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# **Women Education and Political Participation: Challenges and Prospects in Nigerian Democracy**

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## **Abstract**

This study examined the Women Education and Political Participation: Challenges and Prospects in Nigerian Democracy. The acquisition of new knowledge in the life of an individual is very crucial to the level the individual will attain in life. It is the same when it comes to the amount of education that women acquired. The more knowledgeable a woman is, the more she is able to dominate her environment. As the world is evolving so is learning. Learning does not end neither does it have limits. As long as a woman is determined, she can learn anything; even to any extent. One of the areas they can apply their knowledge is in the field of politics which hitherto has been seen as male territory. Women must come out and utilize their God-given potentials in politics. Their contributions are very essential which will go a long way in improving the society. Thus, one of the focuses of women education in present the dispensation should be in the area of empowering women in political participation.

**Keywords:** Education, women education, politics, political participation, human rights.

## **Introduction**

Education is a basic tool that is used in promoting societal values. It has become an area of prime importance not only for Government or voluntary agencies but also for individuals, families, and other private participants. As such both the governments, voluntary agencies and individuals (women inclusive) are committing and should continue to commit lots of resources in order to achieve success in the educational enterprises. Fafunwa (1974) defined education as the sum of all the processes by which a child or young adult develops the abilities, attitudes, and other forms of behaviour which are of positive value to the society in which he lives. Being a social institution, education establishes its form from the values of the society where it exists. Education is equally the right “acquisition of values and the knowledge of things which are worthwhile (Peters, 1979). Education possesses exemplify purpose (relevance), potentiality (significance), standards (products), productivity (efficiency) goals (to be achieved), and effectiveness. For this reason, education in all its ramifications is adapted to the needs of the society; and it addresses key issues like dignity of labour, leadership, committed citizenship, industrial harmony, globalization, self-reliance and so on.

Nnoli (2003) as well as Okoh (2007) and Osaat et al (2017) further viewed education as a process, as a product, and as a discipline. As a process, it assists in developing, preserving, and transmitting a people's culture from generation to generation. As a product, it concerns itself with change whether overt or covert, implicit or explicit, which is to be found in the life of the learner. Thus, the product of education is an educated individual who should demonstrate intellectual and moral acumen in improving the society. As a discipline, education comprises a systematic and organized knowledge designed to help both the educator and educated in evaluation and action.

The education of women, especially in the present 21<sup>st</sup> century is very important. As the world is fast advancing, women cannot afford to be backward. They have to key into the present global transformations and be relevant in their societies. Education becomes a major key in actualizing this. More significant is the fact that education should prepare women for leadership positions; be it in politics, economy, or in any other setting. In other words, education should develop the potentials in women and help them in realizing that they can do many things. Hitherto, many have seen politics as a sole territory for men. They believed that women do not have the acumen and strength to withstand the rigours of politics. Irrespective of the fact that some women both in the past and present had/have pulled up some surprises, such as, Elizabeth Peroni of Argentina, Margaret Thatcher, Angela Merkel of Germany, Mrs. Hillary Clinton of America, Queen Amina of Zaria, Mrs. Titilayo Ransom Kuti (Nigeria), Dora Akunyili (Nigeria), Prof. (Mrs.) Grace Alele Williams (Nigeria), Sirleaf Ellen Johnson (Liberia), Dr. (Mrs.) Ngozi Okonjo Iweala (Nigeria) among others.

Many still believe that politics is not for women because they have their God-given duties at home and to take care of children. This assertion may not be wrong tracing back to many centuries ago, perhaps, because of the exegesis of the time and people's approach to life looking at the levels of violence and crimes experienced of recent. However, politics should be for both male and female. The paper embraces 'Barber democratic theory' of 1984, which believes that participatory democracy is an expression of strong democratic principles, rules and regulations and a form of government in which all the people (including women) participate in decision-making and implementation of policies. Barber further asserts that collective participation will build collective interest, a common will, and community action, all of which without doubt gives credence to politics. The theory calls for all in authorities to give women opportunity to contribute their quota in national development. It recognizes the enormous potentials women have which must be well utilized. Women are very special to sit at home or fold arms; hanging their fate in the hands of men. They must come out to play their role, apply their skills and unique potentials to bring about growth and development.

