

# The Nigerian Woman and The Reformation of the Political System: A Historical Perspective

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## Abstract

The issue of greater involvement of women in politics has been an issue of concern in the public as well as in the academia. It seems however that most Nigerian governments have mostly paid a lot of lip service to the issue of women involvement in politics without really doing much about it. Both sectors (public and academia) have however neglected to recognize that, though, mostly unrecognized and appreciated, historically and culturally Nigerian women have not always been relegated to the domestic sphere. This paper examining this issue has looked at women's greater participation in politics in terms of the historical background of women involvement in the public or political spheres of their communities. Also, x-rayed is the necessity for a re-initiated greater participation in the political sphere. In which examining the obstacles that have thus far, hindered women from fully participating in political activities particularly in contesting for elective offices become important. Emphasis is laid on some of the individual or personal and collective strengths of women that could be of great benefit to the process of sanitizing and stabilizing the Nigerian democratic process. Finally, the paper identified by way of recommendations, some long and short term measures that could enhance a greater reintegration of women in the political sphere. This includes the sensitization and mobilization of the large women population and the initial employment of the quota strategy. The current male dominated political democratic process is detrimental to Nigeria's actualization of her social, economic and political development.

**Keywords:** Women reformative nature; Politics; Democracy

## Introduction

The concern and desire that women should occupy their rightful position and role in society is not only a core discourse in development studies but in societies like Nigeria a desperate necessity. Historical evidence indicates that African women but particularly Nigerian women had and continue to immensely contribute to the economic growth of their societies, though, formally unrecognized. Women in Nigeria have always played politically crucial roles but with an overwhelming majority of them at the periphery of politics in modern Nigeria. Though, constituting half or more of the Nigerian population and contributing to the development of its economy, political decisions affecting them, their families and communities have dominantly been made by men from the colonialism period. The United Nations organization recently confirmed this stance when it stated that "the world can only witness rapid progress when the world women, who because of their numerical strength, (more than half of the world population), are brought into the developmental process", [1], this invariably means that for as long as Nigerian women continue to remain at the periphery of the political sphere actual development will continue to elude Nigeria. Thus, the actual progress and development of Nigeria is tied to the political situation of Nigeria as the UN argument goes, "the whole can never be understood by a mere presentation of a part" [1].

Equality before the law and equal opportunity for equal, fair and objective representation for all citizens in the political sphere is a cardinal point of the democracy. The exclusion of majority of the citizens (women) also implies that as a democratic nation Nigeria cannot talk about human rights as an essential part of the democratic process which requires that opportunities for participation in decision making should belong to all equally. The situation in Nigeria however is one in which society conspires to continue to exclude women from full participation in the decision-making process. The achievement of development in Nigeria therefore requires that the nation must focus efforts on cultivating the full potential and particularly the leadership potential of the other half of her human resource. Cultivating this potential involves making crucial the political participation of this large marginalized group. The concern of this paper, thus is an examination of the many and varied factors that conspire to hinder the full participation of women in politics there by hindering the development of Nigeria. Also exposed are the natural, social and political strengths in women that would culminate in the stabilization and growth of the democratic system in Nigeria, which so far left unexploited have resulted in waste and the deterioration of the democratic system of Nigeria. The paper begins by conceptualizing the issues of politics, laying the historical background of women's participation in politics, what went wrong, and how women can as a group move forward utilizing the much natural, individual and collective strength available to them to serve their society.

## Definition of politically related concepts

### Politics

Politics as a concept has not learnt itself to easy definition; this has resulted in its being variously defined by political scholars. Giddens et al. [2], described the concept of politics as concerning the means whereby power is used to affect the scope and content of government. Politics has also been equated to policy which is the act of making public choices and making decisions on behalf of people through the medium of the state and its apparatus [3]. This implies that, politics is about government and governance. The sphere of the political which is politics may well range beyond that of government itself described politics simply as who get what, when and how. It could therefore be the authoritative allocation of value or resources [4], though it is accepted that politics is beyond the sphere of government, it must be noted that the sphere of government is the sphere of political power, and all political life is about power, who holds it, how they achieve it and what they do with it. Power is thus very central to politics.

**Power:** Power on the other hand can be simply described as the ability of individuals or groups to make their interests or concerns count even when others resist [2], it could also be the ability to exercise one's will over others [5].

