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SCALING INCLEMENT HURDLES IN THE SHADOW OF MEN: THE IMPERATIVE OF WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The issue of women empowerment in development is a major national and international policy discourse. This paper examines the gendered nature of our society as it affects women empowerment. The role women play in the civil society, their limitations and some efforts of the previous governments, in alleviating these problems are examined. It also attempts to highlight a number of international declarations and agreements concerning women's rights to equal status in many aspect of life. The paper notes that the nation has either unconsciously or logistically marginalized a formidable part of our population to our own peril. The paper critically identifies major obstacles affecting women empowerment in political, social and economic advancement as well as in the planning and implementation of gender programmes in our society. It illustrates that though there has been an increase in the number of women in position of leadership since 1999, the number of women in politics compared to men is just 7%. In addressing these problems, the paper explains the need to adopt several identified opportunities to women for integration in national political development. The paper however, concludes that there must be serious challenges to create full citizenship for women and responsive economic, social and political democracy for all and it is expected that eyes will be opened and drummed home to use to potential force that women represent in nation building.

Keywords: Female, Gender Stereotype, Political Empowerment, Women Empowerment,

1. INTRODUCTION

Nigerian women have continued to bear the burden of actions taken by their male counterparts who have been dominating the socio-economic and government at every level. Thus, in Nigeria, as in other countries, gender has remained a burning issue (Akande 2002, Afonja 2002, Sotonade 2003, Sotonade 2004). Participatory governance institutions are growing in scope and scale. Citizens have far greater opportunities to get their opinions heard and influence decisions. But a question that recurs in this work is this: Will this contribute to changing the status quo for those who have historically been marginalized politically and economically, and who continue to face potent form of discrimination—women?

Since the transition to democratic rule in Nigeria in 1999, there have been various; campaigns, both by governments and different organizations, both locally and internationally, - in the mobilization of more women participation, but despite the progress made in the last century, there are still few women leaders. It is appalling to note that the right of every citizen of Nigeria, women inclusive, to vote and to be voted for clearly stated in the Sections 40, 42(1), 77(1 & 2) of 1999 Constitution of Federal Republic of Nigeria has been skewed against the women (FGN, 1999). For example, data from the 2007 election show that only less than 10 percent of the elected Senate are women, less than 10 per cent of the House of Representatives are women, and no women governors nor president.

The above situation is not a unique Nigerian issue; it is a global and historic phenomenon, and World studies vividly illustrate the under-representation of women in Parliament (World Economic Forum, 2005). Emerging findings show that though there has been increased number in women in position of leadership since 1999, the

affirmative action of 35% is yet to be achieved, and women in politics are yet to be fully answerable to women and in their effectiveness in impacting on fellow women. This calls for a rethink; as the 2011 election has been concluded and 2015 general election is fast approaching, it is pertinent to take stock and appraise the participation of women in politics in Nigeria.

From the foregoing, the following questions are germane: why is it that, in 2011, more than a decade after the return to democratic rule in Nigeria, there remains a need to assert the right of women's participation? This is a question we need to ponder, and consider why we still need to strategize on measures to ensure that this right is not only protected and promoted but the dividends in the form of women active involvement in political and public life are manifested. What have been the issues? This work reviews various attempts at encouraging more women participation in politics, women in key positions, the challenges faced and suggested way forward.

Using descriptive statistics from National and International Published data, the dimension of women political empowerment in form of women political participation in Nigeria will be measured using data on the number of seats in senate held by women, women legislative positions, female deputy Governors, female Governors, and President in Nigeria. The paper concludes with suggested strategies on measures to ensure that women do not only participate in politics but also enjoy the dividends, in form of women activities and visibility, and also make certain that women's voice are not only heard in public life but also manifested.

What is wrong with having a female as an elected governor of a state or even as the president of the nation? Why is it that our ministerial cabinets are only garnished with few women? The answer is partly due to the fact that our women have not acquired the power to put them in such positions of great responsibilities. But once we successfully remove the impediments to their self-actualization, they will be conspicuously present in places that matter.

2. CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

Empowerment is fundamentally about power. It is about transforming society through collective as well as more individual processes. It is about gaining greater control over our lives. Infusing the empowerment agenda with a strong emphasis on social justice focuses attention on transforming power relations for a more just society for all. This is a process in which state actors play an essential part in guaranteeing and protecting rights and promoting greater social, political and economic equality, at the same time as enabling citizens and communities to have a say in decisions that affect their lives (Mike and Monica, 2012).

By gender stereotyping, we mean thinking about people primarily in terms of gender group membership, treating women and men as interchangeable members of the category female or male (Boriga and Fiske, 1995). Preconceived notions about women and men abound and people subscribe to traditional stereotypes that characterize women as submissive, talkative, emotional, easily moved to tears, etc. Men, on the other hand, are assumed competent, active, logical, independent etc. these stereotypes tend to reflect men and women as belonging to opposite end of popular adjective in which men have desirable qualities while women have undesirable ones. Such category - based thinking tends to exaggerate similarities within women thereby minimizing their individually, and exaggerates differences between men and women. They also tend to ignore situational, individual and cultural variations in the behaviour of people. This is because they tend to assume that there is a high probability that females will exhibit certain traits while males will exhibit the opposite traits. Societal norms and stereotypes also function as traditional ideology that relegates women to housewife roles while promoting men as actors, providers and final authority.

It is instructive to note that gender is not synonymous with women, nor is it a zero-sum game implying loss for men; rather, it refers to both women and men, and to their status, relative to each other. Gender equality refers to that stage of human social development at which "the rights, responsibilities and opportunities of individuals will not be determined by the fact of being born male or female". In other words, it is a stage when both men and women realize their full potential. The gender factor is no longer to be only a supplement to development but central to the practice of development. As a result of the Beijing conference, and the many years of work leading up to it, more than 100 countries announced new initiatives to improve the status of women. In 2000 and 2010 the follow-up Beijing conferences further strengthened the application of the mainstreaming concept, and used it to highlight the need for more progress in reaching equality worldwide.

Several studies have examined attitudes towards sex roles, women and other related constructs. Findings generally reflect sex differences in attitudes towards women, with males showing more negative attitudes than female (e.g. Mothered, 1995; Haddock and Zanna, 1994; Thomson, Basu and Reinitz, 1995). Personal factors such as age, religion and education, have also been found to be related to attitudes towards women. A personality variable that has been consistently linked to sex role attitudes is authoritarianism. Results have shown that authoritarian men hold negative views about women, (Haddock and Zanna, 1994). This is not surprising, since traditional attitudes are related to rigidity as measured by authoritarianism, religious and conservative attitudes.

Some researchers have suggested that men's attitudes towards women have been ambivalent. Reflecting male desires for dominance and intimacy. Gilke and Fiske (1996) have developed a scale that represents opposite evaluative orientations towards women-hostile and benevolent sexism. Hostile sexism, which refers to sexist antipathy towards women, based on an ideology of male dominance, superiority and hostile sexuality correlates significantly with negative attitudes and stereotypes about women. Benevolent sexism refers to an attitude that includes protectiveness toward women, positive valence stereotypes of women and a desire for intimacy, and is related to positive attitudes and stereotypes about women.

In the area of women and political leadership, it can be stated as emphasized in previous studies (Udegbe, 1995, 1996). The gendered nature of political leadership in Nigeria, relates to the low representation of women in political offices. In the last five decades, the proportion of women occupying public offices at the Federal, State and Local Government levels have been relatively low, hovering around 7%. Appointments to the offices have been characterized, and motivated by tokenism; perhaps as a response to the global call for gender equality in access to power. The few women in these positions find themselves working in groups that are in essence predominantly male, thus reinforcing the sense of marginality in the women leaders and Nigerian women in general. The women realizing that they are "token female leaders" with no well defined consistency may experience a sense of lack of control, heightened vulnerability and dependence on the high authority that appointed them. Further, they are also likely to face double marginality 'different' and privileged.

