

DISCUSSION PAPER

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**STATE AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION:
WOMEN IN NIGERIA'S 2011
ELECTIONS**

Lai Olurode (D. Phil)

ABSTRACT

- ◆ Nigerian politics is still largely a men's affair. But with the growing consciousness that gender discrimination is rooted in culture rather than biology, national governments and international agencies have remained unrelenting in the initiation and execution of policies that are capable of altering entrenched perceptions about women's alleged inferiority.
- ◆ The Civil Society and Gender Desk of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) organised varieties of sensitization and mobilization workshops for women generally, ahead of the 2011 elections, and INEC worked to secure the electoral environment as a means of promoting women's participation.
- ◆ Going by a comparative statistics of women contestants in the 2007 and 2011 general elections, there was an impressive rise in the number of women seeking competitive elective positions.
- ◆ However, there is further need for the efforts of national and international NGOs, government ministries and agencies like the Ministry of Women's Affairs, political parties and INEC to double their efforts to make sure women are an equal part of Nigeria's political sphere.

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FOREWORD

Nigerian politics is still largely a men's affair. While women hold key cabinet positions in Abuja, their representation in the legislature and executive is negligible. The articulation of women-specific demands is low; women remain economically and politically marginalized. Nigeria's still evolving democracy needs to address this challenge and create room for women's interests to be articulated and advanced.

The Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES), a German independent, non-profit organization committed to supporting social democracy, has been active in Nigeria since 1976. We have always supported women's political participation, since this is a major feature of democracy. Today, we are glad to publish a discussion paper on the question of women and Nigeria's elections. The publication of fact-based analysis to enable citizens to identify and voice their interests is one of the main objectives of our work - we have therefore created the "Discussion Paper" series. The first paper dealt with "Anti-Corruption Policies under Obasanjo and Yar'Adua"¹, no.2 analyzed "The Jos

Crisis: A recurrent Nigerian tragedy"², while the third discussed "The Fire next Time: Youth, Violence and Democratization in Northern Nigeria"³.

Among many ways for citizens to influence politics - such as rallies, advocacy, the publication of ideas and townhall meetings - elections have a special position as formal decision-making processes about political office-holders. They are also an indicator of the state of a country's democracy. We are grateful that the Hon. Commissioner of the Independent National Electoral Commission, Professor 'Lai Olurode, has submitted this analysis of women in Nigeria's 2011 general elections. It shows a wide range of exclusion that starts with party manifestos and is also present in the non-democratic ways in which political candidates are selected. He identifies corruption and the need for large sums of money as some of the main impediments for women to move into politics.

Professor Olurode points out that gender discrimination has societal rather than natural causes. This is underlined by a survey that the Pew Research Global Attitudes Project

¹ <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/nigeria/07813.pdf>

² <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/nigeria/07812.pdf>

³ <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/nigeria/09586.pdf>

undertook in May 2010.⁴ According to this survey, Nigeria was one of the very few countries of the world in which the majority of people - 55% - did *not* agree to the statement that “women should have equal rights than men” - a worrisome indicator for an aspiring democracy. Professor Olurode suggests possible ways to alleviate it, especially continued engagement by civil society and national and international NGOs on the issue. He also emphasizes the need for more activism and sensitization on the side of political parties and INEC to drive more equity and social justice in women’s participation on politics. But his research is also academic in the sense that it throws up several research and policy question. For example, there is an urgent need to look at targeted interventions to increase women’s participation, that is: to address their specific grievances *as women* that exclude them from power. Another gender-relevant

subject is the post-election violence in 2011 which seems to have been mainly the affair of young *men*. Solutions would therefore have to specifically target young men, their ideas and their grievances. Finally, the question of political exclusion can also be more diversified: For example, what is the correlation between income and participation in elections? How strongly is the majority of poor Nigerians represented in politics? This discussion paper is one in a series of many; yet it opens up a whole new and very important debate on the state of Nigeria’s democracy.

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Iwo, April 2013

⁴ <http://www.pewglobal.org/2010/07/01/gender-quality/>

INTRODUCTION

The outcome of the Beijing Conference of 1995 has led to giant strides in recognizing the need to accommodate gender issues in all aspects of livelihood globally. This is especially pertinent in view of the closing gaps in population distribution of the two genders. Countries have made significant efforts to improve the chances of women in electoral and appointive positions. Some countries, especially, emerging democracies have legislated female participation in their electoral process by imposing gender quotas on political party nominations to elective posts. Developed countries like Canada, and the Scandinavians ensure gender mainstreaming in all policy decisions.

In the Nigerian context a National Gender Policy was developed and adopted since 2006, but not fully implemented widely. Current statistics indicate that women are grossly under-represented in governance and excluded from the electoral process. It is worthy of note that significant improvements have been made in appointive positions (as Ministers, heads of parastatals and commissioners) reserved for women nationwide.

The participation of women in politics however falls short of the desired 30% by international standards and 35% as entrenched in the National Gender Policy 2006. Current statistics indicate that women are grossly under-represented in elective

positions and excluded from the electoral process, such that in the 2007 elections, they constituted only 9% in the Senate of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 9.27% in the House of Representatives, 5.45% of the State Houses of Assembly and 0% of the Governorship and Presidential elective offices. After the 2011 general elections, it turned out even worse, with women only garnering 7.3% and 6.1% of members of the Senate and House of Representatives respectively.

In this paper, Prof Lai Olurode has researched widely on matters arising from the 2011 elections regarding female political participation, which clearly indicates low participation at all levels of the electoral process. The paper also analysed constitutions and manifestoes of parties, highlighting areas of compliance as well as areas of conflicts. Even parties that favour women in these documents do not bother to implement them to the latter.