**Democracy:** The definition of the concept, "democracy" has not only been variedly defined but has also generated a lot of confusion and controversy resulting in the apt submission of the situation by Claude Ake, [6], who held that:

*Democracy has been defined with a profusion of meanings that verge on anarchy, libraries of controversy exists on the concept, theory and meaning of the practice of democracy. And the confusion continues to grow with the very attempt to bring clarity. (p. 94).*

Despite these controversies and confusions, the origin of the concept gives us an idea of its meaning and purpose. The term "democracy" is derived from two Greek words; "Demos" meaning people and "Kratos" translated Power. Ubah, [7], described democracy as a system of government that derives its power from the people for the benefit of the people, it is a system comprising of two principal elements, that of political freedom and social justice. Durel [7], believes the central tenet of democracy is the active participation of people (all people) in governing themselves. Thus, an ideal democracy is related primarily to equality, rational discourse, and freedom of participation and self-determination of all members of a society. Invariably, a society where an atmosphere of repression and discrimination against a major stakeholder in the democratic process prevails, where only one segment of the society is involved in governance and enjoys unlimited political freedom, such a society cannot be said to be democratic.

The Modern average Nigerian woman is most times saddled with a myriad of responsibilities and concerns that adding the seeming unsurmountable battle of dismantling the barriers that come to women in politics seems like courting an unnecessary battle. There is majorly the lack of consciousness and or realization that, this political sphere has impact on all the other facets of her life are touched by what happens in the political sphere. Implying, therefore that most women do not realize that they could do something to transform their situations, improve the quality of their lives, that of their families and communities by simply becoming involved in political activities or more so by reaching for political leadership. This involves struggling to overcome barriers set against women participation in the political

sphere. There is therefore no alternative to women involvement either is there room passivity, the reintegration of women in the political sphere is a necessary task if change is to be attained in the political situation and development of the nation. Thus far, the passivity or marginal involvement of women in this sector has meant that the overwhelming majority of those involved in the political sphere and consequently those overwhelmingly involved in decision making have been males. The UN's dedication and declaration of 1975-1985 as the decade for women, the convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women, (CEDAW, 1979) treaty and the Beijing Platform for Affirmative Action (BPFA,1995) bill have not particularly helped the lot of Nigerian women.

### Historical overview of women in politics in Nigeria

An examination of the political history of Nigeria reveals that Nigerian women have not always been excluded from the political sphere; their involvement was greatest during the pre-colonial history of Nigeria. Though, this period showed Nigeria as comprising not only of distinct ethnic groups but each group having a distinct social and political structure. Regardless of other distinctive differences each of these groups had evidences showing women as possessive of political power, though varying from group to group and during various historical periods. Generally, there was greater political involvement of women during the pre-colonial period than at any other time of Nigeria's history, this political power and involvement was correlative or complementary rather than a hierarchical division of labour that exists now. Some of the famous pre-colonial societies and kingdoms were at this historical period ruled and controlled by women. At this period, traditional mores in these traditional societies reproved individualism and accreted and accentuated cooperation, collectivism and sharing [8-10]. Thus, contrary to the postulation of modernization scholars that the root of women subjugation and marginalization is embedded in traditional culture and customs of Nigerian peoples. Women subjugation and marginalization seems to have begun with competitive and individualistic tended modernization and westernization.

This traditional complementary or dual political involvement can be seen in the pre-colonial Igbo society, where the "Obi" of Onitsha ruled alongside the "Omu" who is the female monarch and later with the "Ikporo-Onitsha". Besides these male and female monarchs; other women involved in the rulership of the group was the "Otu Umuada", (Married daughters), though variously called, depending on the group of Igbo's in question are found amongst all Igbo peoples. These women were dynamic, powerful, respected and exercised considerable influence. There were also other powerful women groups that were involved not only in the organization and mobilization of the women but were also involved in making political decisions. This means that amongst the pre-colonial Igbos, there existed a defined representative system that involved both sexes equally [8]. Describing the existing parallel political structure [1], posits that

*"In this society, political power is diffuse and leadership was fluid and informal. Community decisions were made and disputes settled in a variety of gatherings, village wide Assemblies, women meetings, age grades, secret and title societies. Decisions were made by discussions until agreement was reached. Any adult present who had something to say in the matter under discussion was entitled to speak" (P. 285).*

