Politics In Nigeria: To What Extent Has The Gender Agenda Gained Momentum?

Otu Ekpenyong (Ph.D)[1,] Okechukwu Egwu Ibiam (Ph.D)[2,]
Emmanuel Obiahu Agha[2.]

[1,] *Department Of Sociology, Faculty Of Social Sciences, University Of Port Harcourt*
Rivers State, Nigeria
[2,] *Department Of Political Science/Psychology/Sociology, Faculty Of Humanities And Social Sciences,*
Federal University, Ndufu-Alike Ikwo (FUNAI), P.M.B. 1010, Abakaliki, Ebonyi State, Nigeria

Abstract: *Globally, mainstreaming gender issues in politics has been recognized as an essential way of building a stable democratic society. However, women, constituting over 50% of the world's population, have been globally under-represented in politics and decision making and implementation. Women's continued under-representation in Nigeria's politics is of peculiar interest to the global communities, given the country's significant position in Africa. However, the Fourth Republic has experienced increased rebirth of gender equality in Nigeria's politics, as a result of political will and women's advocacy movements. A good number of women have, of recent, become politically relevant in Nigeria. In spite of these, several socio-cultural and economic factors continue to inhibit women's political potency and participation. Nigerian women, while celebrating their achievements in the March 8, 2013 International Women's Day (IWD) under the theme "Gender Agenda: Gaining Momentum", have reinvigorated their campaign for gender equality in politics as a viable measure for equitable and sustainable development in the country. This paper examines the extent to which gender agenda has gained momentum in Nigeria's politics, and also discusses the socio-cultural and economic hurdles which perpetuate women's under-representation and low political participation in the country.*

Keywords: *Gender agenda, politics, International Women's Day (IWD), affirmative action, Nigeria.*

I. Introduction

In the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial Nigeria, women never enjoyed parity with men in the political scene or in issues of governance. The history of political transformation in Nigeria is replete with issues of male domination and women tokenism in participation in public affairs (Aina and Ukeje, 1998; Aina and Olayode, 2012). The political system remained male-centric. The military era consolidated on this chauvinistic tradition and merely provided women with the least opportunity to challenge gender inequalities and discrimination in the Nigerian polity. However, democratic leadership has tried to mainstream gender issues in Nigeria, even in politics and public offices.

Historically, the entity called "Nigeria" was birthed by Britain in 1914, though with penchant for low political participation for Nigerian indigenes. However, the Clifford's constitution of 1922 introduced the first elective principle that awakened the political consciousness of a few male indigenes. Following this development, a handful of male indigenes gained entrance into the politics of the country in the colonial period. They were Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, Obafemi Awolowo, and Anthony Enahoro, among others. From the creation of Nigeria, colonialism placed men at the centre of Nigerian politics to the disadvantage of women, thereby institutionalizing chauvinistic politics.

The political marginalization of women continued even through the First Republic (1960-1966) where only four women were seen in the corridor of political power. Mrs. Wuraola Esan and Mrs. Bernice Kerry were the only two legislators in the Federal Parliament, whereas Mrs. Margaret Ekpo and Mrs. Janet Muokelu were the two female legislators in the Eastern House of Assembly. There was no female minister. During the Second Republic (1979-1984), there was only one female senator out of 571, and 11 female members of the House of Representatives out of 445. In the 19 states of the federation, there was no female representation in all the State Houses of Assembly and there was no female chairperson or councilor at the local government level (Agina-Ude, 2003:3; Oleru, 1999:47).

Having painlessly overthrown the First Republic, military dictatorships merely rewind the wheel of female subordinate position in the Nigerian society through the 'First Lady' syndrome, and this hindered the 'woman's questions' from being addressed within the mainstream development praxis. Resultantly, the

'woman's questions' became private interests of wives of political leaders (Aina, 2012:70), and thrived only through the political influence of the First Ladies.

Significantly, First Ladyism has led to the signing of several international agreements on elimination of all forms of discrimination against Nigerian women, including socio-cultural, economic, and political discriminatory policies or practices. In this democratic era, Nigerian women have gradually recovered their lost glory, as they have joined other women of the world to celebrate their achievements so far. It is on record that between 1999 and 2007, President Olusegun Obasanjo appointed a number of women into the Federal Executive Council. They included Dr. (Mrs.) Kema Chikwe (Minister of Transport), Mrs. Dupe Adelaja (Minister of State Defence), Dr. (Mrs.) Bekky Ketebu-Igwe (Minister of State, Ministry of Solid Minerals), Dr. (Mrs.) Amina Ndalolo (Minister of State, Federal Ministry of Health), Mrs. Pauline Tallen (Minister of State, Federal Ministry of Science and Technology), Hajia Aishatu Ismaila (Minister of Women Affairs), and Chief (Mrs.) Titilayo Ajanaku (Special Adviser to the President on Women Affairs).