Nationally, there is awareness among the general populace on the need to fully involve women in the electoral process. Non-profit organizations (women and human rights groups), the National Council for Women Societies (NCWS) are all active in their campaign for the full integration of women into the electoral process. Further sensitizing and scrutiny by these groups as well as relevant government organs including INEC would assist greatly in ensuring

gender mainstreaming by political parties.

The need to open up the political space to accommodate all groups, especially women to participate in nation building cannot be over-emphasized. The time to act is now.

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Political Party Monitoring and Liaison
INEC , Abuja, Nigeria, April 2013.

STATE AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION: WOMEN IN NIGERIA'S 2011 ELECTIONS

By

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'The April 2011 elections marked a genuine celebration of democracy in Africa's most populous country and a key member of the Commonwealth. Previously held notions that Nigeria can only hold flawed elections are now being discarded and this country can now shake off that stigma and redeem its image'. (Interim statement by H E Mogae, Chairman, Commonwealth Observer Group).

1. INTRODUCTION

Women's determined efforts to penetrate the public space have historically been resisted not only on cultural grounds alone (largely patriarchy) but also on biological basis. On both grounds, however, young girls and women are routinely denied access to society's significant resources. As a consequence, life chances of men and women differ significantly across societies and even within the same family. Of course, we now know that physiologically, the previously assumed differences between men and women are exaggerated, and so insignificant as to justify the social gaps and general inequality between them. Differential treatment of men and women stifle

women's economic, political and social inclusion. Citizenship rights of

women thereby become threatened, fettered and abridged.

The view of a rigid role compartmentalization between men and women on grounds of the theory of biological determinism is now difficult to sustain. Gender role differences are malleable and are open to manipulation and change over time. Moreover, gender categories could play similar or even widely conflicting roles across society and time. Indeed, in a temporal and spatial sense, gender roles have undergone immense transformations which had weakened the foundation on which a purely biological determinism of gender roles was planked. That the biological school of gender roles has dominated the thoughts of many scholars and policy makers for long is little surprising. Religious sentiments were readily mobilized in defence of a rigid gender regime. Thoughts about gender

categories and roles are culture-driven. It is generally known that non-material components of culture, unlike cultural artefacts, change slowly since they relate to values, social practices and beliefs. It is often said that old habits die hard. In many fundamental respects, and this is not an African or Asian phenomenon, the domestic sphere and that of human reproduction and whatever are connected with them continue to be seen as women's whereas the outer space, the world of work and "core" activities are perceived as men's. This should help to explain men's dominance in not only politics but economy as well. Gender typing of human activities is universal though men and women are not necessarily assigned similar roles across society. This has been the strong point of the cultural school of gender roles which maintains that culture rather than biology has a stronger explanatory power in gender-role analysis. Men's and women's social roles are interchangeable and not predestined or biologically programmed.

However, it has now become fashionable for countries to articulate measures being taking to right

centuries of social discrimination against women. International agencies and development partners continue to paint a picture of lopsided development if women are not motivated to be part of the development process. Countries where women and young girls are discriminated against in respect of access to social, economic and political resources display disturbing poverty profiles than others. The challenges of poverty and social exclusionary practices would be difficult to address unless women are mainstreamed into such development and citizenship agenda. This submission was based on the near equal numerical presence of men and women in global and national populations. Globally, of the about 7 billion human population, women constitute about 50%. In its last census of 2006, Nigeria recorded a national census of over 140million out of which women constituted about 48%. It is clear from these statistics that poverty would become aggravated if women are shut out of development efforts and thus denied their rights as citizens. Or how can men with just about fifty per cent of the population shoulder the entire

burden of economic activities? Without women's labour in farming and rural productive activities generally, more people in Africa would go without food. Women are a major force in rural production, distribution, food processing and in rural cottage industries as well.

It is evident that women's exclusion from agriculture is capable of unleashing hunger on society. On grounds of social justice and equity, women's exclusion from politics is definitely indefensible. First, it will certainly deny society of women's perspectives on issues of governance on the floor of parliament and even at other levels of political administration. When such governance issues get translated into policy for action, they confront challenges of implementation because of low buy-in by women. This then leads me to the second point; men as politicians cannot claim expertise in legislating on matters that are purely women-specific. Women's perspectives should not be silenced and should be incorporated into policy formulation and implementation. This will aid sustainability and implementation. A third point relates to symbolic gesture and attracting

respectability on a global level. Countries that treat their women with dignity and afford them visibility in politics and development which are beyond mere tokenism, generally tend to attract development partners and thus more donor fund unlike those that regard them as political lepers. It is therefore important to continue to challenge the asymmetry that presently pervades political participation between men and women in Nigeria. There is no immutable law that says that men must be dominant in politics or that women are inferior politically. Thus a practice whereby women have restricted access to positions of power and thus its exercise through political participation and representation, is unacceptable. Women should have access to the State arena where key resources are concentrated and where critical decisions affecting men and women are taken. The State regulates access to juicy appointments and other critical resources. Men are dominant in public sector employment at the Federal, State and Local government levels. In 2008 and 2009, women constituted just about a third of the workforce at those levels¹.

The power of the State and of its key actors remains awesome. This is why being out of the State is unthinkable for members of the dominant elites. Women's unrelenting struggle to gain sympathetic treatment and smuggle themselves and their agenda into the State arena make sense in the context of the enormity of State power. In Nigeria, political power is more formidable and deterministic of leverage over other key resources. Members of the political class are more handsomely rewarded than any other group in Nigeria. An analysis of emoluments of national assembly members is very disturbing in a country with our poverty outlook². Indeed, the reward system is too much skewed in favour of government appointees generally and this is a cause for concern in view of paucity of investments in human capital development. Politics indeed is a most profitable engagement in Nigeria which helps explain the 'do or die' attitude that it attracts.