The second issue relates to democracy (Mama, 1993, Udegbe, 1995). A concept which ordinary women, but is unable to do so because it is dominated by a clique of women whose actions of their own. This phenomenon is gradually becoming legitimized in Nigeria, as seen in gender stereotypes will be strongly reinforced and constructive approaches to issues of gender and leadership will continue to be trivialized. Furthermore, a retrogressive pathway will be created in global advances made in gender and leadership because this clique of women provides a disabling environment for effective integration of women into the political power structure in Nigeria.

3. THE PRESENT STATUS OF WOMEN AND EFFORTS OF PAST GOVERNMENTS ON WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

Looking at the role of women currently play globally, the roles assigned to women can be clearly differentiated from those assigned to men, but the degree of gender differentiation in roles varies from one country to another, this solely depends on their social and cultural heritages and sometimes economic value. In countries around the world, women are outnumbered by 4 to 1 in legislatures; at mid-year 2009, only 17 heads of state or government were women. Even if the present accelerated rate of increase in women's representation continues as compared to previous decades, we are still a long way from reaching the "parity zone" of 40-60 percent; thus gender equality in democratic governance continues to be extremely limited (Ezeilo, 2010). It is apparent that countries have a lot to undertake in addressing this imbalance and that this work is an attempt to put this in perspective.

The past three decades have witnessed a steadily increasing awareness of the need to empower women through measures to increase social, economic and political equity, and broader access to fundamental human rights, improvements in nutrition, basic health and education. Along with awareness of the subordinate status of women has come the concept of gender as an overarching socio-cultural variable, seen in relation to other factors, such as race, class, age and ethnicity.

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God, created women to lead, as against their claims, which follows when they actually lead. Nature and man independently put man inside women. Male is in female and even lad is in lady.

Nigerian women play subsidiary roles, always trailing and always lagging behind. They are rarely found in leadership positions because they are seriously considered in the power equation. Hence, they under-represented in decision-making positions. This cripples them and makes them suffer untold hardship because they are part of the decisions that directly affect them (Asubiojo; 1997). Thus, it is believed that Nigerian women are being repressed. They are passive citizens who expected to only react to issues but not to initiate them. They act as anchors for men, just props to help the men perform their own roles. Their essential human creative powers, are stunted by facing them to go into professions that would only remind them of their secondary role in the society.

Actually, for decades after Nigeria's independence, there are still fear that increased participation of women in governance is threatened by practices already by other democracies. With widespread under-representation of women in the current democratic dispensation, women have more to show for their numeric strength as regards key positions across all levels of government. Instead, more women, are still being sidelines in both elective and political appointments. Under this democratic dispensation, there are still only few women senators and some governors prefer female as their deputy. Representation at the state and local government levels did not fair any better. In all the 36 states, there are few female members of the House of Assembly. There are 774 local government areas in the federation and yet there are only a handful of women and only three (female) chairmen. Yet the local government is the nearest to the people where women are more visible since they are more active as community leaders and workers.

Therefore, the issue of women empowerment in democratic dispensation in Nigeria is really an issue of the status of women as development takes place. How have the issues been addressed? What way has it taken? What progress has been made so far? Finally, in what direction should the issue of the women empowerment and the Nigeria culture move, as we experience democracy in Nigeria? Although there has been improvement in the position of women, but still exist e.g. interior status ranges from failure to recognize the economic value of their labour. There is sexual harassment in the streets, offices, discriminations and violence against them, while society is largely looking down upon them as irresponsible loose women. Apart from the fact that more women have access to education, there is increased gender awareness brought about by global and national women's movements. To some extent, these have contributed to increased representation of women in our organizations.

4. ANALYZING WOMEN POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN NIGERIA

Table 1: Women Political Representation in Nigeria (1979-2011)