Also, President Musa Yar'Adua, in his short-lived administration, included such women as Saudatu Bungudu, Salamatu Hussaini Suleiman, Diezani Alison-Madueke, Dora Akunyili and Grace Epkiwhre in his cabinet. In 2011, President Jonathan appointed 33% of women into political offices. They included Zainab Maina (Women Affairs), Prof. Ruqayyatu Rufai (Education), Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala (Finance), Zainab Ibrahim Kuchi (Niger Delta Affairs, State), Diezani Alison-Madueke (Petroleum), Omobolaji Johnson (Communication Technology), and Viola Onwuliri (Foreign Affairs, State), among others. Satisfactorily, this shows a consciously-motivated commitment to the affirmative action.

However, it is not yet uhuru for Nigerian women, as they still struggle to close the wide political gap existing between them and men. Interestingly, the International Women's Day (IWD) was celebrated on March 8, 2013 with the theme "Gender Agenda: Gaining Momentum". Nigerian women were fully involved in the celebration. Essentially, this paper attempts to examine the extent to which the gender agenda has gained momentum in Nigerian politics. Summarily, the paper unmasks political representation of Nigerian women and the factors that constrain women's active political representation or participation.

Colonialism and Political Discrimination of Nigerian Women: A Historical Overview

Political discrimination of Nigerian women has a colonial history. Before the advent of colonialism, women in the different communities which were eventually amalgamated as "Nigeria" played significant political roles. The pre-colonial Hausa society paraded such influential and prominent women political leaders as Queen Amina of Zaria, Queen Daura and several other titled women as the Magajiya, Iya and Mardanni occupied very prominent political positions and wielded great influence in the daily administration of their cities. We need to mention that this level of participation was recorded mainly before the introduction of Islamic reforms through the Jihad of 1804. The reforms introduced the purdah system which imposed certain restrictions on the socio-political activities of women.

The pre-colonial Yoruba society had palace ladies (wives of the kings or priestesses) who were addressed as the Iyamode, Iyemole, Iyemonari and Iyale-ori. The Queen mother (Iya Oba) had a lot of influence and respect. It is interesting to note here that about five women had at one time or another been Oba out of more than thirty eight predecessors to the present Oba. This point has been extensively discussed by Smith (1969) while writing on the kingdoms of the Yoruba. Uchendu (2006) observes that the umuada (a group of married women) were politically strong and influential in the pre-colonial Igbo society. However, women's political influence started dwindling in the colonial period.

According to Halkin (1976), African women lost political as well as economic status under colonial rule. Europeans failed to see that African women have political roles and institution in their societies. This led the women to revolt against stringent colonial rule in 1929 (the Aba Women Riot). In 1948, nineteen years later, the ruler of Egba land, Ademola (II), attempted to re-enact the same drama that led to the Aba Women riot of 1929 by liaising with the colonial administration to exploit the local population. The women rejected this and protested against him to the point that he was dethroned and exiled out of Egba land. This took about twenty thousand women led by Madam Funmilayo Ransome Kuti in much the same manner as the 1929 Aba women's riot. The colonial government, not prepared to encounter the women again, nodded to their demands which resulted in Ademola's dethronement and banishment.

The determination and struggle of Nigeria women to stamp their feet on the politics of the country in the colonial era were exemplified by the activities of few women like late Mrs. Funmilayo Ransome Kuti, Mrs. Margaret Ekpo, late Miss. Beatrice Adunni Oluwole who attempted to form a political party, Nigeria Commoners Party (NCP) and Mrs. Hilda Adefarsin, one time president of National Council of Women Societies. There was obvious lack of moral and institutional support from the colonialists to encourage and enhance Nigerian women participation in politics. However, Nigeria's post-colonial political development has ensured women political participation, though minimally.

International Women's Day 2013 – Gender Agenda: Gaining Momentum
       Against the backdrop that women's challenges in a male-dominated world can only be effectively addressed by them, women all over the world have embarked on pervasive campaigns to address their challenges, to ensure that their voices are heard and respected, and to celebrate their achievements. This global momentum for championing women equality and celebrating their achievements culminated into the International Women's Day (IWD) observed annually on every eight day of the month of March (March 8). On this memorable day, thousands of events are held throughout the world to inspire women and celebrate achievements. To spice the eventful day, a global web of rich and diverse local activity connects women from all around the world, ranging from political rallies, business conferences, and government activities and networking events through to local women's craft markets, theatric performances, and fashion parades, and so on.