It should not be surprising that in spite of its hazards, ordeals and risks, women are being lured into it as well. Definitely, the State, its agencies and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have, over the years,

instituted programmes, activities and policy interventions to improve on women's political participation. My objectives therefore, in this paper are to find out and establish the impact of State-induced promptings as well as the effects of out-of-the-State interventions on:

- (i) the number of women in executive positions in political parties and on the number of women seeking elective and competitive political offices;
- (ii) the number of women that got elected into political offices in 2007 compared to the 2011 elections, and
- (iii) suggest measures to improve, sustain and bolster women's political participation in order to avoid reversals of the successes recorded so far. The overall concern here is how to expand women's citizenship rights.

Apart from this introduction, there are six other sections. The next section presents a broad highlights of the 2011 general elections. The third section deals with factors which activated women's participation in

the 2011 general elections. In the fourth section, I focused on women's position in political parties. The fifth was on women and the 2011 general elections. I discussed constraints on female participation in politics in section six while the conclusion is section seven wherein I reflect on some policy issues and desirable interventions that can broaden the scope of women's political rights.

2. HIGHLIGHTS OF 2011 GENERAL ELECTIONS

Nigeria's 2007 general elections were roundly condemned for being the worst in Nigeria's history. Even the leading beneficiary of the presidential election admitted this much upon being sworn in as president³. It was clear from that moment that the President (Musa Yar'Adua) was set on a collision course with those and processes that rigged him into power. At his inauguration, he promised Nigerians that he would definitely set the machinery in motion for political and electoral reforms. The Justice Mohammed Uwais Political Reform was thus quickly inaugurated on August 28, 2007⁴.

The kernel of the report and the agitation of leading opposition figures and non-governmental organisations was that the appointment of the Chairman and members of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) be removed from the President and be placed in the hand of the National Judicial Council⁴. Before he could begin to embark on concrete measures over the findings of the political reforms committee, Yar'Adua breathed his last⁵. The burden of considering the report for implementation fell on Yar'Adua's successor, President Goodluck Jonathan whose controversial rise to an acting Presidency was infused with a strange doctrine of necessity⁶.

After what President Jonathan referred to as extensive consultations, he appointed Professor Attahiru Jega, a former Chairman of the radical Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) as Chairman together with others among who were also renowned activists⁷. These appointments were generally applauded and many thought that Jega and his team had formidable credentials to enable the new election management team conduct credible elections. Iwu's era was

indeed a colossal disaster as courts after courts overturned the results that his commission declared without regard to procedure⁸. The new election management body under Jega's leadership was sworn in on June 30, 2010 by the President and it immediately hit the ground running. Members screening by the Senate was unprecedented in terms of rigour, its painstaking nature, media coverage, public attention and interest.

The first decision which the new electoral commission took was to agree with key stakeholders that the voters' register compiled by the previous Commission in 2006 was not credible. It took this policy decision at its first retreat in Uyo and informed Nigerians that it would compile a new register of voters⁹. This decision was considered a good beginning by the stakeholders.

There were two major challenges in executing this agenda. The first was the challenge of time because the 1999 constitution provides that a certified copy of the national register of voters must be ready 90 days before elections¹⁰. The other challenge was that of funding a new project on the compilation of a new

voters register. The Commission under Prof. Maurice Iwu did not budget for a new registration of voters. The old commission was prepared to use the 2006 voters' roll, the legion of criticisms against it notwithstanding. The new commission under Jega had to approach the National Assembly with a request to approve a supplementary budget in the sum of over N87 billion¹¹ to compile a new register. A large chunk of this budget was for the procurement of new direct data capture machines (DDCM). The commission had proposed the purchase of over 132,000 DDCM which would meet its methodology of deploying one DDC machine to every polling unit to capture biometric information of eligible voters at an average of 500 voters per polling unit. In spite of initial hiccups, in the end, over 73 million voters were captured in the registration exercise in readiness for the 2011 elections¹². This register is the most comprehensive and credible data bank in Nigeria up to date; Commercial banks accept voters' cards as mode of identification for banking transactions. This feat was accomplished in just 3 weeks and this

really surpassed the expectations of many including some concerned development partners who saw both the registration and election as an impossibility made possible and acts of great accomplishments¹³. However, sanitising this data base by eliminating duplications through data consolidation remains a formidable challenge.

With a new register that was generally applauded by stakeholders as cleaner and credible than all the ones that preceded it, the stage was set for the 2011 general elections. At this stage of this discussion paper, maybe I should adumbrate on some salient factors in the turnaround in Nigeria's electoral fortunes that had moved the process from election fiasco to an enviable state of credibility and electoral fidelity. The role of the presidency, its body language and public posture of no interference were critical success factors. It would be recalled that during his campaign, the president had promised a regime of free, fair and credible elections. The president publicly stated that nobody should rig for him or kill anyone for him to be elected. Secondly, the election was moderately funded by government

and satisfactorily supported by Nigeria's development partners; they also provided technical support where necessary.

More than ever before, the commission provided an elaborate security planning for the elections which ultimately paid off. This is the third point in the turn around of the electoral process. The commission's decision to set up the inter-agency consultative committee on election security (ICCES) was most thoughtful. It afforded the commission an opportunity for periodic meetings with security agents and for critical review of election security strategies. Outstanding security challenges notwithstanding, Nigeria's 2011 general elections were by far the most secured. Security agents surpassed the expectations of many. The elections were generally well secured and the professionalism of security agents was very supportive of the exercise of citizenship rights. The post-election security breaches in some states were most regrettable as they had nothing to do with the credibility of the electoral process. The need for a more intense voter education is evident.