Year of Election	House of Assembly				House of Representatives			Senate				Governorship			Presidency		
	No. of Elected Women	No. of Elected Members	% Of Women	% Of Women	No. of Elected Women	No. of Elected Members	% Of Women	No. of Elected Women	No. of Elected Members	% Of Women	% Of Women	No. of Elected Women	No. of Elected Members	% Of Women	No. of Elected Women	No. of Elected Members	% Of Women
1979	-	-	-		11	445	2.47	1	57	1.75	-	-	19	0	-	1	0
1985	27	1172	2.30		14	589	2.38	1	91	1.10	-	-	21	0	-	1	0
1993	-	-	-		20	360	5.56	9	109	8.25	-	-	36	0	-	0	0
1999	12	990	1.21		12	360	3.33	3	109	2.75	-	-	36	0	-	1	0
2003	38	990	3.84		21	360	5.83	3	109	2.75	-	-	36	0	-	1	0
2007	54	990	5.45		27	360	7.5	9	109	8.25	-	-	36	0	-	1	0
2011	25	990	2.53		12	360	3.33	7	109	6.42	-	-	36	0	-	1	0

Sources: Authors' compilation from Ezeilo (2010) and INEC Publications (2011).

From the table above, percentage of women in the of house of assembly was 2.30% in 1985 out of 1172; however this figure decreased to 1.21% in 1999 out of 990 and increased thereafter to 3.84% of 990 and 5.45% of 990 respectively in 2003 and 2007. Also, the figure further decreased to 2.53% of 990 in 2011. For the House of representatives: percentage of women elected were 2.47% out of 445 in 1979, decreased to 2.38% out of 589 in 1985, increased to 5.56% out of 360 in 1993, decreased to 3.33% out of 360 in 1999, and increased thereafter

to 5.85% and 7.5% out of 360 members in 2003, 2007 respectively. In 2011 this number decreased to 12 out of 360, accounting for 3.33%. In 1979 and 1985 only one woman was elected to the senate out of 57 and 91 respectively; however, this figure increased to 9 out of 109 in 1993, and in 1999 and 2003 it fell to 3 women senators out of 109 members. In 2007 the number of elected women senators increased again to 9 out of 109 members, and 2011 it fell to 7 women out of 109 members, accounting for 6.42%

5.   OPPORTUNITIES OPENED FOR WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

In fact, the issue of the emancipation of the disadvantaged group including women is relatively new in Nigeria. Many governmental and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are sensitizing women on how to claim their rights as full citizens of the nation e.g. Better Life for Rural Women (BLRW), Directorate of Food, Road and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI), Family Support Programme (FSP) and Family Economic and Advancement Programme (FEAP). However, there are various efforts of past governments and there are a number of international declarations and agreements concerning women's rights. It provides for equal pay for work of equal value in 1953, equal political rights in 1954, maternity protection in 1955,
equating in empowerment in 1960, equating in education in 1962 and equal marriage rights in 1964

Some International Conferences on women empowerment with the commencement of their first conference in 1975, second conference in 1980, the third in 1985 and the last one in 1995 in Beijing. However, there are various opportunities opened for women to explore for their advantage. The declaration of 1975 as women's international year and 1975 as women's decade by the United Nations forcefully placed gender issues on the agenda of member nations of the UN. This also marked the beginning of an opening of various opportunities for gender planning. It was during this time that Nigeria started to evolve policies, institution building, programmes and philosophical learning in the area of gender.

Gender equity in recent times has been a major issue in global discourse, as it has been found that women are the catalysts to development strategies focused on improved standard of living and good government that give men and women equal voices in decision-making and policy implementation, good governance and attainment of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Studies have also shown that higher numbers of women in parliament generally contribute to stronger attention to women's issues. Women's political participation is a fundamental prerequisite for gender equality and genuine democracy. It facilitates women's direct engagement in public decision-making and is a means of ensuring better accountability to women.

In Nigeria, we have in the 1999 Constitution, sections 40, 42, 77 (2), NGP (2007), 35% Affirmative Action in Elective and Appointive Positions. In recent years there has been significant progress; more and more women are seeking to transform politics itself, and women's groups are focusing on efforts to increase women's representation on the ballot to reinvigorate political accountability. Today, there are more women in government than ever before. The proportion of women parliamentarians has increased by 8 percent in the decade from 1998 to 2008 to the current global average 18.4 percent, compared to an increase of just 1 percent in the two decades after 1975 (Deme, 2010).