The situation as documented amongst the Yoruba was no different, as women participated actively in the traditional processes of governance. Yoruba history for instance has records of numerous

female Obas (kings) who ruled at certain periods, one of such was Oba Orompo who reigned from 1555 in Ile-Ife, Oyo kingdom. In Ijesha land, five of the thirty-eight Obas are purported to have been women. Some Yoruba towns are said to have been founded by women, Ondo was one of such, others included "Ketu" and "Sabe". Igala land also said to be founded by Ebele Ejaunu. Amongst the Igalas was a powerful political leader and a formidable leader in 1860 called Ojedi Umdei. She held to have made the invasion of igala land a difficult task for the Europeans. Amongst the Yoruba also, women held important titles alongside their male counterparts, there were titles like the "Iya" Oba who acted as queen mother, there was the "Erelu" a woman and member of the "Ogboni" cult. There was the "Iya kere", next in rank to the king's mother and responsible for the king's treasury; women even held a female equivalent of the warrior line of titles, the "Iyalode". There were also recognized powerful women pressure groups such as the "Egbe Iyakide" with representation to the council that handled state affairs [8,11].

It is interesting to know that in the pre-colonial pre-Islamic Hausa land; the public domain was not considered the sphere of men alone; the operational situation was one where both sexes were recognized as having a stake with both playing important roles. Historical records show active political involvement of women with political title designations as "Magajiya", (the queen) "Iya", (Queen mother), with as much power as their male ruling counterparts. Notable female historical names in Hausa land included Bazoo Turrunku, Daurama of Daura and queen Amina of Zazzua a renowned political and military leader who expanded her territory. The marginalization of women from the public sphere in Hausa land began with the Islamic Jihad of 1804, which also introduced the practice of Purdah. Pre-colonial Nigerian societies showed evidences of collective power sharing between females and males with complementary women political involvement, as Professor Wilmot held in his book, "The right to Rebel", where setting out to present the context of student's movements with a view to drawing from history stated, "One ignores history at one's peril..." [6]. Thus, pre-colonial Nigerian societies had a successful political societal life because of its allowance for full and equal participation of women.

The beginning of colonialism in the early 1900s saw a setback in the political involvement of women in Nigeria, diminishing the prerogative and rights enjoyed by the Nigerian women [11]. Observed that with the setting up of colonial machineries women were systematically rendered invisible as the colonial masters evidently preferred and encouraged male domination. The author concluded that westernization and colonialism robbed Nigerian women of their right in the public and political sphere. The rationale or philosophy behind the colonial masters' empowerment of men to rule over women is perceived by scholars to be due to their Victorian and Edwardian middle class backgrounds. With ideology that had separate spheres for males and females, with men controlling the public sphere and women the private sphere. From the standpoint of the colonialists the woman had no business outside her home, an ideology which became Nigerian with the arrival of colonialism, this western ideology consequently led to the relegation of most of the women decision-making groups and positions and denying them involvement, power and recognition.

To nurture this patriarchal domestication of women, only men were prepared for positions, with such opportunities denied women, thus began the process of consciously and purposefully marginalization of women from the public and political sphere. The arrival of missionaries saw no change, with the missionaries helping to

entrench this discriminatory ideology and prejudice. The education and training given women at this period by these missions was geared towards making women good housewives. This was the rationale behind separate educational institutions for girls and boys, thus, education for girls was preparatory towards domestic life [8], seeming to confirm this opinion held that, "the acceptance of western gender stereotypes did immeasurable harm to Nigerian women". Liberated from the checks and balances that co-governance provided, gender discrimination was heavily constructed into policies, programmes and structures of the system to preserve it for men. The outcome was the development of a politically inactive women population and prejudicial self-serving political sphere. Colonialism therefore distorted the traditional Nigerian dual power sharing, cooperative and collective system. Despite the continued struggles of a few courageous women activists to break this modern chain of subordination, more and more male innovated and systematic obstacles have continued to obscure the rise of women to full political participation consequently adequate political representation.