## **Women**

A woman is an adult female human being (Hornsby, 2000). She is different from a young girl or a teenage girl. She is supposed to have crossed the female adolescence stage into adulthood stage. However, some persons include adolescence stage as part of a woman's age. The "adolescence" is viewed as a transitional period between childhood and adulthood which cultural purpose is the preparation of children for adult roles. Some scholars have also said that

one who is pregnant or capable of being pregnant; or one who has put to bed (i.e. has a child or children) is no longer a girl but a woman. Thus, a woman generally, is a grown-up girl.

Also, the scripture in Genesis 2:18 described a woman as a helper to man. When one reads from 21-23 of the same chapter, it is observed that God made woman using a rib from Adam after subjecting him into a deep sleep. She was later be presented to Adam by God who 'hereafter named her "woman" as she was a bone gotten from his bones and a flesh of his. This shows that women are very important. They are helpers who can serve in any capacity such as politics for societal advancement.

In addition, women contribute majorly to the world's population but they receive a small proportion of its opportunities and benefits. The United Nation's report in Enaibe (2012) asserted that one out of three households in the world has women as its breadwinner. This means that many households depend solely on women with regard to their duties or tasks, for the household comprises of men, children and the elderly.

Field in Amadioha (2008:1) analyzed politics as the activity by which an issue is agitated or settled. It can also be seen in terms of three inter-related components namely; activities in which power is gotten and applied through control of institutions; or government's activities in which public issues are discussed and demands made which are expressed through political parties, interests groups, mobs or solitary individuals. It is likewise seen as those activities of the formal institutions of government which make laws, interpret them and carry out the laws. Lasswell in Mark and Sar (2015) further defined politics as who gets what, when and how. It represents reality to a good extent especially in Nigeria. Politics incorporates the allocation of scarce social, economic and cultural resources to individuals, groups, regions and classes. Politics has also been defined as the governing of men and women.

In his book, "The governing of man", the American political scientist Austin Ranney, discusses the relationship between ruler and the ruled. He argues that this relationship is central to political life (Nnoli, 2003). Among academics, politics is often defined as the authoritative allocation of values. Emphasis is placed on how resources are allocated by the system of authorities in society. Pioneered by the American political scientist David Easton, it has an abstract and comprehensive scope that makes it attractive as a possible source of laws of social life which some believe to be as unchanging as the laws of physical life. Politics is equally defined as all activities that are directly or indirectly associated with the emergence, consolidation and use of state power. Okeke (2007) saw politics as a civilizing agent and way of ruling the society without violence.

Therefore, whether defined in terms of man being a political animal or as a process of sharing/allocating things/possessions to people that is who gets what, where and how, the struggle for power; or the authoritative allocation of resources and values, politics has the state as its centerpiece. Women are required to participate in politics as to contribute their quota both in governance through political participation or otherwise for societal development.

### **Women's Place in Global/National Political Perspective.**

The conception of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in 2000 saw an increased discussion on gender equality with three areas emphasized:

- i. Basic human capacity and well-being as measured by education, health and nutrition;
- ii. Access to resources and opportunities, and
- iii. Security (Lim, 2012:5).

At the same time, there were seven main priorities recognized for empowering women:

- i. Strengthen opportunities for post primary education;
- ii. Guarantee reproductive and sexual health and rights;
- iii. Invest in infrastructure to reduce the time burden for women and girls;
- iv. Guarantee women's and girls' inheritance rights;
- v. Guarantee gender equality in employment;
- vi. Increase women's seats in national parliaments and local government bodies: and
- vii. Combat violence against women and girls (United Nations Fund for Population Activities now Population Fund, UN FPA, in Lim, 2012:5).

Thus, Goal 3 (Target 3A which was aimed at eliminating gender disparity in primary and secondary school education, preferably by 2005, and in all levels of education no later than 2015) was developed in order to achieve gender equality and empower women. Also, Goal 5 (Target 5A aimed at reducing the maternity mortality ratio by three quarters, and Target 5B aimed at achieving universal access to reproductive health) is related to both gender value and health by dealing with improving maternal health. In addition, other targets such as 1B (achieving full and productive employment and decent work for all, including women and young people) and 2A (ensuring that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling) have dealt with gender dimension as structured under other goals.