Nigeria opened the opportunity for women by adopting the UN plan for integrating women in development. From there on, several opportunities were opened to women in different aspect of economy and politics as shown below:
(a)   With the assistance of UNDP grant, the involvement of women in agriculture increased. Rural technology project to enable rural women to benefit from modern technology were developed. Solar fish dryers, Garri processing now began to evolve.
(b)   Government to address women's lack of the access credit facility. The United Bank of Africa introduced "Women's Forum" where women met to identify and discuss gender issues relating to finance and banking. This was followed with the funding of people's Bank and Community Banking, which proved useful especially for rural women who are exposed to banking habits.
(c)   Women Development Units (WDU) were created in 1976 to work closely with government and non-governmental agencies to promote development of resources for communities, By 1986 the WDU were upgraded and given responsibility of developing policies, programmes and projects that would improve women's involvement in the development process.

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(d)   In 1989, the National Commission for Women (NCW) was established under the office of the President. This office proved to most significant opportunity for women to articulate their ideas on the future of gender stereotype, equality and national development. There was a branch of Women Commission in each State of the Federation. At both state and national levels (NCW) helped to entrench mainstreaming as well as monitoring and implementation of programmes of sectoral ministries. It also organized training and sensitization workshops for women.

(e)   In the area of education, special efforts are made by government to encourage parents to send their daughters to school. A blueprint on Women's Education was initiated in 1987 and subsequently, an implementation committee was set up. It was concerned about various issues that inhibit women's education and recommending many measures some of which are already implemented. There is a federal government girl's college in each state and more opportunities for women are made at all levels of education in Nigeria.

(f)   In the area of law, reforms have been made to address labour and gender issue. The 1979, 1989 and 1999 Constitutions have now given more room for gender equality before the law. The human rights of Nigerian women are constitutionally guaranteed in our constitution. Such issues as female employment, married civil servants, etc are now reviewed to allow for equity.

Politically, women are free to pursue all aspects of the political process. They could vote and be voted for and more women are involved in the formulation of government policy, and have free rights to active political life and political participation as ministers, commissioners and so on.

With the Nigeria government's ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Women, and the establishment of the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs headed by a cabinet minister, the door is now opened for many opportunities in gender programming. The objective of the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs is to develop policies, prorgammes and projects, which will fully integrate Nigerian women in National Development. The institutional capacity on ground for addressing gender issues shows that even if women do not realize the opportunities opened to them now, they should brace up to do so. Nevertheless, women still face major obstacles in social, economic and political advancement.

6.   IMPEDIMENTS BETWEEN FEMALE AND ACTIVE PARTICIPATION

There are many hurdles in the planning and implementation of gender as they affect women participation in Nigeria. The major obstacles have structural origins; which gives rise to systematic discrimination against women. The principles and rules of the discrimination are embedded in the institutional infrastructure of society, starting with the family. Laws administrative and social practice in our communities form hurdles as discussed below:

* **Customary Law Practices:** In many societies, there is a "dual system" of law, where customary law may operate in the area of personal affairs, marriage and property rights. Since customary law is likely to vary from the society of the country to another, and since the traditional courts and village elders establish convention, it is often impossible to be certain on what is allowed or forbidden under customary law. Often there is no clear distinction with social sanctions legitimizing the subordination of girls and women, such as in allowing genital mutilation, bride price and polygamy.

Social conventions, values, and mores combine to maintain the stereotype of women as kitchen dwellers who are only gatecrashers into spheres outside of their matrimonial homes. Women are socialized from birth to see their place as second to that of men. The birth of a male child is warmly received, to the extent that women often feel that their marriage is not secure until they give birth to male children. Cultural practices are often harmful to women. For example, burial rites in the eastern parts of the country ensure that women remain social outcasts: widows are forced to drink the bath water of their dead husbands as part of the mourning process. Vesico Vaginal Fistula (VVF) results from the early marriage of teenage girls in the north. Victims of these cultural practices cannot participate socially as they are viewed as outcasts.

In the area of women's rights, customary law has an overall tendency to take away rights given under statutory law and the constitution. However, in matters of dispute, the higher courts and statutory law usually take precedence. In the case where the national legal situation of women shows such complexity and internal

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contradiction, there should be advocacy of highlight the provisions accorded in the national constitution and statutory law.