### The necessity for women participation in politics

The struggle to get the Nigerian women involved in the political sphere should not be seen or misconstrued to mean a struggle in opposition and competition with the men, it's a struggle that will lead to the achievement of greater success and strength that can only be achieved by the sexes working together. It is needful for Nigerian women to fully participate in politics, mainly because constituting half or more of the whole population, there is need for their interest to be considered during decision making. Men and women being differently affected and experience situations and issues, even where such issues interests, needs, resources are similar. Some of these issues and situations may or may not be specifically women issues, but issues with implications for all of humanity. Thus, men cannot adequately represent and replace woman, even where there is the best of intentions. The exclusion therefore of women from this process and sphere is a big loss for society, as Schriver, (cited in Johnson and Schwartz 1992 in [12], stated:

*When some of us are denied opportunities  
to influence decision making processes that  
affect our lives, we all hurt. We all loss when  
the voices and vision of some of us are excluded....  
By listening to the voices and seeing the  
world through the eyes of those who differ  
—in gender, color, sexual orientation, age,  
ablement, culture, income and class, we can  
learn much about new paradigms or world views  
that can enrich all our lives" (P.47)*

Adequate political participation and representation of women is therefore a human rights issue, and thus a democratic issue and it is seen to be the corner stone of every democratic society, (UN, 2002). Women representation and participation is also a good governance issue with serious implications for development. Evidence has shown that women who participate directly in decision making bodies press for different priorities than those emphasized by men, women are seen to be, often more active in initiating and supporting laws benefitting women, children and families. This means that with more women in



these positions, the more livelihoods there is for the promotion of such laws. Research in the United States shows that female and male legislators have different policy priorities [13,14]. This does not only suggest that male and female heads emphasize different policies, but also implies that greater participation in policy and decision making opportunities of women will result in the enactment of policies that will not only benefit women, but also their children, families and communities, making the issue of women participation and representation a developmental issue.

Social researches have also suggested that women's increased participation in decision making bodies improves the quality of governance. Three studies have shown positive correlation between increased women's participation in public life and a reduction in the level of corruption. A poll conducted by Gallup and the Inter-American Dialogue in five Latin American countries in 2000 also found that most of those surveyed believed that having more women in power improves government and that women are better able than men to handle a wide range of policy issues. Women equal political participation and involvement is therefore not just a human right issue thus a democratic issue, but a good governance and developmental issue, as an increased participation and political representation of women will not only benefit the women but the whole of society. UNFPA, (2002) affirms, this stance when it held, *"empowering women is also an indispensable tool for advancing development and reducing poverty"*

Also, it is a known fact that it is not enough for governments to make policies, the successful implementation of these policies and programmes depend largely on adequate and due consultation with the sectors or the people to benefit from these policies and programmes. Lack of due and adequate consultation, results in conflict of interest and thus failure of the programme or policy. Women involvement in politics becomes important for due consultation regarding issues that concern them and for the successful implementation of developmental policies and programmes that concern them and others under their jurisdiction like children and youths. The full participation of women in the political sphere will also reduce the level of the cries for marginalization in the Nigerian society. Politics is said to be, the means through which values and resources are shared, a situation where more than half of the whole population is excluded from or is under-represented in the process of the allocation of value will result in unfair allocation, and giving others undue advantage resulting in cries of marginalization. Since fair and adequate representation means adequate and fair sharing, which is tantamount to democracy, Nigeria cannot therefore talk about democracy in a situation where more than half of her citizenry is almost excluded from an important process of democratization.

Importantly, also for more than half of the population of Nigeria to feel the impact of the efforts of government towards development, the women who constitute a large proportion of Nigeria must take their rightful place in the decision-making process. This is to enable women to contribute towards the decision-making process and the decisions that affect their lives in the process ensuring political legitimacy over such issues. Also, there is need to change or modify the current brand of Nigerian politics. This change is necessary not only because of its male dominated nature, but also because it is currently not serving and benefiting the people. It is more tended towards greed, self enhancement, embezzlement and complete corruptness. The level of corruption requires a great influx of many people with different temperaments, instincts, perspective, needs and nature to make change

possible. After all, the dominance of men in politics has benefitted nobody, men and women alike and the whole of society. The involvement of only a few women will only result in the corruption of this few as is the current situation, these few unable to change the male dominated nature of politics will more likely join them. The current situation is captured in the lamentation of Ikedi Ohakim, the governor of Imo State, (Style, and This Day Magazine) when he stated that the current brand of politics is:

*Money politics... it is the bane of our collective existence as a people. More than 70% of politicians in Nigeria have no business being in there, because they lack the pedigree to ask the people for a mandate to serve them. But simply because they have the money to throw about delve into politics and hold the people captive.*

Thus, they need to infuse into the current system, people with different perspective of life, ideas, needs, nature and personalities to compliment and help change the system.