Of course, the transparency manner in which the election commission engaged key stakeholders - political parties, the executive, legislature, the judiciary, the media, NGOs and community based organizations among others - assisted the credibility of the electoral process and the general positive perception. This is the fourth point. Issues of ethics of electoral commissioners remain central to election management and nothing must be done to diminish this relationship of trust. No effort must be spared to undermine the esprit de corp. The commission must continue to improve on team work and cohesion in its internal procedure.

The fifth point is the activism of core stakeholders in the election process. These stakeholders did not spare INEC where necessary, but their interventions were sympathetic, credible and sincere and with a view to improving on the electoral process. As we look ahead to 2015, the judiciary, for example, must be intolerant of those (whether organizations or individuals) who may wish to throw spanners in the wheel of the electoral process through

frivolous litigations which must be nipped in the bud. So unless, circumspect is exercised, such frivolous writs may scuttle our efforts at democratization and the delivery of effective electoral services. Since elections are about partnership, INEC's relationship with other stakeholders really paid off. The bulk of our ad hoc staff was from the Nigerian Youth Service Corps. These young men and women put in their best in the service of their fatherland and were accordingly commended for their heroic roles. To me, the above were some of the factors that cannot be ignored in an honest assessment of the moderate success of the 2011 elections and which accounted for the positive assessment by the Commonwealth Observer Group as contained in the opening page of this discussion paper.

But before we discuss the outcomes of the 2011 general elections particularly with reference to its gender implications, some mention should be made of efforts by the State, NGOs and others to activate women's participation in politics.

3. FACTORS WHICH ACTIVATED WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN THE 2011 GENERAL ELECTIONS

Both at the national and international levels, concerns continue to be expressed about women's poor visibility in all facets of political contests. Women's overall marginalization, even under globalization is rooted in patriarchy. Patriarchy is indeed a fundamental cause of discriminatory practices that are directed at women whether in economic or political sphere. These discriminatory processes often seek justification in women's assumed biological inferiority to men. Being biologically programmed, it is regarded as immutable. Of course, it is now clear that this was mere propaganda as it has no scientific validity. With the growing consciousness that gender discrimination is rooted in culture rather than biology, national governments and international agencies have remained unrelenting in the initiation and execution of policies that are capable of altering

entrenched perceptions about women's inferiority.

In the context of a favourable international climate, Nigeria continues to create an enabling environment that could mitigate gender stereotypes and prejudices. Nigeria, for example has domesticated major United Nations protocols that seek to end discrimination against women. With regard to factors that had been at work in prompting women's participation in the political economy, some of these can be located at the State realm while yet others are by non-State actors - particularly some non-governmental organisations and quasi - non-governmental organisations. Let me be more specific in this regard, especially in connection with the activation of women's role in the 2011 general elections.

A study of the constitutions and manifestos of political parties revealed some general and specific reference to women's issues¹⁴. Though, some political parties incorporated gender specific ideas that are action-oriented in their manifesto, yet, others were mere

tokenism. I studied the manifestos of political parties with a view to understand their positions on women - both in a general and specific sense. Only three of them, the All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA), the All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP) and the People's Democratic Party (PDP) displayed a measure of impressive coherence and understanding of the phenomenon of women's political empowerment. But the Action Party of Nigeria (ACN), and the Labour Party (LP) seem unbothered or rather thought that gender issues were not as important. But even then, these parties (APGA, ANPP and PDP) failed to fully frame actionable agenda of what would be done to right discriminatory practices. Some examples would suffice.

The manifesto of the People's Democratic Party recognised the relevance of women, their numerical strength and their multiplier effects in the mass mobilization of the Nigerian people. The party therefore stated that it would pursue policies to enhance women's participation in national affairs. In specific terms, the party mentioned the following among others;

- (i) ensure equal opportunity in accessing microfinance by women cooperatives
- (ii) selectively provide affirmative action for women's participation in democracy and other social areas;
- (iii) ensure equitable representation of women in all aspects of national life including party organs by using affirmative action to ensure that at least 30% of the workforce are women;
- (iv) to implement the provision of the UN Conventions on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women;
- (v) mainstream women's concern and perspectives into all policies and programmes;
- (vi) support legislation for the abolition of all forms of harmful traditional practices against women; and
- (vii) exempt women standing for electoral office from paying any fee.

It is indeed to the credit of the party that some of its pledges to women

participants were honoured. The references to affirmative action and UN Convention were instructive of the party's sensitivity to gender issues - a good global practice and an impressive grasp of the problem. ANPP pledged in its manifesto, under a section on women's right, that the party would guarantee equal opportunity for women to develop and compete with their men folk in an environment free from social prejudices that inhibit social, economic and political growth of women and/or infringe on their fundamental rights as persons in fact and in the law. The manifesto then goes ahead to outline some specific policies that would be pursued to advance women's interest - obnoxious widowhood practices would be outlawed; and ending a regime of discrimination against women with regard to consideration for political appointments, among others.

APGA too rolled out steps to be taken by the party to advance gender equity, such as sponsorship of enlightenment programmes, fight gender inequality, promote affirmative action in employment, review credit guidelines to favour women, sponsorship of legislation to

fight child marriage, and many others. It should not be forgotten that these are mere statements of intentions by the political parties. These statements, could however, be taken as indicative of women's precarious and pathetic position *vis-a-vis* men. It is however, to the credit of the political parties that they recognized the imperative of change in women's status. Perhaps, how women featured in political party executive positions and as contestants in elections as well as winners, may well be good indicators and expressions of how political party manifestos have been translated into actions.