       The origin of the International Women's Day can be historically traced to the second International Conference of Working Women held in Copenhagen in 1910, in which over 100 female delegates from 17 countries voted unanimously that every year, in every country, the same day should be observed to call attention to the needs and challenges of women globally. The first International Women's Day was launched the following year in 1911, nearly a decade before women in the United States would even have the right to vote. In fact, the United States even designates the whole month of March as '**Women's History Month'**.

       According to an online source, the 1900's was a time of great expansion and instability in the industrialized world, which collided with a growth and flux in radical ideologies. Women's fight for equality constituted one of these radical ideologies. This fight eventually led to a March through New York City in 1908, through which women demanded voting rights, better pay and to become man's equal. Following this, an 'International Conference for Working Women' was held in 1910 in Copenhagen, in which Clara Zetkin proposed what is today known as **International Women's Day**, stating that "in every country, on this day women should press for their demands". It was a unanimous decision. After this, women and men attended annual International Women's Day rallies to campaign for women's rights to work, to vote, and to hold public office (www.yuppee.com). Since then, the United Nations, governments, women's organizations, and other organizations all around the world have keyed into this project to celebrate women's achievements and ensure their continued emancipation from all forms of oppression.

       The year 1975 is very remarkable in the history of the International Women's Day because it is the year that the United Nations recognized and celebrated the International Women's Day. Since then, the United Nations has assumed the responsibility of declaring an annual theme for the IWD's celebration. However, some groups can select their own International Women's Day theme, specific to their local context. For example, the European Parliament's 2013 theme was "Women's response to the crisis" and their 2012 theme was "Equal pay for work of equal value".

       In 1977, the United Nations proclaimed it a "Day for Women's Rights and International Peace". Below is the list of the annual themes of the IWD as declared by the United Nations:
- 1975: The United Nations recognized and celebrated the IWD
- 1996: Celebrating the Past, Planning for the Future
- 1997: Women at the Peace Table
- 1998: Women and Human Rights
- 1999: World Free of Violence against Women
- 2000: Women Uniting for Peace
- 2001: Women and Peace: Women Managing Conflicts
- 2002: Afghan Women Today: Realities and Opportunities
- 2003: Gender Equality and the Millennium Development Goals
- 2004: Women and HIV/AIDS
- 2005: Gender Equality Beyond 2005: Building a More Secure Future
- 2006: Women in decision-making
- 2007: Ending Impunity for Violence against Women and Girls
- 2008: Investing in Women and Girls
- 2009: Women and men united to end violence against women and girls
- 2010: Equal rights, equal opportunities: Progress for all
- 2011: Equal access to education, training and science and technology
- 2012: Empower Rural Women – End Hunger and Poverty
- 2013: The Gender Agenda: Gaining Momentum

       With the theme "Gender Agenda: Gaining Momentum", March 8, 2013 marked the 102nd anniversary of International Women's Day. While the past century has witnessed much progress, it is pertinent to note that

much work remains to be done in all regions of the world in order to emancipate women from inequality and powerlessness imposed by chauvinist culture. Interestingly, the inspiring statement that guides the IWD 2013 is: "Over time and distance, the equal rights of women have progressed. We celebrate the achievements of women while remaining vigilant and tenacious for further sustainable change. There is global momentum for championing women's equality".

The International Women's Day has been observed since the early 1900's and is annually held on March 8 to celebrate women's achievements throughout history and across nations. The event means so much to women in both developed and developing countries, as growing international women's movements and organizations try to build support for women's rights and equality in a number of socio-cultural and politico-economic areas. Thousands of events occur not just on this day but throughout the month of March to mark the economic, political and social achievements of women. Organizations, governments, charities, educational institutions, women's groups, corporations and the media celebrate the day. Many groups around the world choose different themes each year relevant to global and local gender issues.

Gender equality and the empowerment of women are at the heart of many national and international commitments, including the UN Millennium Development Goals. Obviously, developed countries have recorded some measures of appreciable progress in mainstreaming gender issues. However, developing countries are yet to mainstream gender issues in their economic, socio-cultural and political affairs. In this regard, development across the world has been visibly uneven.