* Administrative Practices: In many instances government departments may explicitly or implicitly maintain gender bias and discriminatory practices which affect programme planning and implementation. These are most serious where there are administrative sanctions, which promote discrimination against girls and women in the provision of services and the distribution of resources. It may be that some of this discrimination originates from the administrative rules arising from discriminatory legislation (even though such legislation might be unconstitutional). It is more likely, however, that discriminatory administrative rules have no basis in statutory law. For example, a government school may have rules to expel any female pupil who becomes pregnant, and to dismiss any unmarried female teacher who becomes pregnant. Very often, such rules are unwritten and are illegal and unconstitutional. They seem to take their inspiration from custom and tradition, even when they are contradictory to statutory provisions and published government policy.

* Social Practices: At the level of the household and the community, there are likely to be endless well established conventions in discriminating against girls and women, especially in the unfair gender division of sometimes even food. In some societies, the girls and women eat last which mean that in poor families they also eat the least, perpetuating their weak physical and malnourished status. The first step programme- strategies is advocacy for ending gender discrimination at the level of family and community, especially in those areas where such discrimination obstacles the well-being of the girl child, and obstructs a mother's effort in providing for her children. Programmes need to challenge situations where government departments operate and sanction gender discriminatory administrative rules.

* Religious Doctrine: Other obstacles have teamed up with the ones earlier explained to work against an increase in the participation of women in governance. Religion is an accomplice in the stereotyping of women and reinforces the barriers that prevent them from participating politically, economically, and socially. For instance, in the northern part of Nigeria, women are held in Purdah in deference to Islam. Only their husbands have unfettered access to them and their movements are restricted to their quarters. They depend entirely on their husbands and families to meet their needs. The conditions of their lives can only be guessed at, as most households subsist below the poverty line. Religion ensures that a significant number of women are barred from participating in politics, either as voters or as aspirants to elective offices, as well as economic activities. Sharia, as being practiced in Zamfara State, for instance, is obviously a drawback to the participation of women in politics. Women don't mix with men in public and separate transportation has been provided to ensure that men and women do not mingle seriously. A serious female politician has to go against this regulation to canvas her views. She keeps late nights, since that it is usual time; most caucus makes their important political decisions. Such women would be lucky if they are not arrested for attempting to use the cover of the night to engage in illicit sexual trade.

* Political Violence and Threats: Another major inhibition to female participation in politics today is the issue of negative acts by some desperate male politician which have forced many women to withdraw into their shell. Unscrupulous men to ensure that their female politicians in a bid to keep them away from the party and other elective positions often employ violence and dirty tactics (WARDC, 2003). The agitation for more politically relevant roles for women in the polity, is viewed as a tea party in our society. Politics is time consuming and demands a great deal of attention. There are caucus meetings, primaries, campaign stumps, and fundraising and infinitum. Participation often requires attending evening meetings. For women without a supportive spouse, it is difficult to juggle traditional roles with an interest in politics. Some women in politics pay a costly price for their careers. The tradeoff may be politics for marriage and marital happiness. Female politicians are often perceived to be divorcees and marital failures.

* Finance as Barrier: Besides the other obvious factors that undermine the involvement of more women in politics is finance. How can a woman in a society like Nigeria go out of her way to lobby others, probably males, for funds? She might as well kiss her political ambition goodbye before she starts. Tax declaration was also another party requirement that proved to be a challenge for some of the aspirants. Many women were not employed in the formal sector and hence had nothing to declare over the years. For those who were not successful in the primaries, many were unable to pay for delegates to vote for them because it involved competing with other wealthier opponents

* Poverty: "In Africa" poverty wears a woman's face- UN's Economic Commission for Africa. A corollary to funding is the stark poverty that confronts Nigerian women. Under stifling economic conditions, women have less access to education, credit information, skills, loans, and health care- all crucial for attaining financial

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independence. The combination of all these factors added to the burdens of child rearing and housekeeping; conspire to keep women off of the social and political scenes. In some cultures in Nigeria, women have no property or inheritance rights. African women are said to own just one percent of the continent's assets. This makes it difficult for them to access loans, as they do not have collateral

7. RECOMMENDED POLICY OPTIONS

One may tend to ask that if all the efforts put in place in the past achieved very little, where do we go from here. Generally, the overriding objective of women empowerment is to ensure that every Nigeria woman is empowered to be able to access the basic gender equality as a means of improving the vulnerability of women in the nation. Wives of political office holders, women in power and government at all levels have to put all hands on deck to ensure that the following are constantly pursued.