### **Obstacles faced by women in politics**

The acceptance of the philosophy of the colonialist that to be Lady-like or feminine and elegant, meant the woman being non-confrontational, subservient and domesticated by the Nigerian male, was the major undoing of women's participation in politics. This separation of spheres for the sexes was the beginning of the indoctrination of male superiority and female inferiority. The superiority of the man thus presupposes insulating the weak female from the rigours and hardships of the public life. The indoctrination campaign that entrenched the seclusion of women from the public domain was consequently followed by other factors that conspired to keep the women out of the decision-making process. As a measure of ensuring that women are kept out of this arena men have formulated what Anya [11] termed a *"masculine model of politics"* where men define the rules of the game and the standard for evaluation, this results in a situation where head or tail the women losses. The truth of this situation was reflected in the 2003 party primaries, where some female political aspirants had come forth to contest believing that the political atmosphere was now more gender friendly, on the strength of all the agitations and promises made by political party hierarchy. The reality was however shocking for some of the female hopefuls.

Onyeka Onwenu, a female candidate who had hoped to contest for chairmanship position of Ideato local government Area in Imo State was quoted as saying.

*The intrigues were as many as you have candidates who brought in money to the field and were distributing, you have candidates who sent buses to get under age school children to vote for them, you had candidate who when they went through with this ward they would get their supporters transported to another ward to stand on the line and vote for them, you had paid officials... (p. 306).*

This female hopeful was not alone in the cry against this blatant and open disregard of the rules, other female candidates after due consideration of all the manifest malpractices that attended the primaries concluded that the game had no rules, and where they may exist, they were not for some people as such people flouted the rules with impunity, concluding therefore that the party rules were meant to exclude rather than include [11].

There is also the problem of the way and way political activities were organized making it difficult for a wife and mother to participate in such activities. This organization ensures that to participate the women

must sacrifice her other roles for which society also decries her action; such strategies as setting meetings at nights or the wee hours of the morning, with political programmes that go on unendingly, are all an indication of a deliberate set-up to exclude. The women's problem is compounded by the fact that all party and structures and machineries are owned and controlled by this group. Related to the issue of patriarchy is the fact that women are also socialized to see themselves as being subordinate to men, this perception makes it impossible for most women to conceive of a woman ruling over them, not just out of the acknowledgement of the superiority of the male but also because of the belief that women who become involved in politics must be women of easy virtue, unfeminine, aggressive and dirty to be involved in politics. Socio-cultural beliefs of society such as, the fear of accusation of sexual impropriety, incidences of sexual harassment and a combination of patriarchal, social, cultural and religious conditions keep the women out of the arena of politics.

Another major obstacle to women's political participation is that of finance. Political activities and contest in Nigeria are a capital-intensive undertaking. We know that the deliberate colonial initial policy and subsequent social cultural factors have contributed to making women majority of the poor. Since most of the other women are in the same boat it compounds the situation of the women. Also, it is an established economic fact that most women spend their incomes on domestic items including on their children and husbands. The women also lack the additional advantage of being able to easily obtain loans from the financial sector because of the issue of collateral security. This constraint is so strong that though some political parties attempted to aid by providing waivers for their female candidates, it still is not much help considering the financial involvement in electioneering. This is a great disadvantage considering that most of their male opponents have resources at their disposal as well as financial backing in terms of sponsors. Confirming this situation, a former MP of Bangladesh was quoted as [11], lamenting that

*The two most overwhelming obstacles for women in entering parliament (Politics) are the lack of constituents and lack of financial resources. Women move from their father's home to their husband's home to their in-law's home. They are like refugees. They have no base from which to develop contacts with the people or to build knowledge and experience about the issues. Furthermore, they have no money of their own; the money belongs to their fathers, their husbands or their in-laws. Given the rising cost of running an effective campaign, this poses another serious hurdle for women in the developing world. (P. 309)*

Education is perceived to be a strong correlate of political participation. And in modern society education is a major instrument used by disadvantaged or marginalized groups in effectively improving their status, that is, education could be an instrument of equalization to help reduce disparities of wealth and power [2]. In this respect, too, the women folk are disadvantaged as from the initial stage of western formal education, the females were behind their male counterparts, with some parts of Nigeria beginning even much later than others, making them even more their disadvantaged than the others. The fact that women were allowed into the arena of education much later than the males is a big disadvantage added to this fact is a combination of socio-cultural factors that make access to education for women difficult, these complications have reflected on the level of illiteracy of the women population. The literacy rate of women is estimated to be 39.5% of the female population, while that of the men is 62.5% of the male population. It is also estimated that about 61.0% of the total

illiterate population are women this is a result of the long-standing preference for educating men both historically and socio-culturally which has culminated in the present situation.