### **The Place of Women Education in Political Participation**

Women education is very essential in their political participation such education helps in the following areas:

1. Women over the years have demonstrated great abilities in initiating and formulating policies either directly or indirectly through their linkages. In the past, we had great examples such as Amina of Zaria, Idia of Benin, Margaret Thatcher of Britain and Alele Williams (first female Vice Chancellor in Nigeria). Few years ago, there was Dr. Mrs. Ngozi Okonjo Iweala who occupied the office of Vice President and as Director of World Bank as shining examples and even the late Dora Akunyili.
2. Education prepares the woman in one instance as a wife, a mother, sister, lover, in-law, and grandmother and also places her as an arbitrator in the society.

3. Women have proved over the years to be more prudent in their spending. more upright and honest, dedicated and committed to their profession.
4. Educated women can be at the helm of affairs e.g. Germany Chancellor Angela Merkel, former Liberia's President- Sir Leaf Johnson, etc.
5. Women are naturally in a position to teach. Our national values which are fast eroding can be properly taught by our women to our youths for proper empowerment.
6. Empowering women through education will help in health sensitization, which will help in eradicating diseases and social problems (e.g. female circumcision, abortions, etc) and reduce immorality rate in the society.
7. In the home, women can assist their husbands financially; gone are the days where women are only house wives.
8. Women are very caring, patient, and understanding. They will always be helpful in our nation building.
9. In Nigeria today, women influence has skyrocketed. There are educated women performing dominant roles in different spheres. In the three tiers of government for instance i.e. the Federal, State and L.G.As, women are excelling, making meaningful contributions (Yohana, 2012). In the civil service, we have women permanent secretaries, directors and top civil servants working hand in hand with men. In different sectors of our economy, we have women employed. We have Doctors and Nurses including auxiliary; contributing immensely to our health development, likewise in world bodies such as WHO, UNESCO, UNO, etc. In education, we have renowned women Professors, also female lecturers, teachers and administrators contributing immensely to our nation's educational development. There are also other women giants in the field of agriculture, security, sports such as Olympic and commonwealth Gold Medalists — Chioma Ajunwa and Blessing Okagbare as well as in the movie industry (Nollywood) among which is Patience Ozokwor to mention but a few. Considering the above points, there is need to give more women opportunity to contribute their quota in nation building. Women should be given more roles in politics. Since several men have tried and many have been disappointed, women should be given a chance.

### **The Uniqueness of Human Persons and the Women in National Politics**

A person is seen as a human being who is either male or female, who lives in a place. A person is a unique individual different from any other person. Such an individual is specially created and there is no other person like him. Thus, Mr. A and Mr. Z may be living in a place but are different from each other.

Azikiwe in Oputa (2018) believes that God created man and that he is expected to serve a divine purpose. He went further to state that all men are expected to play their part in ensuring a better society for everyone. He also believes that:

- i. All men are equal.
- ii. No man should be treated as a slave.
- iii. Human beings are supposed to be kind to one another and do things which will promote people's happiness. God did not intend that man should suffer in this world.
- iv. Man is an emblem of glory; a reflection from the abstract world.

- v. Man can be influenced by his environment.
- vi. Man is a powerful creature in a world of uncontrollable forces (Oputa, 2018).

Furthermore, Azikiwe believes that man should be eclectic which calls for openness of mind. This implies that he should be open to opinions of people but at the end, is able to filter and select what he feels best suits him. He should not be a slave to one school of thought or idea.

Equality of person emphasizes that all human beings are equal in that we have one life, one vote, one head, one blood, one value, among others. Human beings are also born into this world in the same way and will eventually die at a stage. Nevertheless, humans are not really same as evidenced in sex, colour, age, socio background, exposure, education, and so on. For instance, some persons are born male, others are born female; some with silver spoon, others without; some are graduates, some are masters degree holders, some have only first degree. Also, some persons possess as many as five degrees including double Masters or PhDs while some have only one.

Everybody is unique in his own way. Some persons are old, some are middle aged, while others are young; some are gentle while others are lion/garrulous/harsh; some introverts, others are extrovert; some are intelligent, others are average or below; some are tall, others are average or short: some are fat, others are slim; the comparisons continue. Since, two persons are never the same, it behooves that everyone should be respected accordingly since everyone has one thing or the other to offer.

