nature of politics which tends to promote and sustain inadequate party interest in women issues (Olojede 1999/2004) Agina-Ude 2003, Adeleke 2014, Adereti 2005, Lewu 2005).

And again, there are other serious cultural factors that need to be mentioned. In Nigeria and most third world Nations, women are regarded as the property of men. This very factor is supported and reinforced by both Christian and Islamic religions. Both religions preach that women should be submissive to their men or husbands, take care of their homes, which makes it mandatory for the first assignment of a women in a home is the kitchen and to bear children and thus anything short of this makes a woman to be disobedient and non-submissive. This condition characteristic of Islamic religion is more pronounced in the Northern part of Nigeria where the women who are regarded as the weaker sex operate and stay in what they called "purdah". This is a situation where by women and or wives are told to operate a particular method of dressing in a flowing gown that covers them from the head to their legs. They are told to cover even their faces and should not be allowed to walk freely outside their homes. Perhaps, this is hoped will prevent them from sleeping with other men outside matrimony. The question that rightly comes to mind is that, does restriction on moving freely outside the homes prevent immorality and infidelity? Anybody who has decided what he or she wants to do, can always find stratagem of doing it irrespective of what the law says or whether somebody is watching him or not.

### **EQUITY IN SOCIO ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES**

Most women in positions of authority believe that what they are fighting for is equity and not equality. Most of them were of the opinion that never a time men prevented them from rising to any positions of authority or deprived them the right to get into politics rather, it is the women themselves who are not ready to take their destiny in their own hands to get to where they want to be. Some of them believe that in any contest between them and men, they should be given priority simply because they are the weaker sex. Life does not make room for anybody that is weak. The world is opened to anybody who is ready to fight for

it. 'Life is survival of the fittest'. The National Woman Strategy 2007 addresses quite a number of issues including the need to increase female labour force participation, closing the gender pay gap, supporting female entrepreneurs, ensuring women and girls full potential in the educational system, providing child care and other supports to enable women to engage in the labour market and reducing the number of women experiencing poverty. This strategy did not state that women should not compete with their men's folk. In most advanced countries of the world where some women had risen to the top of their career, such as Margaret Thatcher of Britain, Hilary Clinton of America, they took time and contested with the men and got to the top.

With the launch of this strategy, women's labour market participation in Ireland continued to grow and it approach the EIPS target of 60 percent for the period (National women's strategy 2010 progress report) According to this report, the objectives and actions contained in the strategy were grouped under the following: Equalising socio-economic opportunity for women, Ensuring the well-being of women, and engaging women as equal and active citizens, so women should therefore buckle up and do what every other person is doing instead of waiting for man to come down from heaven, which has stopped long ago.

During the democratic regime of Obasanjo's administration that supposed to respect the issue of gender, in the senate there were only 4.6% women out of 109 members. The House of Representatives which was composed of 360 seats had only 13 women which is 3.6%. In the governorship position, there was no woman except the deputy governor of Lagos state who was impeached before her tenure expired.

In the 4<sup>th</sup> republic of Jonathan administration which was said made serious impact in this area, out of 40 ministers, 13 were women. This affirmative action stipulates 30% women representations, while the wife of former president Jonathan's campaign led to increased number of 35%. His government also appointed more women in the cabinet positions more than those before him. The former President Olusegun Obasanjo appointed only nine women ministers; his successor late Yardua had only seven women ministers. (Yemi Ajayi and Ahamefule Ogbu Thursday, 17 July 2011).

## **INFLUENCE OF GENDER IN THE UPKEEP OF HOMES**

It is axiomatic to say that most women are fond of quoting this aspect of the Bible which says that, "any man who can not take care of his home is worst than an infidel". Perhaps, the problem inherent in this assertion is how one can lay the burden of the up keep of the home on man when women are agitating for gender in equality. Worse still, this equality was supported by the international agreed affirmative action of 1985 in Nairobi, and 1995 Beijing United Nations Declaration and 1999 convention on the elimination of all forms of Discrimination against women (CEDAW) on gender equality to the political process. Also, the National women strategy 2007-2016 which tries to monitor the key government departments, relevant agencies and social partners including the national women's council that meet regularly to ensure that these laws are carried out to the latter.

