
GOVERNANCE AND GENDER IN NIGERIA: WOMEN ON THE EDGE

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ABSTRACT

Ordinarily, discussing gender issues should not be equated with discussing women and their placement in the governance process of the society. However, in developing countries such as Nigeria, the rates of skewness of traditional, social and cultural attitude against women have made gender issues become synonymous with attempts to understanding the place, role, problems and importance of women in men dominated society. This discourse essentially examines the involvements of women in Nigeria's democratic process in the Fourth Republic. The paper argues that, women have not been given equal roles in this process as a result of socio-cultural and traditional limits placed on them by society. This has interrogate this disempowerment and recommends among other strategic options the need for strict compliance and practical implementation of the United Nation's Convention on the elimination of all discriminations against women (CEDAW), and other relevant laws as well as participatory democracy that will ensure gender balancing in Nigeria's governance process.

INTRODUCTION

Participation in the governance process of contemporary societies is drawn from a variety of discourses particularly liberalism which is predicted on the notion of "the right to equality for everyone" (Brody, 1992:4). The strength of the liberal discourse is that it advocate for the equality of rights of all citizens irrespective of sex, creed, class or ethnicity. Deriving from this underpinning principle, women lay claims to equality of legal and moral grounds (Shettima, 1995). Thus, the Nigerian constitution is in cognizance to this universal principle of equality of citizens devoid of any form of discrimination on social, cultural, economic, political or legal premise. It is to emphasize non discriminatory practices by the state that the country has ratified several international conventions prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sex and other premises. In the absence of practices in the governance process on the basis of sex, the political and bureaucratic spaces would accommodate Nigerian citizens especially when competence and merit constitute the broad criteria.

However, it evidently clear that the Nigerian women suffer discrimination in all facets of life Politics, Social, Cultural, Economic, Considering the percentage of women in leadership positions. This has threatened to destroy or reduce the usefulness of the women folk in many communities in Nigeria today. This paper mainly attempts to undertake a general gender analysis of the country's governance process in the Fourth Republic in Nigeria.

CONCEPTUAL EXPLANATION ON GOVERNANCE AND GENDER

Exploring the Concept of Governance

The concept of governance has to do with policy making and policy implementation regulated by systems of laws and guideline which are segregated into specific operations to achieve specific goals or objectives. It involves the use of political authority and the exercise of control over a society and the management of its resources for social and economic development (Landell-Mills and Serageldin 1991 and Dethier 1999). The World Bank (1992) captures this more lucidly as it states that, that exercise in the management of a country's economic and social resources for development is what constitutes governance. Sampston (2004) contents that governance is the process of decision making and the process by which decision is implemented. Governance therefore has its basic tents which in the vies of Jega (1994:101-102) are:

- ❖ Responsibility and responsiveness in leadership and the public services.
- ❖ Accountability and transparency in the mobilization of resources.
- ❖ Discipline, effectiveness and efficiency in handling public (as well as personal affairs) .
- ❖ Selflessness and impartial services to the people, and
- ❖ Popular participation and involvements of the people in the conduct and management of their affairs. What can be deduced from the foregoing conceptualization is that, governance encompasses the state institutional and structural arrangements, decision-making process and its implementation capacity that is geared towards uplifting the living conditions of the people. It has links with participatory development and it also concerns with creating an enabling political environment for economic growth and equitable distribution of values as well as adherence to protecting the fundamental rights of all peoples irrespective of sex, status or other primordial inclinations/considerations.

The Concepts of Gender

The term gender defines masculinity and feminity which shapes the way men and women are perceived in society, the roles they are given and the work they perform (Igube, 2004). In other words, gender is used as an analytical category to draw a line of demarcation between biological sex differences and the way these are used inform behaviours and competences, which are then assigned as either "masculine" or "feminine" (Riley, 1997). Gender in the context of the family, community, nation and organization is how certain roles, responsibilities, rights and identities are ascribed to male and female members based on established beliefs, values and norms. It refers to social meanings of male and female, and distinction made in different societies about attitudes and roles.

