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Mission Statement

The world system is increasingly passing through very disturbing phases. Almost every sphere of life is being subjected to unprecedented crises. Both the human and the physical environments have come to crossroads of crises. There are, for instance, unprecedented episodes of global warming; depreciating conditions of soil fertility caused by, mostly, unregulated human activities; overflowing of banks of oceans and rivers on one hand, and alarming rain failures in different parts of the world resulting in protracted droughts and famine; on the other hand unprecedented frictions in human relationships across the globe resulting in unprecedented inter-personal, inter-group, inter-regional and inter-continental confrontations, among others.

The Nigerian society is caught up at a similar crossroad. This presupposes that what has become, or is becoming, of the Nigerian society is directly a reflection of the predicament of the international community. Indeed, the entire Nigerian system is increasingly becoming alarmingly chaotic, resulting in unprecedented episodes of conflicts and violent behaviours. For instance, relationship within, and between, families is increasingly becoming very confrontational; the echoes of intra and inter-communal or group conflicts and violence are assuming new disturbing dimensions; the educational system is fast proving highly incapable of producing variables for positive national growth and development; the two dominant religions, Christianity and Islam, are disturbingly proving to be avenues for the promotion of intra and inter-religious rivalries other than peace and unity which are supposedly their main tenets; the

political system is fast becoming terrains of unprecedented violence, conflict, misrule on one hand, as the security agencies are increasingly proving to be suspiciously incapable of performing their constitutional roles on the other hand, among many other vices.

Needless to assert at this juncture that conflict, violence and confrontation have become the dominant features of the Nigerian society. This development results from a network of causes. Apparently, therefore, for us to be able to adequately comprehend the adjoining variables responsible for this down trend in our society, much mental, physical and financial energies have to be exerted. This, of course, is the hallmark of **Journal of Multi-Disciplinary Studies, A Publication of Centre for Peace Studies and Conflict Management (CPSCM)**, Taraba State University, Jalingo.

The Centre appreciates our renown academics who have identified with this mission, particularly, the maiden edition of its Journal through their very valuable articles. Our most reputable senior colleagues who have graciously accepted to be part of this mission as editorial consultants cannot be appreciated enough. The Centre has, indeed, put its hands on the plough and pledges to stick to the philosophy of "Forward Ever, Backward Never". We remain resolute.

Akombo Elijah Ityavkase, PhD

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Women Participation in Governance and Politics in the Eastern Niger Delta Area of Nigeria

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Abstract

Gender has always been an issue in governance and politics all over the world. Politics is supposed to improve governance and improve the life of the citizenry. Despite the enormous numerical strength of woman, their participation in politics, the world over, has been very low. Some people are of the opinion that because of certain peculiar gender differences and characteristics, the women may do better in politics and governance in terms of improving the standard of living of the citizens and better management of corruption, violence and conflicts. In Nigeria, and specifically the Eastern Niger Delta area, women participation in politics is low. The reasons could be cultural, poverty, gender bias, prolonged military dictatorship and the nature of politics in Nigeria, among other factors. The role of women in the traditional African family, as well as the importance of subsistence agriculture to the sustenance of the family, have all been considered as of historical importance in understanding the low level of participation of women in politics. This paper examines critically the role and the participation of women in governance and politics in the Eastern Niger Delta area, using a historic-structural and multidisciplinary approaches. The study concludes that societal stereotype, cultural norms, prolonged military dictatorship and the violent nature of politics in Nigeria has resulted in women being marginalised till date and therefore not being given the opportunity to make their impact in governance and politics in Nigeria, the Eastern Niger Delta Area inclusive.

Keywords: women, governance, politics

Introduction

Participation of women in politics and governance in the Eastern Niger Delta Area of Nigeria is of utmost importance to women empowerment. Right from the pre-colonial period, women had made efforts to participate actively in politics, but their male counterpart had always, for several years, made it impossible¹. Even though women in the Eastern Niger Delta

had ratified several agreements to improve their participation in politics such as elimination of all forms of discrimination against women and adopting of the 1985 Beijing Conference Action plan, and signed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa, yet all these efforts has proved abortive².