Issues in Politics and Women Representation in Nigeria

Politics has been severally defined. In his celebrated book entitled **Politics: Who Gets What, When, How**, published in 1936, Harold Lasswell opined that politics is a process engaged by elected officials to determine "who gets what, when, where, and how?" This conceptualisation has influenced the widely held notion of politics in the several parts of the world as a contest for power and authority to distribute resources in the polity. Thus, politics is a process of resolving societal conflicts that arise when determining who gets what, when and how. On the other hand, Marxist scholars perceive politics as an ideological struggle for power for the acquisition and distribution of resources. By injecting ideological struggle into their definition, Marxists sharpened the content of the concept with the emphasis on class differentiation in the political process (Natufe, 2006). Mao Zedong declared that "politics is war without bloodshed while war is politics with bloodshed" (Zedong, 1965). Unfortunately, Mao Zedong did not live long enough to see that in Nigeria, politics is war with bloodshed. Politics in Nigeria has become a game in which aspirants employ all forms of tactics (including violent means) to ensure they win, hinging their bloody and manipulative tendencies on Machiavellianism.

Robert Dahl has succinctly defined politics as any persistent pattern of human relationships that involves, to a significant extent, control, influence, power or authority. Politics, according to Robert Dahl, is ubiquitous: it exists every there are human organizations or social groups such as churches, clubs, women guilds, professional associations, village councils, family meetings, market unions etc. however, politics, for most people, is concerned with issues in the public realms such as legislatives, executives, interest groups, political parties, elections, campaigns, voting, lobbying and so on (Ikpe, 2010).

David Easton (1965) defined politics as the "authoritative allocation of values". Nnoli has put up an interesting definition of politics as all efforts toward seizing state power, exercising state power and consolidating state power. Drawing from this avalanche of definitions, Ikpe (2010) has summed up politics as that which "involves the sum total of activities, processes, procedures and behaviours describing how people agree and disagree over how to, and who should make binding decisions and allocate scarce resources in a community".

Politics in Nigeria, since the inception, has been dominated by men. It's all men affairs, but a no-go-area for Nigerian women. Right from the colonial era, politics in Nigeria has suffered violence and only the violent will take it by force (paraphrased from the Holy Bible: Matthew chapter 11 verse 12). Women, by nature, do not possess the kind of violent nature or characteristics exhibited by men in Nigerian politics. Agbalajobi (2010) has opined that winning public elections in Nigeria is a matter of force or "do-or-die" affairs. Therefore, those who possess physical stamina and strength to use brutal force are men. As a result, women would have to give way for the men to take whatever is available by force.

According to Aluko (2011:41), the absence or under-representation of women in decision-making and implementation processes undermines the fundamental concept of democratic form of governance which assumes that participation and representation in all areas and levels of public life will be equally available to women and men. However, politics and political arrangement in Nigeria has undermined female legitimacy resulting in women's political powerlessness. Akiyode-Afolabi (2010) submits that women's overall political representation and participation in government is still at 8%.

An analysis of the Nigerian electoral system has shown that the 2003, 2007 and 2011 elections witnessed unprecedented increase in the number of female aspirants and increased local mobilization of the

generality of women. However, only few women aspirants succeeded in winning political seats in these elections. Women candidates in the 2011 election constituted 9.1% (against 90.9% male candidature) of the total number of candidates who contested in the April 2011 polls. As usual, only few women made it through party primaries (Aluko, 2011). This failure is reinforced by the fact that political parties and structures have been hijacked by men.

Available statistics shows women's political under-representation in the April 2011 polls in all the geo-political zones and some states in Nigeria. The South-West had the highest number of female candidates with 15.5% of the 2116 contestants from the zone; South-East had 11.9% women candidature of the 1611 candidates; South-South had 10.5% female candidature of 1624 candidates; North Central had 8.5% of 1371; North East had 4.2% of 1187 candidates; and North West had only 2.3% of 2088 candidates. At the state level, the Federal Capital Territory (Abuja) had the highest number of female candidates (24%), Ekiti had 20.9%, Osun had 20.5%, Lagos had 17.8%, Kogi had 17.0%, and Ebonyi had 16.0%. States like Bauchi (1.1%) and Yobe (0.8%) had very low representation with the least being Jigawa which had no single female representation (Akiyode-Afolabi, 2010). Tables 1-3 further show women political representation in Nigeria in this Fourth Republic.