Fundamentally, therefore, this paper aligns itself with the definition of Akande (2006) which refers to gender as a system of roles and relationships between women and men that are determined not biologically but by social, political and economic context. The concepts of roles refer to the patterned behavior expectation attributed to the acceptant of a particular status or position. These roles are influenced by perceptions and expectations arising from cultural, political, economic, social, environmental and religious factors as well as from

custom, law, class, individual institutional biases etc. These attitudes and behaviors are learned and can change over time. This conception on gender therefore points to the fact that, while sex is biological, gender is socially constituted.

THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS

Theoretically, the debate about gender equality or gender balance is on-going. Thus, no single theory completely captures the issues of equality of men and women. However, liberal feminism seems to have made useful contribution in this regard. The main thesis of liberal feminism is that all human beings are created equal by God and therefore all deserve equal rights in the society (Preira, 2001:5).

Historically, the first element in the liberal feminist arguments is the claim for gender equality. A key document for understanding the basis of this claim is the Declaration of Sentiment issued by the first women's right convention at Seneca Falls, New York in 1848. Rewriting the Declaration of Independence, the signers declared that all men and women are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights, which include life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness, that to secure these rights government's consent of the governed (Dubois, 1995).

Liberal feminism, thus, rests on the beliefs that:

- (i). All human beings have certain essential features-capacities for reason, moral agency, and self actualization.
- (ii). The exercise of these capacities can be secured through legal recognition of universal rights.
- (iii). The inequalities between men and women assigned by sex are social constructions having no basis in a nature.
- (iv). Social change for equality can be produced by an organized appeal to a reasonable public and the use of the state (Lorber, 1994).

Contemporary feminist discourse has expanded these arguments with the introduction of the concepts of gender as a way of understanding all the socially constructed features built around an idea of sex identify and used to produce inequality between persons considered male and persons considered female, (Lorber, 1994). Liberal feminism thus necessarily implies that both men and women should have equal opportunities to whatever aspiration they have in the society, however, where limitations and participation is disproportionately tilted to men then gender liberalism is distorted and women are disadvantaged both in quantity and quality of participation, hence they (Women) lack the necessary influences, control and access to power in order to contribute to the decision making and development processes in the society. In other words and as it applies in this paper, the seemingly negligible involvements of women in the governance process in Nigeria has denied them the opportunity to make meaningful contribution in policies that can engender socio-economic development in Nigeria.

WOMEN IN NIGERIAN POLITICAL GOVERNANCE: A DISCOURSE

Political Participation is sine qua non of democracy. Democracy involves a commitment to give citizens-both men and women equal opportunity to develop their individual capacities. It means individual participation in the decisions that involve one's life. Political participation involves those voluntary activities such as holding public and party offices, being a candidate for political offices, attending election campaigns, voting and exposing oneself to political stimuli. Understanding, when we talk of democracy, politics and political participation, it generally means a country in which all the political institutions of polyarchy are firmly established, including the right to vote during elections and the right to stand for elective positions virtually by all adults-women inclusive (Adereti, 2005). Women participation in politics and political governance at every level can therefore be taken as an index of the level of democracy and development in a country, women constitutions half of the population and everywhere have contributed significantly to human development. In Nigeria, for example, women have always played five key roles-mothers producer, home mangers, community organizers and social, cultural and political activities (Enemu, 1999).

This abysmal level of women engagement in the political process might be due to the operations and structure of patriarchal leadership in Nigeria, leading to the unfortunate prevalence male supremacy and female subservience (Oluyemi, 2005). In pre-colonial Nigerian society, the sharing of power between male and female was on the basis of complementary. Thus, the differences was not along the super-ordinate/subordinate lines, but the men managed to dictate the pace for the society as a whole. It should be recalled that indigenous social formations in Nigeria, as in other African societies that in many cases provided a place for women as daughters of extended families, heads of clans, older and revered citizens with ample wisdom to be tapped, leaders who governed in female forms usually inaccessible to men and guardians who served as go-between humans and the gods in matters of religion, health and social welfare (Mba, 1982 and Okeke, 2004).