Furthermore, the universal declaration of human right of 1945 emphasizes respect for the individual, based on certain human rights. First, a right is a justifiable claim, to have or to obtain anything to which one is entitled, or a justifiable claim to act in a particular manner if one is entitled to do so (Omogegbe, 1993). A right could be moral or legal. A moral right is a justifiable right on moral grounds to have anything or act in a particular manner; however, a moral right cannot be enforced by any legal procedure. For example, a beggar has a moral right to receive alms from passers-by who have money, but if a passer-by has money and refuses to give the beggar alms. the latter cannot take any legal action against the former although he has the right to expect help from him. A legal right is a right which is conferred by law, and can be enforced by a legal procedure.

Every right is limited by a corresponding duty to respect the rights of others. A person could and sometimes should insist on his right, but this is not always advisable. In certain instance. it is to waive one's right, for example in the interest of peace. The ability to know when to demand one's right and when to drop it is part of moral maturity. It comes after a mature reflection on the circumstances of any given situation.

Certain rights are natural and basic to human existence; and are known as the fundamental human rights. They are fundamental to human nature and therefore universal. Examples of such fundamental human rights are:

- i. The right to bodily integrity;
- ii. The right to freedom, i.e. self-determination;
- iii. The right to exist or the right to live;

- iv. The right to self-expression;
- v. The right to a just wage for one's labour;
- vi. The right to be treated with justice;
- vii. The right to good name;
- viii. The right to own property within certain limits;
- ix. The right to marry and have children;
- x. The right to education;
- xi. The right to belong to any religion, i.e. the right to freedom of worship; and
- xii. The right to form any society or organization if such a society or organization does not constitute a threat to public peace and security and does not infringe on the rights of others.

The women should be allowed to participate within their capabilities and potentials. The women when trained can also qualify to occupy some political offices. They may be qualified due to their innate human potentials and acquired skills and knowledge as trained or educated persons.

### **Women and Political Participation**

Women political empowerment simply means women are encouraged to participate in politics/political issues. The most important benefit of this is that their voices are heard. They can thus participate in choosing who will rule over them democratically and also have a say in governing process or in decisions making through their representatives. They can as well be voted for. Political empowerment also implies placing women at different helm of affairs through a deliberate assistance.

To be politically aware is to be politically informed. It is the state of being knowledgeable of public affairs, knowing one's political rights, liberties and follow the pace of political systems and trends. This implies knowing the political issues and behaviours as well as political culture around. It is to be politically educated.

Consequently, for women's political awareness, the following have been found very necessary:

1. Women must come out enmasse to join political parties from the formation level to participate and seek executive positions within the respective party machineries. They should not wait to be invited but join early, collect party cards and ensure they attend the meetings. By being regular at meetings, women will be noticed and with time, their opinion will be sought for on issues.
2. This is the time for any woman seeking political power through election to get ready, by:
  - i. Building her credibility and making herself visible.
  - ii. Familiarizing herself with the needs, problems and aspirations of her constituency, and making moral, financial. technical and advisory input whenever and wherever possible.
  - iii. Acquiring leadership skills through training, education, attending conferences and workshops.
  - iv. Building up her political structure;
  - v. Establishing a good rapport with the grassroots men and women, her potential electorate;