The above is just the percentage representation of women candidature. It is appalling to find out that only insignificant few women candidates won the 2011 election. Men had their ways at the end of the polls. However, President Goodluck Jonathan has graciously compensated the women with about 33% appointment into ministerial and other public positions. Interestingly, the foregoing statistics justifies the fact that political representation and participation of women is abysmally low in the northern parts of the country as a result of the religious practice (purdah) that makes women unnecessarily invisible and withdrawn from the public.

Table 1: Women Political Representation in Nigeria's Fourth Republic

Elective Offices Occupied by Women after the 1999 Elections					
Offices	Male	%	Female	%	Total
Governors	36	100	-	-	36
Senate	106	97.2	3	2.8	109
House of Representatives	347	96.4	13	3.6	360
Speakers of State Assemblies	36	100	-	-	36
Total	525	19	16	3	541
Elective Offices Occupied by Women after the 2003 Elections					
Offices	Male	%	Female	%	Total
Governors	36	100	-	-	36
Senate	105	96.3	4	3.7	109
House of Representatives	339	94.2	21	5.8	360
Speakers of State Assemblies	36	100	-	-	36
Total	516	95.4	25	4.6	541
Elective Offices Occupied by Women after the 2007 Elections					
Offices	Male	%	Female	%	Total
Governors	36	100	-	-	36
Senate	100	91.7	9	8.3	109
House of Representatives	328	91.1	32	8.9	360
Speakers of State Assemblies	36	100	-	-	36
Total	500	92.4	14.	7.6	541
Elective Offices Occupied by Women after the 2011 Elections					
Offices	Male	%	Female	%	Total
Governors	36	100	-	-	36
Senate	101	92.7	8	7.3	109
House of Representatives	336	93.2	24	6.7	360
Speakers of State Assemblies	35	97.2	1	2.8	36
Total	508	93.9	33	6.1	541

Sources: INEC, 2007, 2011; UNICEF (Nigeria) 2011

Table 2: Gender Distribution in Selected Political Offices in Nigeria (1999-2007)

Years	Political Offices					
	Senate		House of Representatives		State Assemblies	
	Male (%)	Female (%)	Male (%)	Female (%)	Male (%)	Female (%)
1999	97.2	2.8	96.7	3.3	97.7	2.3
2003	96.3	3.7	93.9	6.1	95.7	4.3
2007	91.7	8.3	92.4	7.6	93.9	6.1

Source: Adapted with modification from a graphical representation by Aina (2012:70)

Table 3: Political Representation of Women in Nigeria (1999)

Position	Male	%	Female	%	Total
Ministers/Special Advisers	35	79.5	9	20.5	44
Speaker	35	97.2	1	2.8	36
Governors	36	100	-	0	36
Deputy Governors	35	97.2	1	2.8	36
LGA Chairman	765	98.8	9	1.2	774
Councilors	8,667	98.4	143	1.6	8,810
State Assembly	978	98.8	12	1.2	990
Senate	106	97.2	3	2.3	109
House of Representatives	347	96.4	13	3.6	360

Source: National Assembly, Nigeria 1999

Theoretical Undercurrents: Patriarchy (or Male Chauvinism) versus Feminism

Women's low political participation and under-representation can be better appreciated and understood within the contrasting theoretical conflagrations of patriarchy and feminism. Patriarchy is used to describe an arrangement in societies where males are expected to dominate in all decision making processes. Brinkerhoff and White (1988) succinctly see patriarchal authority as normatively approved male dominance: men typically control economic resources, make decisions, and have the final say in all matters affecting the society. Men are the arrow-heads and would in some cases want the women to be only seen and not heard. From time immemorial, patriarchal arrangements have favoured the dominance of men over women all over the world in strategic affairs, even in the family.

In most societies of the world, economic, political and social structures are strategically dominated by men and the women have been largely subjected to the roles of 'second fiddle' in the affairs of things (Esidene and Abdul, 2013). As Agbalajobi (2010) rightly contends, the discrimination against women in terms of participation and representation is universalistic and has long historical standing dating back to the ages. The practice of gender discrimination and sexism was experienced even in the most advanced democracies of the world including Europe and America. However, developed societies of the world have taken bold steps to ensure gender equality.

The story is different in developing societies where women, argued Agbalajobi (2010), are unjustifiably discriminated against, not only in elective offices but also in matters of jurisprudence and litigations where they are sometimes denied the right to secure bail for accused persons. Predicated on male chauvinism (excessive sense of male superiority), most Nigerian women continue to shy away from politics. Anifowose (2004:77) has claimed that the historical background of male dominance over women is better appreciated in their differential genetic make-up as well as in the social structure. According to him, "men are generally heavier, taller and even physically stronger than women and therefore more capable than women to enforce their will through physical violence and threat of violence. Women on the other hand are vulnerable because of their role of child bearing and nursing. In addition, discrimination and subjugation of women is further enforced by custom, traditional practices, beliefs and the law, behind which stood coercive force of the state" (2004:77). Men have captured the state's apparatus in all societies to oppress and exploit women.

