

Gender and Democratic Governance in Nigeria: Impediments to Effective Participation.

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Abstract: The study examines the major impediments to equal gender participation in the democratic governance in Nigeria. It obtains its data primarily from the secondary sources such as textbooks, journal publications, research articles and online materials. The theory of Liberal Feminism has been adopted as framework for the purpose of analysis, while Content analysis helps in the analysis of all the data collected. The findings indicate that since the return of democratic governance in Nigeria in 1999 the female gender has been underrepresented in the polity. This is as a result of major impeding factors which the study highlights to include: colonial legacy, cultural practices, deficiency in education, wrong religious beliefs, as well as the poor economic status of most women in Nigeria. In view of this revelation, the study, therefore, makes the following recommendations: governments at all levels in Nigeria should endeavour to provide quality education for all citizens irrespective of gender status to arm them with the required knowledge for effective political participation; the government should review all cultural practices that have constituted barriers to women political advancement in general and their participation in the governance of Nigeria in particular; Religious leaders should not only accept women and girls as members of their congregations but should also recognize their rights to leadership beginning from where they are worshiping; Parents should not constitute more barriers to their female gender in terms of education, rather they should endeavour to give them befitting education that will enable them assert their political rights at all times; The civil societies, the media and the public should champion a gender equality cause on behalf of the female folk to liberate them from the barrage and shackle of impediments already identified.

Key Terms: Gender, Democracy, Democratic Governance, Colonial Legacy, Violence, Culture, Education, Religion, Nigeria.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Globally, issues pertaining to gender equality had been a major concern to many long before the current 21st century. This stems from the realization that significant portion of the world population, which comprises the female gender; also deserves adequate attention as their male counterpart in the affairs of their society. Consequently, several attempts have been made towards addressing the issues. These include the setting aside of March 8 every year since 1911 as Women's Day to draw attention to issues relating to women (Mojeed-Sanni (2015); The incorporation of the principle of equality of rights in the Charter of the United Nations in 1945; The international observation of the period between 1975 and 1985 as the decade for women, which was accompanied by World Women Conferences in Mexico 1975, Copenhagen 1980, Kenya 1985 and Beijing 1995 (Maters, 1986; Wader, 2010) where quality times were dedicated to discussing issues relating to female gender; The inclusion of gender development in the Millennium Development Goals (MGs) in 2000; The establishment of the United Nations Women, a body dedicated to the promotion of women's rights in all fronts in 2010 and; The renewed calls by the United Nations for nations to observe the Principle of Affirmative Action in their governance. All these and other measures are significant steps aimed at promoting gender equality and the rights of women in the society. However, most countries, including Nigeria have not utilized the opportunities provided by these measures to run gender inclusive governance as their women still suffered relegation due to some certain impeding factors. The case of Nigeria is quite appalling. Since the return of democratic governance in 1999, Nigeria has witnessed five successive general elections beginning with the first in 1999 then followed by 2003, 2007, 2011 and 2015. There were also staggered elections due to court rulings in states such as the

Anambra, Edo, Ekiti, River, Osun just to mention a few. These elections brought several Local Government Councilors, Chairmen and Vice Chairmen into the 774 Local Government Councils in the country; Governors, Deputy Governors and Legislators into the 36 States and State Houses of Assemblies as well as the Federal Capital Territory; the Presidents and their Vice, the members of the National Assembly of which 109 are Senators and 360 are Members House of Representatives. Nevertheless, several reports have shown that the numbers of female gender elected into these positions have not been enough compared to their male counterpart. For instance, Joy Ezeilo reported in UN Women (2014:6) that out of the total of 990 elected members of the State Houses of Assemblies, only 12 were women in 1999; 38 in 2003; 54 in 2007 and 61 in 2011. Similarly, in the House of Representatives, out of 360 seats only 12 women got seats in 1999, 21 in 2003, 27 in 2007 and 26 in 2011. For the Senate, 3 women out of the total number of 109 in 1999 were elected Senators. Same figure was repeated in 2003. In 2007 it was 9 women and by 2011 it came down to 7 women. Equally, for Deputy/governorship category, only 6 and 3 out of 36 were elected in 2007 and 2011 respectively. No woman has ever occupied the office of the President in Nigeria neither has there been any for the office of the Vice President.