In the colonial period, Oluyemi (2005) further argues that the colonial authority promulgated as early as 1876 to protect women's rights, but was subverted with the ideology of domestication function in public arena like men. This trend continued in the post-colonial state as the leaders that inherited power from the departing colonial masters did noting much to change the situation. Genyi (2009:5) has added to the discourse on gender imbalance in Nigeria as she argued that:

Despite to general commitment of the principle of non-discrimination as enshrined in section 2 of the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Nigeria falls short of the desired result of giving males and females equal opportunities to advance socially, physically Evidences abound that several negative aspects of gender relations, such as gender based decision of labour, disparities between males and females access to power and resources and gender biases in rights and entitlements remain pervasive in Nigeria.

Today, as posited by Ukase (2003), the superior inferior relationship between the male and female effectively rules the latter out of contention for many important positions. The under representations of women, especially in the democratic process at both the local government, state and federal levels of governance leaves a yawning gap between the formulation of policies and participation in government to address feminist and cross-gender issues, conflicts and other related social problem. Consequently, the exclusion of women from power in the public arena is in sharp contrast to their ability to make crucial decisions relating to the survival of women (Akande, 2006). Women have important skills and different styles of politics and by excluding them from decision making the country is depriving itself of a reservoir of talent and wisdom as well as denying a more participatory and less autocratic style of governance.

A SURVEY OF WOMEN INVOLVEMENT IN THE GOVERNANCE PROCESS IN NIGERIA (1999-2010): ARE WOMEN ON THE ADGE?

With the return of democracy in 1999, the enthusiasm of women to participate in the political process became high through active involvements in political competition by joining political parties and contesting elections. In other words, the Fourth Republic witnessed some level of activism on the part of women especially as regards their advancements in the political arena. Even at that the participation of cry when compared with the men counterpart. In other words, participation in political governance at the three tiers of government is still male dominated as table 1, 2, and 3 below have shown.

Table 1: Showing Some Political Positions Attained by Women in 1999
Source: INEC, as cited by Tyoor (2009)

POSITION	MALE	FEMALE	Total	% MALE	%FEMALE
LGA Councilors	8667	143	8810	98.38	1.6
LAG Chairman	765	9	774	98.84	1.2
State House of Assembly	978	12	990	98.8	12
Deputy Governors	35	1	36	97.2	2.7
Governors	36	0	36	100	0
House of Representative	347	13	360	96.39	3.61
Senate	106	3	109	97.2	2.8
Speakers of State House of Assembly	35	1	36	97.2	2.8
Minister/Special Adviser	35	9	44	79.55	20.5
Vice-President	1	0	1	100	0

NB: Male percentages worked by this author, Between 1999 and 2003, 3 women were elected to the senate of 109 seats, 12 to the house of representatives of 360 seats while only 12 out of 990 state houses of assembly seats across the country were won by women (WACOL, 2004 and Tyoor, 2009). While women won

no governorship positions, Lagos state and the first Deputy Governor while Benue House of Assembly produced a female Speaker in the person of Chief Mrs. Margaret Icheen. Unfortunately, both women could not serve to the end of their tenure/term while out of the 774 Local Councils Chairmen only 9 were women and 143 female Councilors out of the total 8810 across the country (LEDAP, 2003:4)

Table 2: Some Political Positions Attained By Women In 2003

Source: INEC, as cited by Tyoor (2009)

POSITION	MALE	FEMALE	Total	% MALE	%FEMALE
LGA Councilors	*NA	*NA	*NA	*NA	*NA
LAG Chairman	774	0	774	100	0
State House of Assembly	951	39	990	96.06	3.93
Deputy Governors	34	2	36	94.4	5.6
Governors	36	0	36	100	0
Speakers	36	0	36	100	0
House of Representatives	339	21	360	94.2	5.8
Senate	105	4	109	96.3	3.7
Minister/Special Adviser	32	12	44	72.73	27.3
Vice-President	1	0	1	100	0
President	1	0	1	100	0

NB: Male percentages computed by this author

In 2003, there were 39 female House of Assembly members, 21 female members of the House of Representative and 4 female senators, the percentage of female minister and special advisers rose from 20. 5% in 1999 to 27. 3% in 2003.