Reflecting on patriarchal structures and male chauvinism, Aluko (2010:41) succinctly observes that the consignment of women's roles to the domestic arena while the public space is seen as the traditional place for men tends to perpetuate discrimination and distinctions on the basis of sex. However, the growing emphasis on gender equality, which is a cardinal component of democratization, has tried to change the status quo and give women their rightful place in the Nigerian polity.

On the other hand, feminism critically considers the conditions or place of women in the scheme of social issues. In a more critical way, feminism questions the harmful effects of the socio-political and economic structures on the women. Like the Marxist perspective, feminism accepts that women are cheated, suppressed and oppressed by men. However, feminists go further to argue that politics in Nigeria is a patriarchal arrangement where women are exploited by men. They decry the subordinate position of women in the polity and call for a radical review and change in the political structure; more preferably egalitarian position. In all, feminists strongly argue for gender equality to end women's exploitation and under-representation in the male-dominated world.

Through several feminist movements and organizations, women now argue that they can do whatever men do, and thus should be given corresponding opportunities and rights. The emergence of social women's organizations with particular focus on consciousness, hearing and placing women's issues on the public agenda tend to be prominent especially in the urban areas. However, it is important to note that many of these organizations only acted within traditional boundaries and maintained neutral course in relation to the issue of women's marginalization and male dominance. Different activities by feminist movements have assisted in

inspiring women to improve their self-confidence and also help them to strive hard for the total liberation and socio-political and economic empowerment of women (Azuike, 2003). The commitment of both female and male feminists is needed in this liberation struggle.

Women's Political Empowerment in Nigeria: Beyond the Affirmative Action

The concept of affirmative action refers to social policies that go beyond prohibitions against discriminatory practices that deprive minorities of their rights and aim at remedying the effects of past discrimination. Affirmative action represents an effort to restore equity to social groups, rather than to individuals, by targeting women and minorities for educational opportunities, jobs, promotion, politics, government contracts, and other areas where past discrimination has been documented. Affirmative action policies have been controversial because they appear to represent a form of reverse discrimination inasmuch as they violate the principle of equal opportunity by giving preferential treatment on the basis of race, sex, and national origin. These policies have faced a number of legal challenges that are likely to continue as long as they are perceived to be unjust by some members of society. Regardless of how one views these policies, they have placed increased the number or representation of women and minorities in good jobs, selective educational institutions, and political positions, among others.

In fact, affirmative action is a strategy for promoting gender equality. The concept of affirmative action leapt into the language of political culture from the global platform for action adopted at the United Nations Fourth World Conference in Beijing, China in 1995. The policy recommends that all states who are signatories to the Convention should reserve a quota of all elective and appointive positions for women as a way for redressing injustices perpetrated against them. In a related development, Articles 7 and 8 of the UN Convention on Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) explicitly urge state parties to 'adopt concrete steps, including affirmative action, to ensure equality in politics and public offices between men and women'. It is believed that giving women quotas will compensate for past discriminations and guarantee equality between women and men in governance overtime (Nelson, 2012).

Within the confines of "Political Sociology" and "Development Sociology", the affirmative action is an all-embracing strategy of improving the conditions of women. It is a social, political and development strategy for promoting gender equality and closing the disadvantageous gaps that gender discrimination had created for women in every society across the globe. Based on this global strategy for promoting gender equality, Nigerian women have clamored for pervasive women representation/participation in politics and decision making to compensate for their past discrimination and suppression. The National Gender Policy (2000) provided for 30% affirmative action mandate as its commitment to women's political participation and representation. This was later increased to 35% affirmative action in the National Gender Policy (2006). The general election of 2011 saw some important gains in women's political participation in Nigeria as President Goodluck Jonathan appointed 33% of cabinet positions to women (up from 10% in the last government), including the ministerial portfolios of finance and education. This is in keeping with Nigeria's commitments to gender equality, encapsulated in the National Gender Policy, which sets the benchmark for women's seats in Parliament at 35% (5% higher than the international standard). Yet, this achievement is precisely so remarkable because of the ongoing challenges women in Nigeria face in becoming politically active from the bottom-up through elections. We hope that future governments will emulate and improve on the standard already set by President Goodluck Jonathan.