4. WOMEN IN EXECUTIVE POSITIONS IN POLITICAL PARTIES

In theory and practice, across societies, women are generally perceived as belonging to the sphere of domesticity, caregivers and home makers. In a classical patriarchal setting, women are rarely allowed to venture into the murky waters of politics and warfare. Where women are not allowed to feature in

executive party positions, issues concerning their interests may not attract serious discussion at party executive meetings. But the mere presence of women in executive positions of political parties does not necessarily place women's interest in the front burner. It all depends on the calibre of women's representations. Some women may see their positions as a means to fester their nets. Indeed, it is also a function of which political party executives' positions women occupy. Again let me use the five major political parties as an entry point for this illustration- ACN, ANPP, APGA, LP and PDP.

The following positions were occupied by women in ACN - National Women Leader, National Auditor, Vice-Chairperson of North-West and National Auditor (4 offices in all as at 2011 elections); in the ANPP, the following party positions were conceded to women - Assistant National Financial Secretary (North-East), (South-East), Deputy Welfare Secretary, National Women leader, Financial Secretary, Assistant National Auditor (South-South and North-Central) and Assistant National Publicity Secretary among other

sinecure posts (eight offices in all as at 2011 elections); APGA conceded the following three executive positions to women National Welfare Secretary, National Women's Leader and Deputy National Women's leader; Labour Party conceded none to women; and for the PDP, it only allowed the position of the National Women Leader.

It becomes clear from the above that these positions are mere tokenism in that they rarely attract "serious" male contenders who are more interested in the really more juicy party executive positions where the shots are called. Party positions which women occupy are rarely contested for nor are they perceived as the life wire of political parties. They are essentially ceremonial and most parties can even do without such positions and this would not hurt. With women's absence in respected executive party positions, it is really a challenge to get their views smuggled into the party agenda. Issues of finance and nomination for elections and appointive positions are discussed at executive and caucus levels, and at these levels, women are marginalised both in numbers and in the type of positions that are conceded to them.

The Nigerian State recognises that political parties may not adequately project women's interest; it therefore, through the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) office established a Trust Fund for women seeking political participation in the 2011 elections. The third development goal of MDG states as follows:

*"Promote gender equality and empower women. That fund was established to assist women's aspirants financially. It is common knowledge that political office seekers need fortunes to actualise their ambitions and women are generally poorer than men for reasons of patriarchy among others, and thus women are excluded from key economic spheres"*¹⁵

The overall goal of the fund was to increase women's visibility in the political space and thus promote the

attainment of the 35% benchmark of the national gender policy¹⁶. The take-off grant for the establishment of the Trust Fund was N100,000,000.00 (one hundred million naira) only. Up to date, about 117 female candidates have drawn from the fund - women aspiring to the office of the President, gubernatorial or deputy as well as senatorial candidates drew up to N500,000 (five hundred thousand naira), House of Representatives aspirants drew N350,000 (three hundred and fifty thousand naira); and State House of Assembly N250,000 (two hundred and fifty thousand naira). The beneficiaries cut across party lines and states.

The office of the wife of the president also supported women political aspirants through her pet programme. The president's wife organisation is known as Women for Change and Development Initiative (W4CDI). Generous donations were made available to women political aspirants. The Civil Society and Gender Desk of the Independent National Electoral Commission also organised varieties of sensitization and mobilization workshops for women generally, ahead of the 2011

elections. Among these were INEC and political parties round-table tagged "Setting Gender in Nigeria's Political Agenda," advocacy visits to selected traditional rulers in whose domain women's participation as electors or aspirants may be generally constrained; zonal workshop on female turnout at election and sponsorship of gender caller tunes among other activities. A number of development partners also committed resources in this direction. More importantly, much earlier in its history, the new Independent Electoral Commission (INEC) worked to secure the electoral environment as a means of promoting women's participation. In its theoretical assumption, a secured election environment would prompt more participation by electorates generally in the electoral process but women's participation in particular. This informed the commission's decision of October 2010 to host a workshop on election security. Whether these initiatives and promptings produce the desired outcomes of enlisting better women's participation in the electoral process can only be borne out by facts. A comparative analysis of statistics of women contestants for

2007 and 2011 elections communicate an impressive improvement in the number of women aspirants for competitive elective political positions.

The pressure on women to seek competitive elective offices has been unrelenting both from within and outside Nigeria. International development partners have been at the centre of this advocacy and many state and non-state actors and agencies have been consistent in their agitation for more women's involvement in politics. Prior to the 2011 general elections, sensitization workshops were held on the need to encourage women to seek elective offices. The agitation for women's participation in politics became a major pre occupation of Nigeria's first lady and wives of governors. Apart from this social engineering, the policy-making communities also contributed in no small measure to enlist support for gender equity in politics.

Going by a comparative statistics of women contestants in the 2007 and 2011 general elections, there was an impressive rise in the number of women seeking competitive elective

positions. In 2007, only 516 women sought elective positions to state houses of assembly, the national assembly, governorship and the presidency, whereas in 2011, 921 women contested elections into those offices, an increase of 78 % over the same period, male contestants increased by just 4.3 %.

Generally, the percentage increase in the number of candidates for the overall population was only 8.4 % during the period. (See Table 1). By far, women were more keen at becoming governors in the 2011 general elections. Election into that office witnessed an upsurge of women contestants by over 400% increase - the highest for any office contested for by women in 2011.

Table 1

Gender Analysis of Contestants in the 2007 and 2011 General Elections

S/N	Type of Election	No of Male Candidates			No of Female Candidates			Total No of Candidates	
		2007	2011	% increase of Male	2007	2011	% increase of Female	2007	2011
1.	Presidential Election	24	35	45.83	1	5	400	25	40
2.	Governorship Election	471	646	37.15	14	73	421.43	485	719
3.	Election into the Senate	737	805	9.23	61	92	50.82	798	897
4.	House of Representatives	2190	2220	1.37	137	224	63.50	2327	2444
5.	State House of Assembly Election	5415	5512	1.79	303	527	73.93	5718	6039
TOTAL		8837	9218	4.31	516	921	78.49	9353	10193

SOURCE: Data compiled by the author from INEC, Research and Documentation department.