Furthermore, from the data compiled by the Inter-Parliamentary Union on September 1, 2018, Nigeria has continued to fall below the global standard of 35 percent representation as out of 360 members of the House of Representatives, only 20 (5.6%) are elected women. Also in the Senate, out of the 109 Senators only 7 (6.5%) are women. With this, Nigeria is ranked 183 of the 193 countries surveyed (Inter-parliamentary Union, 2018). This is contrary to what is prevalent in some African states that have met the 35% Affirmative Action such as Rwanda with 63.8% Lower House and 38.5% Senate; South Africa: 41.9% for the Lower House and 35.2% in the Senate; Burundi: 36.4% in the Lower House and 41.9% in the Senate and; Zimbabwe with 31.5% in the Lower and 37.5% in Senate (Jonathan, 2018). The appointments of Ministers, Commissioners and Secretaries into various government ministries, agencies, commissions and parastatals by successive governments in the country have never favoured the female gender as well. All this abnormalities have been allowed to fester uninterrupted despite the proven abilities of women as leaders and agents of change, and their right to participate equally in democratic governance (cited in UN WOMEN, 2014: II).

This study shall examine some of the impediments faced by women in getting involved in the democratic governance in Nigeria with particular focus on the ones highlighted already. The paper is structured into segments as follows: Conceptual clarification, theoretical framework, background to Nigeria democratic governance, impediments to effective gender participation in democratic governance in Nigeria, conclusion and recommendations.

Statement of the Problem

Since 1999 when Nigeria returned to democratic governance, the country has witnessed five successive elections at the federal, state and local government levels with so many office holders being elected into offices of the National Assembly, the State Houses of Assemblies, the Presidency, the Governor and local government councils without adequate representation from the female gender. It is on record, for instance, that out of the total of 990 elected members of the State Houses of Assemblies, only 12 were women in 1999; 38 in 2003; 54 in 2007 and 61 in 2011. Similarly, in the House of Representatives, out of 360 seats only 12 women got seats in 1999, 21 in 2003, 27 in 2007 and 26 in 2011. For the Senate, 3 women out of the total number of 109 in 1999 were elected Senators. Same figure was repeated in 2003. In 2007 it was 9 women and by 2011 it came down to 7 women. Equally, for Deputy/governorship category, only 6 and 3 out of 36 were elected in 2007 and 2011 respectively (Joy Ezeilo reported in UN Women, 2014:6). In addition, no woman has ever occupied the positions of the Vice President and the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria despite their tested and proven abilities to handle such offices. This injustice has continued unabated notwithstanding the global calls for gender inclusiveness in the ratio of 35:65 for female and male respectively due to many impeding factors.

Objectives of the study

The general objective of this study is on gender and democratic governance in Nigeria: impediments to effective participation. However, in specific terms, the study shall pursue the following objectives:

1. To provide a historical background to Nigeria's democratic governance;
2. To highlight and discuss those major impediments to gender effective participation in the democratic governance in Nigeria;
3. To make recommendations for gender inclusiveness in the government of Nigeria

II. MATERIAL AND METHODS

The study combined the historical and descriptive research designs. While the historical design provided a guide into the Nigeria's democratic journey right from independence to 1999 when the country returned to civil rule and till date with the view to demonstrating how female gender had been fared in the

governance of their country, the descriptive method helped us in explaining clearly these impeding factors that have hindered the same females from effective participation in the country democracy. The data for the study were based on secondary sources drawn from textbooks, research articles, academic journal and other internet sources. The findings were reached through the use of content analysis of the data collected from the aforementioned sources.

III. RESULT

Conceptual Clarifications

Gender

Gender refers “to a social attribute associated with being male or female and the relationships among women, men, girl and boys”. (UNDP, n.d:19). Sani (2001:41) defines gender “...as the relations between men and women, both perceptual and material”. And that “gender is not determined biologically, as a result of sexual characteristics of either women or men but is constructed socially”. This view has also been shared by the WHO [World Health Organization] as it considers gender to “be socially constructed characteristics of women and men such as norms, roles and relationships of and between groups of women and men” (WHO, 2008). As a concept, gender includes expectation about the characteristics, aptitudes and likely behaviours of both women and men (femininity and masculinity) (UNDP, n.d: 19).