Table 3: Some Political Attained by Women in 2007

Source: INEC, as cited by Tyoor (2009)

POSITION	MALE	FEMALE	Total	% MALE	%FEMALE
State House of Assembly	953	37	990	96.3	3.7
Speakers	34	2	36	94.4	5.6
Deputy Governors	30	6	36	83.3	16.7
Governors	36	0	36	100	0
House of Representatives	335	25	360	93.05	6.94
Senate	100	9	109	91.7	8.2

NB: Male Percentages Computed by this Author

In 2007, there were 25 female members of the House of Representatives, an increase of 4, from 2003, there are 9 female senators compared to the 3 in 2003, an upward of 6, but there are 37 female state assembly female members down from the 39 in 2003 (Tyoor,

2009:299). The 2007 general elections also witnessed the elections of 6 female Deputy Governors in Nigerian in the persons of Mrs. Paulen Tallen, Plateaus State, Mrs. Salimotu Badru, Ogun State, Erelu Olusola Obada, Osun state Mrs. Sarah Obalisi Sosan, Lagos State, Mrs. Ada Okwuonu, Imo State, Mrs. Dame Virgy Etiaba of Anambra State (Achi, 2007: 102). Indeed, Ogun State went further to produce a female speaker who has since been impeached less than one in office. The presence of women in political governance today is no doubt obvious. But despite the improvements in figures of women involvement in politics, these figures are gross under representation of women who constitute almost half of the populations of Nigeria. From the analysis thus far, it is evidently clear that women involvement or participation in Nigeria politics and governance epically between 1999 and 2010 is marginally low compared to their male counterparts. It is thus apparent that women have been on the edge in the political and public arena in Nigeria. This situation has sadly, denied quota to national development. The unfolding events and time therefore beckon on women to gird loins and with greater cohesion restrategy and compete actively with men in the democratic process and development of the nation.

THE MISSING LINK

It is an incontestable fact that Nigeira is loosing from this inconsequential participation of women in the governance process. In other words, Nigeria stands to gain if the women are allowed to be fully involved in the governance of society. As argued by Onu and Okeke (2009), women's participation in the governance process is increasingly looked upon as one area where any society could reap, in large measures, the benefits of women's education. Existing evidence suggest that, compared to men in similar positions, women who hold public office or senor positions in the civil service often channel much of life for the general population. Kevane (2004:1-2) thus contends that studies of tends in and the experiences of some advanced industrial states suggest that:

Women prefer that social spending tertiary and more oriented towards the wellbeing of children, more social spending on local infrastructure, schooling, and antipoverty programmes is good for economic growth, thus empowering women in political process leads to larger allocation towards growth enhancing government expenditure,

Women's participation in governance process could also greatly improve the conduct of public decision-making. According to the world Bank (2001:12-13):

Greater women's right and or equal participation in public by women and men are associated with cleaner business and government and better governance. Where the influence of women in public life is greater, the level of corruption is lower... women can be an effective force for rule of law and good governance.

What the above suggest is that as leaders and decision makers in governments, women are not likely to succumb to often taken-for granted attitude which encourage public mal-administration, bribery, fraud and the abuse of power. Amazingly, however, in Nigeria at present, as in other parts of Africa women are grossly marginalized in the governance process, with the majority often invited as cheerleaders and the tiny minority tokenized as ornaments that showcase the benevolence of regimes which are inherently patriarchal (Mama 1995; Aubrey, 2001).

AGENDA FOR EFFECTING GENDER BALANCE IN NIGEIRA

Realistic agenda for gender balancing in Nigeira should begin from the practical implementation of the United Nations Convention on Eliminations of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1979, entered into force in 1981 and ratified by Nigeria in 1985. This document has been described as the International Bill of Rights for Women. It described discrimination against women as:

....Any distinction, exclusion or restriction on basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women irrespective of their martial status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedom in the political, economic, social, cultural, civic and or other fields (Article 1).