5. WOMEN AND 2011 GENERAL ELECTIONS

Politics in modern Nigeria has been dominated by men. In most of colonial Africa, this was largely the picture. However, some countries in east and South Africa have made commendable progress in instituting legislation that enhance women's presence in parliament. Pre-colonial Africa was not essentially a man's world. Women not only featured as political leaders, there were also women that were custodians of deities and shrines. Women were the lords of the markets. The political losses which women suffered as the aftermath of colonial encounters were incalculable.

Even under very severe constraints, women remain dogged and resolute in their determination to gain political visibility. Women's struggle in this direction has not been easy and this has not been without some costs - humiliation, intimidation, embarrassment, beating, assault, and even assassination. It is not yet clear, if we can comfortably insist that every encounter with globalization and civilizations have been salutary and superlative for women.

It is not being suggested that women's interest cannot be catered for by men as political representatives nor that women can advance their gender interests better than when men are in the saddles. Of course, it is perfectly possible theoretically, to have elected women that would support legislative ideas that can foster gender inequality and legislations that would be more restrictive of human rights generally and women's rights in particular. The challenge of constructing a gender sensitive polity is far greater than securing seats for women in legislative houses or getting them into executive positions in governments. However, getting them elected and appointing them into positions of political significance are objective pre-requisites for further and effective participation of women in politics.

As a background, it is necessary to remind ourselves of the 2007 elections on which local and international observers had reached a conclusion as the worst in electoral history the world over¹⁷. In majority of cases, votes were not counted and indeed, winners were announced in other cases while counting was on-

going. The election results were a bizarre and a bazaar of a sort. As imperfect as the results were, cautious reference can still be made to women's performances in those elections. There were obviously more women contestants in that election than in 2003. It was still, in the main, men contesting against each other. Women contestants were less than 10% of contestants for the House of Representatives and for the Senate. In fact, of the 2,484 aspirants for the House of Representatives, only 14 (5.6%) were women and there were only 54 women for Senate out of 792 candidates thus making up only 6.8%. There were only 15 female gubernatorial aspirants across the

parties in 2007 and 50 or so female gubernatorial contestants¹⁸. The share of women in the national legislature in 2007 was 7.5% against men's 92.3% for men. In 1999, the figure for women was 3.2%; and 5.5% in 2003¹⁹. However, the figure for 2011 elections was 6.3%, a decline from the 2007 figure.

In 2007, there were 9 women senators and 21 House of Representatives members. In 2011 however, 8 women were elected as senators and 22 as house of representative members. Women constituted only 5.5 per cent of the 986 Houses of Assembly members i.e only 54 whereas men were 932.

Table 2

Women in National Legislature

Years	Senate	House of Reps	Percentage
1999	3	12	3.1
2003	4	21	5.3
2007	9	21	7.5
2011	8	22	6.3

Source: INEC Report on the 2011 General Elections (n.d.) pp. 135-138; and other sources.

The question which was posed earlier can be reiterated at this point of the discourse. Did all the promptings by political parties as contained in their manifestos, by NGOs as well as by State - sponsored initiatives and by INEC as well produce a better outing for women in 2011 elections?

Going by mere percentages of women in the national assembly, the figure did not justify our expectations. But this can only be so on the surface. If it is recalled that the 1999 and 2003 elections were superior to 2007, and if the 2007 figure is discarded, then women have never had it so good than in the 2011 elections. This may be the outcome of the impact of the listed promptings and efforts to activate women's interest in politics. But the impact is yet to be decisive. Whether it will be sustainable or progressive is also difficult to say. There are indeed rooms for optimism. But a lot depend on the performances of women in appointive and elective positions as well as what women organizations do between elections in term of social engineering rather than going into slumber. Let me speak to some constraints in female participation in politics.

6. FEMALE PARTICIPATION IN POLITICS: CRITICAL CONSTRAINTS

Constraints can be located at two levels (i) at the level of ideas and social values i.e. ideology and (ii) at the level of material relationships. Constraints at the level of material relationship are more amenable than those located in ideas and attitude. Politics is perceived in Africa as akin to warfare in that it entails aggressive behaviour, violence, thuggery and hooliganism. This perception has been reinforced by the actual practice of politics in Nigeria. Our experiences of politics are replete with sad reminders of houses that had been razed down, of businesses that had fallen into ruins, of people that had either been killed or maimed. Politics is thus portrayed as a vocation not for peaceful men and women. People who value their lives have enough warning signals to dissuade them from venturing into it. Over the past seven decades of party politics, political practices remain to be peaceful. Politics was not about winning the debates. Winners often take all and in this zero-sum conception, losers have an

entrenched notion that a key factor in their losses is the unfairness of the contest. Every contestant believes he has the winning formula. With this hard-line attitude, election outcomes often trigger a backlash, some of which had actually shaken the country's rickety foundation. Their general perception as free and fair notwithstanding, violence in parts of northern Nigeria accompanied the outcome of the presidential election in 2011. Of course, poverty, ignorance and limited geographical horizon were key explanations - apart from unguarded statements by some leading opposition politicians.