Democracy

Democracy could be defined as a form of government that allows general participation of the citizens in the political affairs of their state. In the words of Tamen (2011:261-262), “democracy is not a mere form of government. It is a type of state as well as an order of society”. Appadorai (1968:137) considers democracy as “...as a system of government under which the people exercise the governing power either directly or through representatives periodically elected by themselves.” Originally, Greece is regarded as the birth place of democracy. However, democracy in Greece at the early stage was sporadic and occurred at isolated locations (Tamen, 2011:139). Later the English witnessed a revolution in form of the greater charter of liberties before the enlightenment. This revolution led to the signing of the Magna Carter on 15 June, 1215 by King John of England, pledging never to act unilaterally on all issues that concern the masses (Tamen, 2011:139). The Charter also has provision which states that “to no man will we deny or delay right or justice” (Ujo, 2008:24). This gave the people power to be involved in the government of their country through a gradual process. However, its transformation from “a mere curiosity to an important national and international political idea” came during the American and the French revolutions in the Eighteenth Century (Tamen, 2011). As a global concept and a form of government, democracy ensures “equal rights of all normal adults to vote and to stand as candidates for elections; periodical elections; equal eligibility for executive and judicial office and freedom of speech, publication and association. These rights provide opportunities for political participation i.e. for choosing rulers or deciding the general lines of their policies (Appadorai (1968:138). Unfortunately, women in Nigeria have not fully enjoyed these rights of political participation guaranteed by democracy as their male counterpart due to some obnoxious cultural practices and others man-made barriers. A trend that is considered antithetical to the opinion expressed by Kofi Annan, thus: “The concept of democracy will only assume true and dynamic significance when political parties and the laws of the land are decided upon jointly by men and women with equitable regard to both halves of the population”(cited in Sani (2001:119).

Governance

This refers to “the exercise of economic, political and administrative authority to manage a country’s affairs at all levels”. It also “comprises the mechanisms, processes and institutions through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise their legal rights, meet their obligations and mediate their differences” (UNDP, n.d:21).

Democratic Governance

Democratic Governance is a range of processes through which a society reaches consensus on and implements regulations, human rights, laws, policies and social structures-in pursuit of justice, welfare (Cheema, n.d: 1) among others. The concept, according to Cheema and Maguire (n.d) is “when the authority of the government is based on the will of the people and is responsive to them. It is when open protections guarantee the right to speak, assembly and dissent. And it is when government and governmental institutions are pro-poor and promote the human development of all citizens.” Sadly, the democratic governance in Nigeria has never favoured the female citizens in terms of the degree of involvement in leadership positions.

Theoretical Framework

The framework of analysis adopted in this study is Liberal Feminism. Feminism generally “refers to the movement aimed at establishing or defending equal political, economic and social rights and opportunities for women” (Omojuwa, 2013:186). Since its emergence in the 20th century, the theory has tried to shift the study of international relations away from the usual state-centric approach to non-state actor. Liberal Feminism as a strand of feminism is concerned with ending women’s exclusion from or under-representation in office, power and employment (Dauda, 2013:48). It argues that since gender differences are not considered based on biological make up there is no real difference between men and women in terms of their ability to perform a given task. The apostles of this framework always buttress their claims about women’s ability to function effectively as men by citing such female leaders like Margaret Thatcher, who in 1982 led Great Britain to war against Argentina because of Falkland’s Island; Indira of India that took India to war with Pakistan 1971 and the Golda Meir of Israel that mobilized and waged war against Egypt Syria in 1973 (Omojuwa, 2013:191 and Dauda, 2013:51). While the theory advocates equal treatment of men and women in the allocation of power and other responsibilities and that women can perform any task just as their men counterpart, experience has shown that in Nigeria this has not been the case as several barriers have impeded the female gender from participating effectively in the democratic governance of the country. No woman has ever occupied the office of the President in Nigeria while in other positions they have continued to witness underrepresentation.