It is important to note that even with the affirmative Action of 35 percent representation of women in politics, the number of women in politics is still not encouraging in Nigeria. In the Eastern Niger Delta area, elective positions for women is considered almost impossible as a result of a combination of many factors, such as tradition, cultural beliefs, low level of education, early marriage, religious and social factors, among others, with a notion that politics is not meant for the women³.

The consequence of the foregoing is that, politics has relegated women to the background resulting only in a few women being involved in governance. The encouragement of women to function in politics has not been impressive and also has not yielded good result. Even the Millennium declaration of year 2000 which addressed gender issues and empowered women to participate in politics and to be represented in governance has not yielded much⁴. Similarly, even the creation of some agencies and institutions, governmental and non-governmental, to facilitate women participation in governance, has not fully achieve the goal⁵.

Factors Hindering women's Participation in Politics and Governance

From the foregoing, it has become clear that there are factors hindering the enhancement of participation of women in politics and governance. Even though women are the easily mobilised group of people during political campaigns, rallies and voting, the men folk and other factors have not allowed them to come into limelight. In the Eastern Niger Delta Area women are under-represented in politics, governance and even in the civil service. The following obstacles have been the major setback hindering women's active participation in politics⁶.

Tradition: Tradition has, in a way, prevented gender equality in politics and governance. This obvious challenge has been a major cultural and traditional barrier to women generally. Historically, this can be traced back to the pre-colonial period when women were seen as the custodians of the family. It was believed that, while women were not to participate in major decisions of the community⁷, men were seen as the custodians of tradition and culture. Consequently, women were not made Chiefs, and did not hold any position cultural significant. Rather, women were models in their homes and were meant to help build the home and the family. They

were seen as major contributors to the upbringing of children from childhood to adulthood. Women were also highly intimidated by their husbands and were blamed any time a child had bad conduct or behavioural problems. Generally, therefore, political positions in the pre-colonial period were held by the men, since, traditionally, there were certain functions that women were not allowed to carry out⁸.

Religion: The challenges restricting women's participation in politics are numerous, and one of it is religion. In the Christian perspective, women are expected to submit to their husbands. This has really restricted the women in playing politics, because they not supposed to go against the wish of their husbands. Women all over the world have faced prejudices giving room for discrimination in women participation in politics. The relegation of women originated from inception the human society, and it has remained till date⁹. The men exploit the women using religion for the advancement of their political ambition. This has resulted in women being under the shadows of men, removing equal opportunity for the participation of women in politics.

In the pre-colonial period, traditional religion prevented women participation in playing community politics or even women being associated to the secret things of their gods. Most times religion is used to exploit the women just like Karl Marx attribute the origin and continuing existence of religion to economic exploitation of the masses in a capitalist system. He further, saw it as the sigh of the oppressed creature, the feeling of a heartless world just as it is the spirit of a spiritless condition¹⁰.

Culture: Culturally, women are seen as home makers. This has led to many women being relegated to the background because of the importance the society attaches to the family. For example, in 1989, Patricia, D. Out was the an aspirant who won the primaries' nomination under the platform of Social Democratic Party (SDP) to contest election in Boki Local Government Area of Cross River State, but she could not make it to the councillorship position because of intimidation from the male folks and imposition of a male candidate on the people by the party¹¹.

Globally, the yardstick for measuring national development in different countries of the world is the assessment of the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) developed by the United Nations. Over the years, it has been shown that the women folk has no equal status with men in most areas of life, especially in elective positions in politics.

Prior to the twenty first century, the Easter Niger Delta women had a different perception of politics and governance¹². This was attributed to some factors ranging from gender inequality, especially culture. This has

prevented the women from participating actively in politics and getting involved in governance. Men, very often, have denied their wives participation in politics in the way women find it difficult to enjoy family support either financially, politically, physically or socially.¹³

Education: Gender disparity in education has also been an impediment to the participation of women in politics and governance because many women have not been given the opportunity to go to school and so they are not as educated as the men. Right from inception, women were not encouraged to acquire education. The male child was seen as the right person to acquire education, and this factor also counted against the women. Because of their low level of education, women were not seen as productive politically, socially and economically.¹⁴