A very major obstacle to women active participation in politics is the issue of the performance of several roles and responsibilities by the Nigerian woman. The human development report released by UNDP [15], showed that Nigerian women perform five multiple roles, that of the mother, producer, home-manager, community organizer and social cultural and political leader. Also, women undertake  $\frac{3}{4}$  of all agricultural work in addition to their domestic responsibilities. The tasks performed by women in our communities is an indication of the fact that women work much longer hours than men, no wonder the ancient traditional saying 'a woman's work is never done,' her toils are endless. With so much to do, all competing for her time it is difficult for the average woman to devote time and cultivate the skills necessary for active participation in politics, particularly if she does not want to sacrifice the effective performance of the other roles and responsibilities society expects of her. A combination of these and several other factors, make it difficult for the Nigerian women to attain active political participation particularly contesting for positions.

### **Women's reformative nature**

Despite the very many factors that combine to keep the women from actively participating in the decision-making process, there are many assets and strengths that because of nature and social cultural factors, can enable her if she so determines, not only to compete with the men for her rightful place but also to do so effectively. As Chinweizu [12] rightly postulated *women wield a lot of power which is far reaching and complex*, the fact however remains that currently this power is personal and not positional or political power (yet), currently the men almost exclusively wield the positional or political power. It is necessary that women should arise and utilize their personal powers and strengths enabling them to share the positional and political power which is rightfully theirs, since they constitute more than half of the Nigerian population. In the words of Torre, (1985), *the women need to be involved in the process through which people become strong enough to participate within, share control of and influence events and institutions that affect their lives* [12]. One of the greatest strengths of the women population is their numerical strength. This numerical strength if properly organized or coordinated could produce political results that would be astonishing. The female population is said to be almost 60% of the Nigerian population [16], if this great population can be mobilized to provide support for women desiring to enter politics then it will be difficult not to recognize that they are a force to be reckoned with. As things currently stand, they are not an important pressure group politically; they can easily be ousted out of the scheme of things because they do not provide sufficient support for each other to secure their place. It is therefore important that the women be mobilized to work together for the benefit of the women population, other marginalized groups and society. It is time the women should refuse to be used and left behind after success has been achieved, but should together work towards putting women in the scheme or centre of things.

Another personal power or strength that can aid women in achieving political power is women's organizational and mobilization ability. Women naturally have great mobilization and organizational skills. This explains why even when men exclude the women in all their political activities, they cannot help but involve the women wings of their political party in the electioneering campaigns. During normal

activities of political parties the leadership of the women wing is treated as inferior to the mainstream of the party leadership, thus the leaders of the women wing do not negotiate on equal terms but their positions are usually window dressing in the male dominated party structure, the women are at the peripheral level [11]. At elections times, however the women leaders and their women suddenly assume great significance with every important male of the party wanting to see and talk with them. These abilities or skills can be attested to by a women's protest that took place as far back as 1925 in Onitsha, when with the introduction of native administration women's political power declined, women become politically, economically and socially marginalized. The women organized themselves and went to compounds of warrant chiefs, demanding the scrap of native courts and reduction of bride price. Again, there was another women's protest or what was termed a women's war in 1929, which began with taxation of men and rumoured taxation of women in 1928. The war involved the Igbos, Ibibios and Opobos in the South-Eastern region. The protest began in Oloko in Bende Division and as it spread the movement radicalized. Although some of these women were killed, others wounded, the protests had far reaching implications. Assessing the 929 war [1], held "that women in Nigeria constituted a force to be reckoned with in national development and that when properly organized women could make things happen..." Furthermore, the significance of the war lies in the fact that 'women could fight against the erosion of their political power, it was a testimony to the political vigour of women's capacity to mobilize, and it demonstrated that the women could always come back when and if necessary and would take their destiny in their hands, that nobody would fight their battles for them other than themselves. This is a big challenge for the modern woman and women's political activists. There were other mobilizations towards protests of unwholesome practices much later, such as protests in the West and the East organized by Mrs. Funmilayo Ransome Kuti and Margaret Ekpo respectively. This is an important advantage that women can utilize to their benefit, so that, instead of mobilizing for male candidates, they can organize and mobilize for female candidates.