Background to Nigerian Democratic Governance

Nigeria is among the fifteen countries (others are Ghana, Cote d’Ivoire, Mali, Burkina Faso, Senegal, Togo, Niger, Benin, Gambia, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Cape Verde, Sierra Leone and Liberia) that make up the West African sub-region. It is also a Federation of 36 States, 774 Local Government Areas with a Federal Capital Territory located in Abuja. Nigeria shares land borders with the Republic of Benin in the west, Chad and Cameroun in the east, and Niger in the north. It equally occupies a total area of 923,768 Square Kilometers (Momah, 2014:64). The area stretches “from the coast of Atlantic Ocean and the forest lowlands of the south, through the Arid Savannah plains of the middle belt, the rocky hill and the plateaus of the southeast to the wide expanse of territory bordering the Sahara Desert to the north” (Balogun, 2011:19). In terms of religion Nigeria is almost half Muslims and Christians with a very few population practising African Traditional Religion (ATR). Economically, Nigeria is one of Sub-Saharan Africa’s largest economies and relies heavily on oil, which accounts for 95% of its export, as main source of foreign exchange earnings and government revenue (CIA, 2017). The country’s export commodities, according to the above source, including cocoa and rubber go to its trading partners such as India (34%), South Africa (5.5%), Spain (5.9), US (9%), France (5.8%) and Canada (5.1%). She also imports machinery, chemicals, transport equipment, manufactured goods food and live animals from China (20.3%), US (8.3%), Belgium (7.6%), UK (4.4%) and Netherlands (4.1%). The Literacy level is 59.6%, while Life expectancy is 53 years for male and 56 female (WHO, n.d).

Historically, Nigeria is believed to have evolved through the activities of the British colonial rule which commenced in the Nineteenth Century. This is apparently true because apart from the fact that the name ‘Nigeria’ was coined by her (British) citizen, Flora Shaw in 1892 (Momah, 2014:9), the British actually started the process that led to the emergence of the Nigerian state. The first step in this direction began in 1849 when in an attempt to prevent further trade in slaves in the Bights of Benin and Biafra the British government established a consulate for the two Bights and thereafter became deeply involved in the political and economic life of the city states (Dauda, 2014:21-22). In line with the provision of the Berlin Conference on effective occupation (Mbua, 2007:26) and the desire to prevent the French incursion into the region the British transformed the coastal consulate into Oil River Protectorate 1885 and in 1893 it was converted to Niger Coast Protectorate. By 1861 Lagos became the Crown Colony and its hinterlands were subsequently brought under the colonial rule as part of the Lagos Protectorate (Momah, 2014:9).

In the north, the Royal Niger Company under the leadership of Sir George Goldie “acquired political and administrative power to administer the area, a narrow belt of territory on both side of the river from the sea to Lokoja in 1888” but by 1900 the British took control of the area and proclaimed it the Northern Protectorate and within the span of four years its hinterlands were forcefully subjugated and brought into its administration (Dauda, 2014). The Colony of Lagos later in 1906 merged with the south to form the southern protectorate and by 1914 the two northern and southern protectorates were amalgamated by Fredrick Lord Lugard into one Nigeria. The British went on to exert its colonial authority over Nigeria up until 1960 when the country was granted independence (Achebe 2012:41). Between 1960 and 1966 the country operated a Parliamentary System of Government. Consequently, Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe became the Head of state while Alhaji Sir Tafawa Balewa was appointed Prime Minister (Head of Government). Nigeria also experienced a Civil War between 1967 and 1970 (Falola and Heaton, 2008: xvii). This war came after the first military coup that collapsed the first republic in 1996. Following this a prolong period of military rule ensued by Generals Yakubu Gowon and Murtala Mohammed /Olusegun Obasanjo until 1979 when Nigeria returned to civil rule, adopted a Presidential system of government modeled after that of the US and elected President Shehu Shagari for a four year term of office. His

second tenure was truncated by the military coup that brought General Mohammadu Buhari into office as Head of State in 1983.

There were other military rulers that piloted the affairs of the country after General Buhari. They included Generals Ibrahim Babangida (1985-1993), Sani Abacha (1993-1998), and Adulsalam Abubakar (1998-1999) (Falola and Heaton, 2008). By 1999 Nigeria returned to democratic governance following the election of Olusegun Obasanjo as Nigeria's President. Since then the country has held three successful Presidential elections that brought in three Presidents namely, Umaru Musa Yar'Adua, Goodluck Jonathan and the incumbent President Mohammadu Buhari who assumed office on May 29, 2015 (CIA, 2017). It is pertinent to note that throughout this journey no woman has ever occupied the office of the President, Vice President, the Senate President, etcetera. And none of them has enjoyed equal opportunity in the polity due to some impeding factors.