Ideally, if the women avowedly claim of gender equality becomes the order of the day, there is no need to hand over a bigger responsibility of home up keep to the man, since the two have become equal, responsibility should be equally divided. Thus, it may be needless to talk about the weaker sex? Where the two have become equal, as it is said what "man can do, the woman can do it better". From this view point, women will be at liberty to contribute in the same way as do men with equal capacity.

## **CONCLUSION**

Today, the issue of gender equality and or discrimination is what occupies most front pages in many Nigerian Newspapers. The common opinion is that in Nigeria women have not been rightfully given their proper place in government while even in some families, male children are considered more important than the females hence attention is mostly given to the males than the females. Perhaps, the ugly revelation is that the women have been historically reduced, despite their age and culture. They have in many occasions been seen as the culturally deficient sex and have become unsavory to man.

But on the other hand, those who claim that women are marginalized and segregated or discriminated failed to understand that the constitution of Nigeria provides for both freedom of assembly and association. At elections in Nigeria, both women and men have the same right to vote and be voted for in Nigeria. The employed women in Nigeria are entitled to maternity leave for twelve weeks at the state level and up to four months at the National level and during this time, they are entitle to receive 100% of their wages and other financial benefits from their employer.

Importantly thing here is that there is a law in Nigeria that forbids pregnant women from being dismissed from service. There is no law in Nigeria that discriminates against certain persons from entering into certain jobs or specifically preventing women from taking certain jobs. There is equally no law establishing differences in salary scale, which makes it possible for males to receive higher salary than females.

However, in Nigeria, we have certain laws meant to protect women from being molested or maltreated. For example, rape is punishable with fines and 10 years to life imprisonment. Anybody who decides to capitalize on the women weakness to have unlawful carnal knowledge of them without their consent, section 282(1) of the penal code provides that a man is said to commit rape if he has sexual intercourse with a woman in any of the following circumstances: (a) against her will (b) without her consent (c) with her consent or by putting her into fear of death or hurt. The implication of these developments is that gender issues have become an integral part of Nigeria's working relation and life style. Matters relating to women often feature very prominently even in the labour and industrial relations system and discussion. In Nigeria, women constitute a substantial proportion of the total population and this makes it very imperative for their issues to be taken seriously and critically. This was part of the reasons why the world body (U.N.O) in 1975-85 declared the women day. All these gathered together were meant to direct attention to gender issues in the Nigeria society.

## **THE WAY FORWARD**

However, to settle the gender question in Nigeria and to remove the barrier encountered in dealing with this matter, women should be seriously and vigorously involved in decision making positions in all sectors and this should be made a prerequisite specifically for elective positions in our democracy. Even though at elections, there has been no restriction on women occupying any positions, the registration levy for women should be reduced and certain positions earmarked for women. This will however stimulate the interests and enthusiasm of women to take up the task of politics actively.

Moreover, the National women's strategy meant for the well-being of women should be given greater support by the government. It will help to ensure not only the well-

being of women but engage many of them as equal and active citizens in the society hence increase and equalize the socio-economic opportunities for women.

Also, the government should make sure the affirmative action which stipulates 30% women representation in government should be adhered to and made compulsory. According to Cusamotu (2008), the strategic role which women can play in the society includes the macroeconomic goal of the administration, strategic role of National building etc and that women are more vibrant, more prudent and less corrupt.

Finally, our leaders should encourage women professional groups such as women in Nigeria (WIN), women Research and Documentation centre (WORDOC) etc. Some of these women groups if encouraged can mobilize their women group in different areas to rise up to certain challenges and many a time some have been found doing well.

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