Apart from the violent nature of politics in Nigeria which generally scare men and women but particularly women, there are yet other challenges that have gender-specific consequences for female participation in politics. Women are perceived as home makers and care givers. Expectedly, a heavy workload in respects of tasks associated with these roles fall squarely on them. In previous times, when a woman's status was a function of the number of children that she has brought to life, unlimited procreation was encouraged. A whole life time may

thus oscillate between baby-sitting, food preparation for family members and nursing the sick in addition to growing food crops for family consumption and market as well as processing the same. When a rigid and rigorous regime of procreation is added to socio-religious and cultural factors, female political participation are greatly fettered. Really, politically ambitious women would have to defer political participation till much after the rituals of procreation and their associated trappings have been fulfilled.

Patriarchy remains strong in our society and the beliefs which sustain it are rooted in culture which changes rather slowly. It would not be an exaggeration to say that women who venture into politics may be portrayed as social deviants and as outcasts. My personal encounters with women politicians lend weight to this. Women who ventured into politics may be portrayed as wayward and as prostitutes in that they attend night meetings. Divorce among such women may be higher than the average. Even then, such women confront all sorts of discrimination in the mainly male-dominated top hierarchy of political party executives.

There are wanton discriminatory practices in the process of securing nomination by political parties and during campaign. Sometimes, these hostilities could be veiled as in the use of offensive language or even direct attack such as when acid was poured on a female politician while canvassing for votes. Financial constraints cannot be ignored. The leading economic sectors are firmly gendered in their ownership. It is much easier for men as politicians to mobilise fund than it is for women. The support by the Nigerian Woman Trust Fund and by the Women for Change Initiative as well as by others would be peanuts when compared to funds that male politicians and their associates could put together. Where women brave these odds and thus get elected, some may regard it as mere tokenism which could be regarded as undeserving. Yet, others may interpret her success as a case of "quid pro quo". In any case, women as politicians may not necessarily attract the respect and courtesy that are associated with their offices, just because they are women. In this connection, it must be stated that attitudes are changing for more

tolerant views of women's visibility in politics.

These constraints appear daunting and intimidating but being located in attitudes and material relationships, they are alterable. The final section which is the conclusion addresses measures to alter the gender imbalance in political participation.

7. CONCLUSION

The blossoming of gender-friendly NGOs is a salutary development. These organizations should actively complement efforts by the State and international development partners to re-shape attitude formation by concentrating on the primary agents of socialization - the family, the school, religious organizations as well as such other secondary agents as the media, the newspapers and peer groups. With a drastic change and overhaul of attitude formation, society and its key members and institutions would become more tolerant of diversity. Since this is the age of the school, school administrators should pay attention to gender balance since these positions prepare pupils for later adult life. It

would not be too much to even insist on affirmative action in this respect.

Secondly, NGOs should not sheath their swords between elections. Going to slumber in between elections portends failure for gender equitable participation in elections. Continuous sensitization is key to the success of women aspirants. Women, and men in particular, need to accept women as legitimate aspirants for appointive positions and for elective offices as well. Women should also overcome self-doubt about their ability and exude more confidence when placed in leadership position rather than nursing a sense of failure *ab initio*.

Thirdly, the Ministry of Women's Affairs should continuously undertake gender analysis of every piece of pending legislation before they become bills. If need be, it should agitate and mobilize for alteration of gender inequitable legislative proposals. Both at the State and Federal levels, friendship of first ladies must be courted if only to have the ears of their male spouses as a strategy of securing the best outcome for women generally, but women aspirants in particular. Collaboration and synergy are key to ensuring

favourable outcomes for women. Of course, women can achieve little when they operate outside of the mainstream political parties. They should join political parties in large numbers and seek to alter the power equation by leveraging on their numerical strength.

The fourth point is about political party constitutions and manifestos. In their present form, they are essentially unhelpful to women who seek political offices. Political parties must reflect gender-friendliness in their constitutions through a sort of affirmative pronouncement e.g. if the chair of a political party is male then a female must be the secretary general. Key offices must be conceded to women apart from deliberately promoting their candidates seeking elective offices. Political parties and national assembly members as well as community based organizations must be sufficiently sensitized to buy into this process of increasing women's participation in politics. Election management bodies at the centre and state levels must simultaneously provide for more women's visibility in their bureaucracies and in the recruitment of ad hoc staff. Election

bodies cannot claim complete helplessness because fielding candidates are purely internal party matters. No, they should engage political party leadership and confront them with statistics on women in parliaments in other countries²⁰ (such as Zimbabwe, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania and South Africa among others) and seek to alter the attitude of party chieftains through sensitization. INEC can be more gender friendly by encouraging political parties to agree to a memorandum of understanding on how to improve on prevailing peripheral participation of women in the political process. Since persuasion may not work satisfactorily, INEC should push for a constitutional amendment so that gender quota can be legislated upon. It should be made to carry the same weight as the federal character clause in the 1999 constitution as amended. The overarching dominance of patriarchy in Nigeria suggests that this strategy will extend women's rights as citizens and remove women's rights from obscurity and tokenism to a subject that can be litigated upon in case of violations.

However, even if all these are done and they lead to increase in the size of elite women's representation, this does not automatically translate into any substantive enhancement of women's position in society. It is perfectly possible to have elected women on the floor of parliament but who are nevertheless insensitive to or intolerant of women's-friendly issues. If the above recommendations are to fulfil the anticipated objective of enhancement of women's status regarding their citizenship rights, then ideological fireworks and re-socialization of elected elite women and men must be simultaneously undertaken to reiterate the salient points about balanced gender development in place of one-sided approach. Fortunately, upholding this is not just about best practice but, it fosters balanced and sustainable development. Above all, it is indeed ultimately about men's enlightened self-interest.