Impediments to Effective Gender Participation in Democratic Governance in Nigeria

A lot of studies have identified several factors that militate against equal gender participation in Nigeria's politics or democracy especially, with respect to the female gender. For instance, Nwabunkeonye (2014) listed some of these factors to include: discriminatory socio-cultural and religious practices; lack of finance; under representation of women in governance; unhealthy political environment; political party discrimination; Wrong perception of women in politics; lack of family, fellow women and media supports and; indigenization of women political aspirants. Esidene and Abdul (2013) also outlined such impediments as: religion/cultural belief system; virility deficiency syndrome; lack of finance and; lack of effective means of implementation of Affirmative Action. Similarly, Sani (2010) highlighted Colonial legacy; violence associated with partisan politics; heavy capitalization or cost of electioneering campaign and; the traditional and cultural attitudes to politics as major factors militating against women's effective participation in governance in Nigeria. PLA (2018:19) pointed at "gender ideology, cultural patterns, predetermined social roles assigned to women and men as well as low illiteracy, poor childcare, inadequate health care, and poverty" as the major factors impeding women in political positions. For the UN Women (2014: II) there are two obstacles that face women in political life. These include the "structural barriers through discriminatory laws and institutions [which] still limit women's options to vote to run for office". However, for effective and in-depth analysis we have subsumed these factors into colonial legacy, election violence, bad cultural practice, poor education and religion as discussed below:

Colonial Legacy

One of the factors that hindered women's active involvement in the decision making in Nigeria is the notorious legacy which was left behind by the British colonial lords. As would be recalled, the continent of Africa, following the Berlin Conference of 1814/85 was shared among the colonial powers such as Britain, France, Belgium, Portugal and Germany for colonialization that lasted for several years. The British was placed in charge of Nigeria but her activities throughout the period have nothing to write home about regarding the rights of women. It is reported that "the colonial master did not entertain or appreciate the political contribution of women. Women were denied access to education and participation in public affairs of the society (Sani, 2001:120). This discrimination was further carried on by subsequent governments in Nigeria thus preventing female's involvement in the affairs of their nation as their male counterpart.

Violence

Election induced violence has become one common factor that is barring women from participating adequately in the country's democratic processes in recent times. To begin with, Election violence includes sorts of riots, demonstrations, party clashes, political assassinations, arson, thuggery, kidnappings, etc spontaneous or not, which occur before, during and after elections. It could be regarded as election motivated crises employed to alter change or influence by force or coercion the electoral behaviour of voters or voting patterns or possibly reverse election decision in favour of a particular individual groups or political party (Dauda, 2011:11).

According to Dauda (2011) election violence involving the use of threats and intimidations can occur at any stage of an election. Thus, if it occurs during voter's registrations it may lead to the disenfranchisement of several people; during election campaign, may compel political contenders to boycott elections and; if violence occurs after an election, its aim is to contest the legitimacy of outcomes (Dauda, 2011). The amount of election violence in Nigeria is quite alarming. Throughout the past elections in Nigeria, violence in forms of killings, kidnappings and clashes among supporters has been recorded. In the 2007 elections, for instance, violence clashes were recorded in Bauchi, Bayelsa, Benue, Rivers, Delta, Gombe and Ogun resulting in the deaths of 280 persons (Global security, 2013). Similarly, in 2011, the post-elections violence that occurred in Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Niger, Sokoto Yobe, Zamfra, claimed about 800 lives, displaced 65,000 people and destroyed 350 churches (Human Right Watch, 2011). Even the 2015 elections

witnessed violence prior to its commencement. From the pre-elections report by National Human Rights Commission, 61 incidences of election violence occurred in 22 states of Nigeria with 58 deaths. Of these, Lagos had 11 incidences with 22 deaths; Kaduna three and nine deaths and Rivers one and six deaths among others (Ibeh, 2015). As reported during the 2011 elections 75% indicated incidences of violence targeted specifically at women (Women Advocacy Research and Documentation Centre, (WARDC) 2014:3). All these have made politics in Nigeria less attractive to women to want to be part.