Lack of Financial Resources: Another factor hindering the women from participation in Politics and Governance is lack of finance. Women traditionally are most times dependent on the men as husbands and family members. Not many women are capable of providing the enormous financial resources needed for politics in Nigeria as their male counterparts, since politics in Nigeria needs a lot of financial resources to get nomination forms, for campaigns and donations to their political parties. For instance, campaigns involve a lot of printing of materials such as bill boards, hand bills and money to godfathers, media support and means of transportation for rallies in different communities and states¹⁵. This has gone a long way in affecting the women in Nigeria during elections. According to Omafume Onogie, for instance, "women are very poor economically, socially and culturally and these factors tend to impoverish the female folk politically". It is pertinent to note that those who are poor cannot create much political impact and most times are powerless¹⁶.

Timing of meetings and political culture: It is characteristic of Nigeria's politics that late night meetings are common and frequent among the political class. These meetings are always held at night when most women consider it unsafe and culturally not acceptable and decent. However, such late night meetings are always crucial because important decisions and issues are always deliberated upon to the exclusion of some party members. Similarly, such meetings are vital and necessary for prospective aspirants to attend. Since women cannot feel save attending such meetings, it reduces their changes of being involved in critical party decisions thereby hindering their inclusion in party affairs. This is the predicament, also, of women in the Eastern Niger Delta Area of Nigeria.¹⁸

Electoral violence: Elections in Nigeria have always been characterised by violence. This takes various forms and stages in the

electoral process. The intra-party violence, especially during primary elections scare women away from political activities. Very worrisomely, political violence is most often than not sponsored by members of the men folk, since violence is not the characteristic of women. Since most often it is the men who sponsor thugs to advance their political ambition they tend to have an edge over the women during and after political campaigns. Consequently, they have more followership than the women. This is, also, the predicament of the women in the Eastern Niger Delta Area for the candidate that will represent the party. It could be during electioneering campaigns during the election or when results are released¹⁹.



Source: www.nigeriaeye.com

Marital impediment: This may occur mostly when a woman is married to a man from another state or tribe. There is a major setback to the aspirant who is married to a man far away from her home state. She may not be favoured and even if nominated for any political position, she is likely to lose it because it will be perceived that she is occupying a position meant for the husband's community. Similarly, a woman is married outside her home state and she decides to go back to her home state to contest elections, it is difficult for such a candidate to receive the full support from the electorate even in her home constituency²¹.

Insensitivity and intimidation by the men: Due to the nature of our traditions, women who are involved in politics are often ridiculed by the men, and even by some women. The use of abusive words, derogatory language and labelling of the female political aspirants as well as physical aggression towards them as a result of the nature of our traditions therefore impede the involvement of women in politics in Nigeria. Generally, our tradition should be moderated in order to avoid discrimination or

marginalization of women in political participation.

In the whole of the Eastern Niger Delta Area, only one woman, Margaret Ekpo, emerged as a woman activist, and later political figure in the Creek town, Calabar. She was a female pioneer among other male politicians in Cross River state in the First Republic. She played a leading role from the grass root to the national level. She founded market women association in Aba, the platform she used to promote solidarity and support among the women to fight for their economic rights. In 1954, she was nominated to the Regional House of Chiefs, in this capacity, she was able to establish the Aba Township Women Association. By 1961 she won a seat into the Eastern Regional House of Assembly. Ironically, her participation in politics became prominent as a result of the over whelming support she got from her husband and family members. It was still the same Margaret Ekpo who led the Aba Women Riot as far back as in 1929.

Another prominent women politician who emerged in this area was Florence Ita Giwa. In 1999, she won the election in Cross River South senatorial election being the first female senator in the area. However, this two are very few among women politicians in the Niger Delta Area. The major cause of few women being involved in politics in the area has much to do with tradition and marital impediments.