FOOTNOTES AND REFERENCES

1. See Gender Statistics Newsletter, Vol.2, Issue 2, National Bureau of Statistics, April - June 2011.
2. Emoluments of National Assembly members are mind bugging. An analysis of the 2012 budget reveals that the national assembly and the presidency would gulp N2,472 trillion which is about 72% of the total budget while capital expenditure is only N1.32 trillion (see Daily Sun, December 14, 2011). According to an analysis by Prof. ItseSagay, a retired professor of law, a Nigerian senator's total emolument per annum is N240 million (i.e. \$1.75 million) per annum and a member of house of Representatives is on total emolument of N204 million (i.e. \$1.45 million per annum). Politics is indeed attractive in Nigeria. The Occupy Nigeria protest of January 9 - 14, 2012 was partly against what is generally regarded as unjust remuneration not only of legislators but of political appointees generally.
3. See President Yar'Adua's inaugural speech, *The Guardian*, May 30, 2007.
4. See Electoral Reforms Committee Report, Vol.1, Abuja, The Presidency, 2008.
5. See Segun Adeniyi, *Power and Politics and Death: a front row account of Nigeria under the late President Yar'Adua* (Lagos: Kachifo Ltd. 2011).
6. See SegunAdeniyiop.cit
7. Generally, human rights communities jubilated upon Jega's appointment as chairman as well as in the appointments of other activists and seasoned professionals. Among those appointed were a retired diplomat, a retired administrator who is also a consultant surgeon, a retired permanent secretary, an engineer who was formerly an administrator of higher education, a retired military officer, two former school administrators and teachers, a pharmacist and a legal practitioner. There were, however, protests against the appointments of some members to such an extent that some nominees were dropped. See *The Punch*, June 30, 2010 wherein a faceless group vehemently opposed the appointment of Lai Olurode from the South West as he was alleged to be a speech writer of former Governor Bisi Akande. See also *Nigerian Tribune*, June 18, 2010 and *The Nation*, June 20, 2010 and *Sunday Sun*, June 20, 2010 for details.

8. The governorship results of Ondo, Edo, Ekiti, Osun States and several other election results were pronounced by the courts as fraudulently declared. But an unrepentant Iwu as Chair of INEC was quoted as saying that USA could learn the art of election administration under his tutelage.
9. See INEC Daily Bulletin of 23rd July, 2010 wherein INEC announced its decision to compile a new register as the existing register had many fundamental flaws such as under-age registrants, blurred photographs, many duplications, still photograph impressions, etc.
10. To meet this requirement of time, Section 9 (5) of the Electoral Act, 2010 was amended to read: 'the registration of voters, updating and revision of the register of voters under this section shall stop not later than 60 days before any election....'
11. See *The Punch* of August 5, 2010, August 6, 2010, and *Daily Trust* of August, 12, 2010 on controversies over INEC voter registration budget.
12. See *The Punch* of March 4, 2011 which published the number of registered voters as 73.5 million.
13. See INEC Synopsis of domestic and foreign observers' reports on both the registration and 2011 elections, pp12 - 13 where the Commonwealth Observer Group led by H.E. Festus Mogae said as follows of the NYSC "These young Nigerians, a large number of whom were women, showed dedication and courage in helping to deliver a transparent electoral process, often in difficult conditions. They are a source of pride and hope for Nigeria." (p.12)
14. See National Orientation Agency (2011) *Source Book on Political Parties' Manifestos and Constitutions* for the Manifestos and Constitutions of the All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA), pp 340-379; All Nigeria People's Party (ANPP) pp 264-300; Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP), pp1257-1304; Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), pp 73-100; and Labour Party (LP) pp 738-753.
15. See the third development goal of the Millennium Development Goal dated 2000.
16. See Gender Policy, Federal Ministry of Women Affairs, Nigeria; see also INEC Gender Policy document which the Commission got a consultant to prepare and was submitted in November 2012; see P.9 of the report. Though, it is a far cry from having a gender balance in term of staffing, women's presence in the upper cadre of the Commission is fair. During the registration of voters exercise and the election in 2011, women's participation was impressive and could be a factor activating women's visibility in the electoral process.

17. See Lai Olurode and S.O. Akinboye (eds.) *Issues in Nigeria's 2007 Elections* (forthcoming)
18. See M.O Quadri and 'Lai Olurode, *'Gender and Democratization Processes: Issues in Nigeria's 2007 Elections'* 'Lai Olurode and S.O Akinboye (eds.) *Issues in Nigeria's 2007 Elections* (forthcoming).
19. See National Bureau of Statistics, Vol.2. Issue 2, April - June, 2011.
20. For example Uganda with a total of 386 seats in parliament has 135 women (35%); Tanzania with 350 has 128 women (36%) and Senegal with 150 has 64 seats (42.7%). Sweden in fact has 156 (44.7%) out of 349 seats. See statistics of women in national parliaments at <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm> (last date modified: 1st February, 2013)

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An uncritical interpretation of colonial history and anthropology would suggest that women's visibility in the public sphere was a recent development. When I once took pride in my role in the domestic front as a help mate to my spouse, my father intervened and insisted that my generation could not match his regarding sharing of domestic chores. According to him, some in his generation pounded yam for their wives and fetched fire wood for them from the farm. Pre-colonial women enjoyed political, economic and socio-cultural presence. No doubt, colonial authorities vested more leverage on men than women and treated women as not only subordinates but inferior as well. Women are yet to recover fully from the devastating discrimination and prejudice that they suffered under colonialism.

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The paper was first presented at the University of Texas conference on Africa in 2012 where participants at the meeting made helpful interventions. Ishaq Sanni and Biodun Oyekan assisted with typing. I am convinced that unless a form of gender quota is legally instituted; improving women's participation in the political process will continue to have bleak prospects. Political parties should be made to reserve certain quotas for women's contestants. The same approach adopted for dealing with federal character issues is recommended i.e. gender quota should be inserted in the constitution for local, state and national elections.

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May 2013.

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