Culture

Culture is a set of values, beliefs, norms, customs, rules, and codes that socially defines a group of people, binds them together and gives a sense of communality to such members (Sheriff and Aliyu, 2016:1-2). Culture could also mean “everything which is socially learned and shared by the member of a society. It is an organized system of norms and values hold by people of a society. In society individual receives culture as a part of a social heritage and in turn reshape the culture and introduce changes which then become part of the heritage of succeeding generation” (Sheriff and Aliyu, 2016:2). Culture, simply put, is “the sum total of learned behaviour, beliefs, kills and the life of mankind as a whole” (Majuk, 2001:53).

Cultural factor has been a major bane of women’s participation in the political affairs of the Nigerian society. For instance, there is a cultural belief that women are supposed to be led and not to lead. There is also a societal perception about leadership ability of women, in terms of assertiveness. Culture has also placed a ban on the extent women can go leadership-wise. Thus, their roles have been confined to home and family. Given such a situation, many women may be reluctant to run for any political office. And if they seek the office, they may fail to attract sufficient party and electoral support to win as they are considered subordinate to men and second class members/ citizens both in the family and in the society, especially in most rural parts of the country (Kassa, 2015).

Besides, detestable socio-cultural practices such as widowhood practices, Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), restrictive religious practices (as observed in the Northern geo-political zone), some of which create barriers to women empowerment and gender equality, access to information, education and wealth-creating assets, such as land, capital (including credit facilities), labour, and entrepreneurial skills, have also contributed to the poor participation of women in politics and organizational decision-making processes (Kassa, 2015).

Furthermore, Nigeria is a typical patriarchal setting where local traditions and cultures place more priority on the male folk right from the family level to the larger society. So, women political participation is hampered by the fact that they are not considered worthy for such activities by their very own traditions and cultures.

Economy

Economic factor such as money plays a prominent role in the political participation of women in Nigeria. Money, generally, is very crucial in politics. For example, the former US President Mr. Barrack Obama acknowledged the power of money in politics in his book: *The Audacity of Hope* when he wrote: that incumbent ‘Peter Fitzgerald had spent \$19 million of his personal wealth to unseat his predecessor, Carol Mosley Braun’. John C. Green...also emphasized the importance of money to party politics when he stated that money is an especially valuable resource among several other resources which parties marshal in the process of seeking control of the personnel of government(Olorunmola, 2016).

The implementation of political parties’ activities at all stages of elections; before elections, for instance, candidates require adequate funds for effective campaign in order to achieve electoral victory. According to Olorunmola (2016), in the 2015 general elections in Nigeria, the cost of nomination forms for candidates vying for the office of the President under the platform of All Progressive Congress (APC) was #27,500,000; Governorship, #5,500,000; Senate, #3,300,000; and House of Representative, #2,200,000 (Olorunmola, 2016:8). Similarly, the above source also reports that the campaign expenses made by the Peoples Democratic Party’s (PDP) Presidential candidate, Goodluck Jonathan Stood at #8,789,685,296.00. This underscores the fact that money plays important role in politics. Regrettably, discriminatory practices against women in Nigeria have put them at a disadvantaged position economically as 70% of them are said to be living below poverty line (Pwaragba, 2013). There is a nexus between women’s socio- economic status and political participation. Thus, Shvedova (2002) argued “that social and economic status of women in society has a direct influence on their participation in political institutions and elected bodies”. In a situation where 70% of them live below poverty line effective participation, therefore, becomes zero. Even when some political parties sometimes gave them a waiver in the purchase of forms as in 2015, they could not “continue the race effectively to the very end” (Olorunmola, 2016:8)

Education

The duo of Kumar and Ahmad has provided a distinction between education in a narrowest and broadest sense (Kumar and Ahmad, 2008:5). Accordingly, education in the narrowest perspective is “equivalent to instruction” and consists of specific influences consciously designed in a school or in a college or in an institution to bring about development and growth, whereas in the broadest sense, “education consists of the total development of personality”. In this sense, education comprises those experiences, which affect the individual from birth till death. Hence, education is that process which an individual freely develops his self according to his nature in a free and uncontrolled environment (Kumar and Ahmad, 2008:5).