(i) There should be conscious efforts on part of government to educate more female since education is a strong liberation weapon. The education of women must reach a far greater strength and the numbers of properly educated women must be increased so many times the present, before the vote would be used to full advantage. It is generally agreed that only the properly informed can make credible choices. Women education, despite its increase is still low compared to the number of males being educated.

(ii) Women with political offices or power should learn to forget the differences in political ideologies of their parties and be ready to reactivate and support dormant women activities with serious surgical operation. All women programme that would enhance women empowerment, should be supported. It is only when women are united that they can be liberated.

(iii) Women must be encouraged to vie for elective positions, initiate lobby groups and form pressure groups at various status/ level and class to make their demands to gain political independence. Women Association and group should be instrumental in helping to protect women integrity, rights etc.

(iv) Women should develop those leadership qualities that stimulate improvement or a complete change in the existing development programmes. They should shed the garb of femininity and take on assertiveness.

(v) Women should be ready to combine masculine and feminine qualities to foster development in improvement. Qualities such as intelligence, persuasive, assertiveness, visible enthusiasm, innovativeness and effective communication skills are all imperative for community development and improvement.

(vi) Women should seek avenue for generation of ideas that would provide solutions to their problems, play from row position in this fourth republic, develop tenacity of purpose for national development and improvement.

(vii) Women should be able to seize the opportunity of their sex and God given bargaining skills in negotiating to win and networking extensively at both formal and informal level for to enhance development and improvement of themselves and the community. They should be able to use their positions as wives of political office holders and women ministers, commissioners, counselors and supervisors and even as mothers of the community to benefit their humble selves and women in general.

(viii) Women must be energized to be vocal, steadfast, and ready to stand against any government policies that are repressive to the development and improvement of women in Nigeria. Any implementory policy designed for development for women should interact with other women and men organizations in order to attain its goals.

(ix) There should no longer be any form of discrimination; especially, the discrimination in the labour market should be checked; while a conducive work environment is created to get the best out of our women. When fully empowered our women would take their rightful position. Thus, apart from being mothers, wives, they become top-level managers, powerful politicians, consultants and a lot more.

8. CONCLUSION

The indispensable role of women and their potentials in accelerating the pace of the political and economic development, with the aim of reducing the miserable consequences of marginalization in Nigeria cannot be over-emphasized. In spite of all potentials, there is a great disparity between the achievements and contributions of men and women to both political and economic activities. The world has failed to realize and accept that women are superior beings and should not be seen as second-class citizens. The state in which women in Nigeria find

themselves today suggests that women must organize to fulfill their dreams. Political development faces a greater challenge than ever before. Women could easily fall back into cynicism or withdrawal. This must not be allowed to happen or else prosperity would not forgive all of us.

Nevertheless, there is a lot of room for improvement through political empowerment for the benefit of all, especially with regards to women in view of women's participation in politics that has been on the increase and public awareness about women's issues has equally been intensified. More women now enter non-traditional fields medicine, law, engineering, science, etc.

In spite of the progress that has been made so far to recognize collective and status of women and their rights to various aspects of life, women are still far from achieving the desired position that should accrue to them in the area of women's political activities. The way forward is to see women as equal partners in progress and remaining barriers such as social, cultural, legal, gender discrimination etc to women's full equality and utilizing their potentials should be removed. Also, the programmes that are drawn up by the women commission must maintain a greater degree of continuity as this has always be the problem of lack of progress in a programme.

On a final note, the nation needs more women leaders, managers, powerful and influential ones who can distinguish themselves in government and politics of the country. It is now a challenge to create full citizenship for women and responsive economic, social and political democracy for all.

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