Although the concept of affirmative action has been eulogized by many as a good strategy, it has been seriously criticized by some. Nelson (2012) argues that its potential for enhancing the realization of women's vision of social equality is seriously questioned since it is a reformist strategy, which is insensitive to class-based interests and the structural or systemic problems underlying women's political marginalization. Affirmative action is mistakenly equated with political representation because it provides women with a certain percentage of positions in political leadership. But as Toyo (2002) observes, this approach refers to equality only for its instrumental value, and not as a basis for transforming political structures and for negotiating more superior and lasting solutions to the fundamental problems of women in society.

The Ugandan experience has often been used as a standpoint for some critics (Tamale 2000; Aluko, 2011). The fact is that equal representation in political positions does not necessarily mean equal participation in politics and decision making. The Ugandan experience has shown that affirmative action merely creates "descriptive representatives" who symbolically stand for women (Tamale, 2000). Even where women are given such quotas, they often do not participate in political decision-making as representatives of the women collectively seeking to transform the structures that perpetuate inequality between men and women. Instead, co-opted into a male-biased political system, they tend to dance to the gallery in order to protect their privileged position rather than adopt a radical, non-conformist stance in order to protect the interest of the larger women collective (Nelson, 2012).

The political space provided for women through quotas becomes a site for accommodation, and this de-radicalizes women politicians and subjects them to the control and dictates of the male-dominated state. On the implications of the above for the electoral process, Tamale (2000) argues that the fact that a predominantly male electoral college appoints the women who fill the mandatory seats significantly impacts on the efficacy of the quota system and, most importantly, raises questions regarding allegiance, accountability and representation. This is exacerbated by state patronage, which bedevils the post-colonial politics of most African states. Like male politicians, a good number of female politicians also run for office on account of the opportunities offered in terms of personal wealth and access to state power.

At best, affirmative action produces 'formal', not 'substantive', political participation for women because state patronage inevitably leads to the containment of women's vision of political suffrage and the enfeeblement of their capacity to catalyze action for social change. This dynamic partly explains why several women who occupy political offices acquiesce to men and consequently fail to influence decision making and the course of governance in favour of the women-folk. In the long run, state patronage through the quota system aids the systematic dilution of a genuine vision of women political empowerment by transforming it into mere glamour for political offices (Izugbara and Onuoha, 2003). Women who occupy such offices become what Tamale (2000) calls 'women in power without power'.

Aluko (2011) has observed that affirmative action may help to improve the situation of women in politics, but presents some dilemmas in its effective implementation, especially in the Third World. He further notes that the concept has some internal contradictions that tend to ambush and neutralize its intended benefits as the case of Uganda has revealed. Tripp (2005:57) has revealed how Ugandan women have become vocal and active in politics (parliament) and have been able to insert key gender-related provisions into the 1998 Land Act, but have failed to include the key co-ownership clauses into the passage of the 2000 Amendments of Land Act. This failure or inability of Ugandan women parliamentarians to effect desirable legislation that benefits women, observed Tripp, stemmed from their mode of power acquisition, including quotas and affirmative action. The customary practices of Uganda, just like other developing societies, provide limited opportunities for women to own portions of land.

Indeed, the present government of President Goodluck Jonathan has raised the hope of women participation in Nigerian politics through his appointment of 33% women into ministerial, ambassadorial and key decision-making positions. While this is commendable, it is obvious that taking such a bold step requires ignoring with vehemence the socio-cultural and economic hurdles that inhibit women's political participation in Nigeria.

Factors Affecting Women's Political Participation in Nigeria
The Nature of Party System: Political parties in Nigeria are usually male-dominated and do not have level playing ground for women. According to Aina (2012:71), political parties in Nigeria are more or less rhetoric than real, and obviously pay lip service to the gender equality agenda. She further accused political parties in Nigeria of being characterized with a gamut of problems including undemocratic administration of the parties, lack of gender responsive party politics culture, gender unfriendly party practices (such as violence, money politics, blackmails and name calling, among others), and lack of technical skills to mainstream gender issues in party politics.

Also, political parties are usually dominated by men. Ideally, it is the position of 'women leader' that is reserved for women. In a situation where men are almost the executive members and non-executive members, political decisions are usually taken in favour of men. Women are left to their fate. Of course, it is obvious that "no cockroach will win a case in any court where fowl is the chief judge". This implies that it is very difficult for women to win elections where men decide the political outcomes. It is also pertinent to point out that most political meetings are usually held in the night, and this makes it difficult for women to cope for fear of being nicknamed "harlots" by their respective husbands and even fellow women. Consequently, most women see politics as a "dirty game" played by men alone and simply withdraw from it and even dissuade fellow women who are interested from contesting against men.