- vi. Being the first among fellow prospective contestants to filter out her ambition into the ears of her constituency, opinion leaders, community chiefs, women associations, etc
  - vii. Working to make herself agreeable to her political party that will ultimately nominate her for the polls. There is always campaign within the party, so work to enjoy the unified support of your party.
  - viii. Preparing an outline of activities and execution time, and being certain to stand by them. As election time draws near, open an office, appoint your coordinator, campaign officer and empower them through initial funding before you begin to request for financial assistance from your political patrons, etc.
  - ix. Being confident and convinced that you are the best candidate for the position which you are vying for even in the face of other heavy weight male contestants with supposedly intimidating credentials. Faith in oneself and in God, plus the ability to stand firm in spite of all the "Shakenings" is the stern stuff of female activists who win political battles.
3. Political Awareness can equally be achieved through educational empowerment. Apart from formal education, women lack the requisite training and political leadership. Indeed, political and civil education is of ultimate importance in order to progress from passive to active enlightened voters. There is need to create massive awareness among Nigerian women to get them involved in the dynamics of politics, either as advisers, voters or contestants (Oduka, 2005).
  4. There is the need for a powerfully articulated female pressure or lobby group that cuts across all partisan interest with the sole purpose to push for women mobilization empowerment and full integration into all sectors of governance. This is the work the Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development, the Heartland Childcare Foundation and the office of the wife of the Executive Governor have been doing for some time. This is equally supposed to be the functions of NCWS, WOTCLEF, NGOs on women empowerment. This pressure or lobby/coalition groups apart from working to mobilize women for effective participation in politics, will also serve as a data base for female political activists and aspirants. This coalition would negotiate power with the respective political parties and thereafter advise women as to who gets what, as well as work to ensure that political missions undertaken are successfully accomplished.
  5. The media as an indispensable strategy of mobilization must be partnered with. Unfortunately, most female politicians shy away from publicity and are often victims of poor representation in the print and electronic media. The media however is the mouth piece of society and its moral conscience. It can serve as an effective tool of crusade for female empowerment through editorial, advertorials and through well packaged exposure of pro-active female politicians. Publicity is important although one should be careful not to overdo it as it is a double-edged sword which could as well destroy any one entire political career.
  6. Politics is money, and women have least access to it. A short and medium term solution would be to establish "A Political Trust Fund", transparently managed to provide a

support base for women candidates who win their party nominations, but are financially constrained to move further.

### **Some Major Constraints Facing Women in Political Participation**

One of the major constraints women face in Nigeria is marginalization arising from traditional, socio-cultural, socio-economic, and religious factors. When this happens, they are denied full access to political participation.

Another is the belief that women are inferior — less intelligent, less productive, less creative, less useful and even less human than men. Consequently, women have had fewer rights and lower status than men (Enaibe, 2012).

The third is the nature of Nigeria politics which is characterized by violence, bitterness, manipulation, falsification of figures, high class rigging, etc which has directly or indirectly discouraged women in embracing politics; and their input reduced as well.

Also, trying to manage the home well and at the same time trying to work in public offices is not easy. This becomes a major challenge.

Furthermore, the rivalry (which may be healthy) between husbands and wives may be another source of challenge since most men do not want their wives to be on top of them or keep a distance from them.

Ajibade (1992), stated that high bride price being paid by men on women has complicated the issue since the woman's freedom and authority have been eroded. Some parents in support of women emancipation have refused to accept dowries on their daughters.

Other constraints include earning disparities in the labour market, and so on.

### **Prospects**

Women should be supported and encouraged. There is need to encourage them to have more access to education, resources, and other opportunities as well as their safety.

Women need a level playing field to showcase their potentials. There is no area that they cannot excel if given the opportunity; be it in the family, school, sports, or government.

Women have patience, inner strength, and native wisdom, which when harnessed, through proper education and enlightenment, can be highly useful. There should be more campaign for women education in all the states in the country and every enacted policy on female education by the government should be implemented; which should include having a favourable admission cut-off points for females into federal and states secondary schools and universities. An educated woman will always be source of inspiration to her offspring and other persons around her.

A strong hope and brighter prospect has been possible with the accessibility and affordability of education/ institutions in all nodes and crannies of the country. So many parents are highly enlightened and aware of the place of education in the lives of both male and female children. With the availability of these institutions and enlightened parents the future for women

education is brighter and hence future political participation emmass should not be negotiated. The pertinent appeal here should be, qualified and competent female politicians should be encouraged and put in their right positions. They are beginning to be everywhere and should be selected with care. This will help in protecting their image and achieving maximum success in the country.

### Conclusion

Task of nation building is very enormous and should not be left alone in the hands of men where capable women abound. Men should not out of pride ignore the numerous qualities women have which are helpful. Rather, women should be encouraged to do their best for the enhancement of our democracy; hence, national development. This also promotes Political stability. Many of these women abound waiting for opportunities to shine. They need to be discovered and utilized properly. The federal government should step up efforts to boost women development. Also, qualified women should be put in the right places where they can excel. These women however must strive to demonstrate good character wherever they find themselves and must not disappoint or misuse people's trust in them like some women did in time past. It is one's hope that with co-operation between both sexes in all spheres of affairs in the country, Nigeria will experience faster development and political stability.

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