The Efforts of Women, governance and other Agencies:

The participation of women in politics and governance has not received enough attention. Many efforts have been made in recent times, such as the Programme for the Advancement of Women has been able to encourage women to join and participate in politics. Similarly, there has been the clamouring about granting women equal representation in all levels of governance²⁵. Women, like Ita Giwa, have also championed the course of women participation in politics and governance. In Nigeria, because of the obvious disadvantages women faced in politics and governance, several Non-Governmental Organisations have been established to raise awareness and encourage women participation in politics. "Women in Nigeria" (WIN), Gender and Development Action (GADA) and Gender Resource Network (GRN), among others, are some of the non-governmental organisations that have been put in place to enhance the advancement of women in politics and governance²⁶.

There are different women societies such as National Council of Women Societies in Nigeria (NCWSN), that have organised conferences, workshops and seminars for women. However, these efforts have not really increased the participation of women in politics and governance as expected²⁷. It is pertinent to note that the United Nations Declaration on Democracy and Affirmative Action for women, encouraging a minimum of

30 percent women to be represented in governance and decision making positions, has not really empowered the women or encourage them, because men's autonomy has not given the women the opportunity to actively get empowered by that policy²⁸.

Furthermore, efforts such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and United Nations recommendations and government's policies on women, which would have encouraged and empowered women in various levels of governance, have yielded the desired result in effecting appreciable participation of women in politics and governance²⁹. In recent times, only few women have occupy the sit government. Women at the Federal, states and local government administrations have remained marginalised in Nigeria. It is the same at the state and local government legislative.

Even though during the dispensation of President Musa Yaradu and Goodluck Jonathan, there was a remarkable appointment of women ministers, but this effort did not really reduce the gap between the men and the women in politics and governance³⁰. Ironically, during various voters' registration exercises, election rallies and voting, women have always outnumbered the men. Even with the massive turnout of women during elections, women are still not considered and given the opportunity for full participation in politics and governance³¹.

Advocacy and mobilisation of grass root support in favour of notable women aspirants should be encouraged. This should really not be difficult because the women form the bulk of the grass root electorates. The mass media, both traditional and social, can do a lot in this regard by show-casing notable women who have contributed immensely to the development of their various communities and the few women in public offices. Traditional rulers and other stakeholders in the communities should make their commitment by encouraging their women to participate in politics in their various localities³².

Way forward:

The efforts of the women alone cannot yield the desired outcome of increased women participation in politics and governance. It is worthy of note, however, that the women are now asserting themselves in politics more than in the past years. This study recommends, as the way forward, that women should be actively involved in decision making and should be give opportunity to serve. All stakeholders in political positions should pursue the implementation of the National Gender Policy based on affirmative action to enhance women participation in politics in all the tiers of government. Affirmation action should be promoted at all levels through empowerment of women for their voice to be heard.

As part of encouraging all stakeholders to give women opportunity, recently, the United Nations' Women Representative to Nigeria and ECOWAS, Dr. Grace Ongile, with support from the Democratic Governance for Development (DGD) led a delegate on a two day advocacy to Cross River State. The goal of the advocacy was to create awareness for women participation in governance and representation in elective positions at the state, in particular, in order to break the gender based inequality embargo. Her visit was to encourage the government to set up strategies for increasing women participation in politics. It is hoped that this visit, and several others, would translate, over time, to sustainable development in the state³³.

Government and agencies should ensure conducive environment for politics and also adopt different measures that will accommodate the women. Other encumbrances such as women's poor access to media could be addressed by offering discounted fees to the women. The very large amounts of money needed by the political parties for collection of nomination forms for election into legislative and executive positions should be abolished for women.

Conclusion

Women as the home makers and managers could play an important role in nation building if given the opportunity to participate in politics and governance. The following measures could facilitate women participation in politics and governance.

- i. The men folk should give maximum support and have more confidence in female aspirants so that they can partner.
- ii. Discrimination, poor financial base, tradition, culture and even educational attainment that have held the women down for a long time should be discouraged in order to pave way for gender equality and full participation of women in politics and governance.
- iii. Through appropriate legislation, violence could be curtailed to allow female aspirants to emerge.
- iv. The media with its great potentials should encourage participation of women in politics using their various media platforms to project the women during electioneering campaigns. There is no doubt that if the men and women are able to partner effectively in politics and governance, the Eastern Niger Delta area and Nigeria in general would experience more development and progress.

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