Another advantage of the women is the natural tendency of women to express and define themselves mainly in terms of relationships; this characteristic can be exploited to political benefit. This nature which develops in the woman a sense of self that is more continuous with other people makes her sensitive to other peoples' needs, and makes her emotional and compassionate about other people. The woman therefore because of this nature judges her achievements by reference to the ability to care for others, the woman is thus not self-serving but views herself based on having successfully fulfilled the needs of others rather than pride in her individual achievement, [17]. This is the basic nature that is required for service and sacrifice for others. It is this sanitizing complementing nature that is currently absent in Nigerian politics that is making society more and more corrupt. This sensitivity, compassion and intuition are needed to compliment the men's analytical, logical outlook, self-serving motivation and more manipulative stance. The absence of these female tendencies in the male dominated brand of politics is what is gradually destroying the Nigerian nation. Women must realize therefore that they are needed in politics and governance alongside the men to infuse their compassionate and sacrificial nature in sanitizing the political system. The men alone cannot lead us to the Promised Land; it will take the combined natures of both males and females to be effective; in the words of Carol Hunsterin, the presiding justice of the supreme court of Georgia. "It is really important for women to serve ... we have something to offer". This female nature if infused into the current

political system will diffuse some of the consequences of the male dominated nature of Nigerian politics.

A very salient but very significant and effective strength possessed by women is that which Chinweizu, described as political power, the power he sees as ruling men and this is the power of socialization. It is the process of socialization that makes the family the bedrock of human society for it ensures the humanity of society. This role or function is most exclusively left to the women even in societies that are conceived to have attained a desirable level of sex role equality the situation is no different as women almost exclusively perform this function such countries as Sweden and in Israel's Kibbutism, (Adewuyi 2000). This indicates that the world over the role of child rearing is considered a female role and performed by females. Chinweizu sees this as a power that the women could cash in on, as they can in the process of socialization teach their children ideals that indicate respect for women and their place in the society [18].

### Measures of increasing women's political participation

Women have demonstrated great courage and determination to have achieved the heights they have attained so far as they are making gradual in-roads into politics, but to be able to make impact and influence the direction of government decisions and policies requires that they achieve greater representation. We have not yet even nearly attained the BPPA minimum of 30% threshold recommended for women. The implementations of these long and short term strategies will enable Nigeria to achieve greater involvement of women in politics resulting in greater political representation. Majorly is the need for women based non-governmental organizations, female politicians, women in media organizations and other women groups to work together. As an initial measure, it is important to mobilize women into greater political participation, then to motivate and encourage them towards political contests. The mobilization will also be targeted towards encouraging women to use their numerical strength to provide support for credible female contestants; with this numerical backing, it will be easy to get more women into elected positions. This mobilization will also provide a forum for women to work towards goals together, diffuse and eradicate the antagonism amongst women that the men manipulate to keep the women from achieving a common goal.

Women organizations should also create a forum or forums for generating funding for women who want to contest elective positions, knowing that campaign and electioneering processes are capital intensive so that the initial take-off funds will not constitute a problem for women who want to go in. The forum can also encourage women who are financially able to invest in the political careers of other women, this is to ensure that they do not lack funding and sponsorship. Though this method as used by male politicians has generated a lot of confusion, ill-blood and corruption for Nigerian politics, its adaptation must be with a lot of care so that the negotiations involved in the process should be more carefully and more humanely done, to ensure that the contestants do not lose their independence and integrity. Besides providing financial sponsorship, older and or more experienced women politicians should be approached and encouraged by women groups to mentor and encourage up-coming female politicians, this is to ensure they do not make the same mistakes the older ones made or others have made, and to enable the younger politicians benefit from the knowledge, experience and contacts built by the older or more experienced ones. Most people do not want to be mentored and censored but both are