Education is a key factor in political participation of women because it takes an informed mind to decide appropriately who to govern her as a voter or which office to run for as candidate and the strategy to adopt in achieving victory. Unfortunately, the level of education among women in Nigeria, especially in the northern part of the country is still at the lowest ebb. For instance, it has been reported that “93% of Northern girls lack Secondary education. Jigawa State School completion rate among female is less than 7%; in North-West 70% of women between 20 and 29 are unable to read; only 3 percent of female complete Secondary education in northern state (Dauda, 2011:27). With the above condition, most women found themselves in a tight corner without knowing their rights, the laws governing the country they are living in and without knowing the importance or the need for them to get involved in the Nigerian democracy. In fact, they are depowered and as such have failed to function adequately in the democratic space of the Nigerian state.

Religion

Religion is a derivative of the Latin word “*Religare*” which means “to tie”, “to bind” (Cline 2017). The Encyclopedia Britannica (2017) defines religion as “human beings’ relation to that which they regard as holy, sacred, absolute, spiritual, divine, or worthy of especially reverence. It is also commonly regarded as consisting of the way people deal with ultimate concerns about their lives and their fate after death”. In essence, followers of any particular religion are expected to adhere strictly to its teachings or doctrines, thereby making it the most influential factor in determining their actions in a given situation. Among the three major religions in Nigeria – Christianity, Islam and African Traditional Religion (ATR) none of them adequately, if at all recognized the rights of women to leadership position in its teachings. Some adherents of Christianity especially, the orthodox, for instance, usually rely (though privately) on the two letters of Apostle Paul (1Corinthians 14:33b-35 and 1Timothy 2:9-15) to justify why women should be perpetually excluded from church leadership and by extension the secular politics. This explains why one hardly sees women elected to handle sensitive positions in some churches. Islamically too, women are not given prominent place in the society except at the family level, even with this, there are still limitations. Hajo Sani (2001:120) bears her mind on this and more:

In a Muslim society....She [woman] may express her views and make her suggestions concerning all matters, but the best role she can play is keeping the marital ties intact and strong by recognizing her husband as the person responsible for the running the affairs of the family. [And that] after the Islamic jihad of 1804, the practice of *Purdah* confined Muslim women to the house and greatly reduced their political influences.

Some portions of the Holy Scripture specifically, (Koran 2:282) does not seem to portray the dignity and equality of women as men. Besides, there are some other considerations that have made women not to be considered for leadership islamically. These include physical weakness, unassertiveness, susceptibility to seduction and the lack of perseverance.

IV. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The paper looked at some of the impeding factors militating against equal and effective gender participation in the democratic governance in Nigeria since the return of democracy in 1999. It noted that in spite of the global campaigns through various means to promote the right of women like the setting aside of March 8 every year as International Day for Women, the Affirmative Action, the inclusion of the principle of equality in the Charter of the UN, etcetera, many countries, including Nigeria have never taken the rights of women serious as their men counterpart as majority of them (women) have continually been shut out of the corridors of power. The reason for these discrepancies has been summarized to include: colonial legacy, cultural practices, deficiency in education, religious beliefs, as well as the poor economic status of most women in Nigeria. Females are very vital to political stability and socio-economic development of the society so, when they are excluded, by implication stability in the polity and economic development will continue to suffer as the case with Nigeria. It is, therefore, pertinent that the government of Nigeria recognized the place of women in governance of the country by adhering to the following recommendations:

1. Governments at all levels in Nigeria should endeavour to provide quality education for all citizens irrespective of gender status to arm them with the required knowledge for effective political participation;
2. They government should review all cultural practices that have constituted barriers to women political advancement in general and participation in the governance of Nigeria in particular;

3. Religious leaders should not only accept women and girls as members of their congregations but should also recognize their rights to leadership beginning from where they are worshipping;
4. Parents should not constitute more barriers to their female gender in terms of education, rather they should endeavour to give them befitting education that will enable assert their political rights at all times;
5. The civil societies, the media and the public should champion a gender equality cause on behalf of the female gender to liberate them from the barrage and shackle of impediments already identified;
6. The government, in addition to what is on ground, should develop economic blueprint for female economic emancipation so as to able to take participate effective the governance of the country since economic factor plays significant role in politics;
7. Women can also help themselves by embarking on mass mobilization, advocacy and sensitization campaigns on the importance of gender equality and inclusiveness in the governance of the country;
8. Nigeria should emulate some African countries like Kenya, Rwanda, among who have surpassed the 35% Affirmative Action in the involvement of women in the governance of their countries.

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