- a) On thebasis of equality enjoy the right to freely choose a spouse
- b) Enjoy the same right to enter into marriage with full and free constant
- c) Enjoy the same rights and responsibilities during marriage and its dissolutions
- d) Enjoy the same rights and responsibilities as parents.
- e) Enjoy the same rights to decide on the number and spacing of their children.
- f) Enjoy the same rights with regard to guardianship and adoption of children.
- g) Enjoy the same personal rights as husband and wife, including the right to choose a family name, profession or occupation,
- h) Enjoy the same rights in respect of property.

Article 16 (1) of CEDAW further provides that state parties are to take appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in all mattes relating to marriage and family relations and in particular shall ensure that both men and women.

The above is further strengthened by the UN Universal Declaration of Hunan Rights (UNDHR) which came into force as the International Bill of Rights for all in 1948 (Thompson, 2001) these include:

- a) The rights to life
- b) The right to equality
- c) The right to liberty and security of persons,
- d) The right to equal protection under the law
- e) The right to freedom from all forms of discrimination

- f) The right to the highest standard attainable of physical and mental health.
- g) The right to just and favourable conditions of work
- h) The right not to be subjected to torture, or other cruel, in human or degrading treatment or punishments.

Moreover, the 1999 Nigerian Constitution is explicit on the issue of equality of all citizens irrespective of gender differences. The chapter II of this legal decampments provides for the fundamental objectives and directive principles of state policy. Specifically, section 17 (1) of the constitution states that "The state social order is founded on ideals of freedom, equality of rights, obligations and opportunities before the law" Furthermore, the constitution in its chapter IV sections 33 to 43 clearly stipulates the fundamental rights of all citizens. In our opinion, we feel a practical point of departure is the strict adherences to these legal provisions which we feel are critical in engendering gender balance in Nigeira for effective governance. Also as a realistic agenda for gender balancing in Nigeira, institutions such as the National Orientation Agency (NOA) the National Policy on Women as well as the National Policy on Education should be properly funded and strengthened to conduct awareness campaigns that will emphasize that gender balance does not simply mean quotas. Quota is merely an affirmative strategy aimed at increasing women participation and political activities.

Moreover, parents should begin to socialize their children from a very tender age without any discrimination such that both male and female ones are exposed to equal opportunities. Parents should help the children (Boys and Girls) to achieve a kind of balance in reasoning as well as social relations. Finally, as pointed out by Oluyemi (2005), there is an urgent need for the establishment of a "Gender Equity Commission" and Citizenship and Residency Rights" for women who marry into or live in areas other than in which were born, to be able to secure leadership positions. The Gender Equity Commission should ensure that the rights of women to land, property and inheritance as well as benefits in other facets of life especially in the governance arena on equal terms with men.

CONCLUSION

This paper has clearly demonstrated that Nigerian women have always played a subordinate role in decisions making, leadership affairs, and other spheres of life. The marginalization of women is compounded by traditional practices in most parts of the Nigerian societies, where women are denied their inheritance rights. The traditional rights for widows and inheritance practice are some of the factors that put women in difficult situations when they are bereaved of their husband. The customary law in general does not recognize the right of a women or a wife to inheritance. It is the practice in some ethnic of a women or a wife to inheritance. It is the practice in some ethnic groups in Nigeira to take women through humiliating ordeals, which may involve being forced to drink part of the water sued to bath their husbands' corpses. They could also be locked up with corpses when they are suspected of killing their husbands (Nigeria Tribune, 2005, May 3:15).

In agriculture, Nigeria women account for more than 60% of agricultural labour force, contributing about 80% of total food production. Women undertake the harvesting and marketing, while the husbands take the profits (www.communwealth.org/shared.) in the political turf, there is deepening gender imbalance in terms of representation in government. In fact, at all levels of decisions-making, women are grossly under-represented and completely marginalized. In the light of the above therefore, there is an urgent need for a realistic implementation of the legal frameworks, especially the CEDAW platform as well as the Nigeria laws to engender gender fairness and gender equity in the governance and public spheres of Nigeria.

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