necessary ingredients for success as well as for ensuring that we do not lose focus of the major goal. Many great female political activists achieved great feats in the political history of Nigeria but some of them have retired while others have died with their great experiences, without passing the baton to others. Women like, madam Nwayerechukwa who led the Aba women war of 1929, Fumilayo Ransome Kuti who led the Egba women in invading the palace of Oba Ademola II and then Alake of Abeokuta and caused him to abdicate his throne and went into exile, she nurtured the Nigerian women union, fought for women franchise, and girl-child education and sought to mobilize other women. Margaret Ekpo alongside Ransome-kuti founded the national women's association in Nigeria which later metamorphosed into the Nigerian women's union, and which was for years the sole politically active woman voice East of the Niger. Margaret Ekpo who was later elected a member of the house of Assembly of the Eastern Region 1960-1966 fought for women franchise and girl child-education. There was also Sawaba Gambo, a great political activist in Northern Nigeria with little formal education, she struggled for the emancipation of the Northern woman despite being severally imprisoned and tortured [11]. Nigeria's history has records of many of such great women, sadly, however most of these great women did not pass on the baton, so that there was no one to continue were they left off they left their great wealth of experiences and legacies, this only goes to show the relevance of mentoring in politics. Such great women that still living should not only be honoured and recognized by women groups but should be approached to mentor young female politicians particularly female politician that being financially or otherwise aided by such women organizations.

There is also need for women organizations to embark on campaigns aimed at educating the average woman and the male population of the relevance of greater female representation in elective positions. This will eradicate the fear and ignorance amongst both men and some women that such a move will create chaos and lead to the destruction of the fabric of society. The greater representation of women in the political structure will not only sanitize the system, it will enrich family values and culture and result in greater social and economic development for society. The introduction of the quota system is a strategy that is being adapted by many developing countries, to enable them to attain the stipulated 30% female representation minimum threshold recommended by UN. These quotas can be introduced at the party level, the Local government levels, state level and nationally as a country. A policy implemented by such countries as Afghan, Eritrea, Kenya, Namibia, Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda [19], is the reservation of number of seats per province or constituency for women both in the upper and lower house. This quota strategy can be adopted and implemented by Nigeria, though this policy has its problems and dangers such as the possibility of negating merit, capability and promoting favouritism. Also, quotas might place a ceiling for women participation, thus limiting their participation in the electoral process; all the same this is a beginning which should be reviewed later.

Another long-term measure is the emphasis on or female targeted education. This measure along with others will enhance the status and confidence of women enabling them to take their place in the public sector in sufficient numbers. As the Nairobi, forward-looking strategy adapted in 1985 [12], to which Nigeria is a signatory correctly noted, *"Education is the basis for full promotion and improvement of the state of women, it is a basic tool that should be given to women to enable them fulfil their role as members of society"*. There has been a lot of emphasis on girl-child education in Nigeria resulting in

substantial increase in the number of girl-child school enrolment and female education generally and a great reduction in the number of female school drop-out. There is still however, much to be done, to eradicate the prejudice against female education, this may require some form of legislation particularly in the rural areas where there is still preference for male over female education. It is also important to remind women to bring to bear, their strengths and natural attributes in their political involvement, so that they can reform the current male dominated kind of politics. They should play the games by the rules and introducing their womanness into the system they should not be afraid to be women, after all men are not afraid of being men.

## Conclusion

Women in Nigerian before colonial times were actively involved and represented in political sphere of their communities. In the recent past, however, colonial indoctrination and patriarchal factors, educational, financial and social cultural factors have dragged the women to the status of passivity and peripheral involvement. This situation does not augur well for the development of society, this exclusion amounts to the neglect of the interests, needs of more than half of the Nigerian population and others related to them such as children, the aged and the like.

The struggle to recapture the parallel collective political participation and governance that was traditionally shared and enjoyed by women has not been and will not be an easy task. This is because having been left alone for very long with the public or in the political sphere the men have evolved a brand of politics that is uniquely male, a game that the women will not find easy to play as it makes no room for them. A game without rules, with wild violence, indecent bribery and corruption, without regard for human life and public service but obviously self-motivated, no wonder they refer to it "as a dirty game". Women involved in politics should not decide on the path of all oppressed minority groups who usually tend to imitate the dominant group in the attempt to gain status, which will lead them to abandoning their feminine traits and becoming men-women. This could be quite tragic as the loss of their femininity will also be a loss of the strength and advantage of their presence in politics. As Ogbuani [20], aptly submitted, *"the mistake in the past is man's oppression of woman, but the mistake of the future is the spirit whereby the woman imitates masculine strength and loses the creative edge of her feminine perspective"*. Women in politics should thus, see their presence as being to infuse human freshness, decency, sanity, humanness into the system. This means that women must introduce in their politics their womanness, as the current brand is not healthy for the survival of democracy in Nigeria, their presence in politics should make a difference.

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