Family Responsibilities: Family responsibilities and childbearing also hinder women from participating effectively in partisan political activities. For better part of their lives, most women are involved not only in child bearing but also in child rearing. Thus, much of the time they could have devoted to politics is taken up by their maternal challenges and obligations. On a serious note, most men do not allow their women to deeply or actively involved in politics, for fear of losing their wives to political activities and gladiators, becoming more powerful or influential than them (husbands), reneging their domestic/family responsibilities, among other things.

Cultural/Religious Demands: Culture, as we know, is the totality of the patterned way of life of any people. In almost all the cultures in Nigeria, women are only meant to be seen and not heard. Among the Igbo, Hausa and Tiv peoples, women are seen as domestic beings, with their place in the kitchen. Most cultures in

Nigeria forbid women from competing with men in issues involving public interests. Also, among the Islam-practicing Hausa people, the religious practice known as "purdah" forbids women from being seen in public. Thus, these women continue to be marginalized in terms of education, and thus cannot be actively involved in politics. However, increased education of women has continued to liberate some Nigerian women from the shackles of culture and religion.

Financial Constraints: Politics in Nigeria has been monetized. In fact, it is usually referred to as "money-bag" politics. Political period therefore becomes a time to display wealth by contestants. Electorates are deceived into voting for the highest bidder(s), as they are not sure if they can benefits from the governments when enthroned. Poverty, which has been feminized in most developing countries, including Nigeria, is a major obstacle to women's active political participation. This forces women to accept the "second fiddle" role. According to Nelson (2012), financial resources constrains women's political efficacy as women find it difficult to fund election, including payment of registration and nomination fees, and funds to finance the kind of elaborate and expensive electioneering campaigns required to mobilize supporters and voters to guarantee success at the polls. The monetization of electoral politics in Nigeria amplifies the generally poor socioeconomic conditions of Nigerian women and reduces their chances of success significantly. Although they are occasionally granted waivers with regards to registration and nomination fees, women lack money to finance their campaigns and ensure their victory. Therefore, with enormous financial resources already in the hands of men as controllers of party structures, women's chances are further reduced.

According to Agbalajobi (2010), the dominant philosophy in Nigerian politics is money. The 'money' factor plays very vital role in the conception, mobilization and winning of political offices either at the presidential, governorship, senatorial, and local council elections. Money is very critical in the shaping, making and unmaking of public office which is supposed to be on trust. Thus, the higher and larger one's financial muscle is in Nigeria, the greater one's chances of winning public office. Women are generally poor in Nigeria, and thus do not have enough financial strength to prosecute their political ambitions. But having dominated the socio-economic and political scenes since the creation of the Nigerian state, men have enough money to sponsor their political ambitions.

Mass Illiteracy: Lack of adequate education is a major hurdle for women political participation. Women constitute a larger percentage of the illiterate population in Nigeria. They are largely uneducated and lack the courage to challenge male chauvinism and domination over women. In fact, illiteracy has resulted in some women opposing and blackmailing fellow women who have taken the challenge to demand for equality between men and women.

Concluding Remarks

Gender equality and women's empowerment (economic, socio-cultural and political) are essential components of human development and basic human rights. Let us first come to the full realization that there is no known society that can develop without the contributions of women. The advancement of women's rights (education, political, economic, reproductive etc) becomes a critical precondition for effective and sustainable development in any nation. As Olufade (2013) rightly notes, equitable participation of women in politics and government is essential to building and sustaining democracy; and democracy cannot truly deliver the expected dividends if women's under-representation continues.

The gender agenda cannot continue to gain momentum, especially in developing societies, unless conscious efforts are made towards mainstreaming gender issues. Of paramount importance, gender sensitive politics should be enthroned in developing societies, especially Nigeria. The case of Nigeria becomes pertinent because she is the giant of Africa and, as a result, is expected to play a leading role in gender mainstreaming. Recently, gender equality in politics has started gaining gradual momentum in Nigeria, and will expectedly spread like whirlwind to other developing societies.

The International Women's Day, while serving to celebrate women's achievement in their respective endeavors, also serves to draw our attention to the rights and opportunities women possess and to the fact that gender equality must necessarily be mainstreamed to build a more sustainably developed society. Women's political empowerment should be consciously mainstreamed in Nigeria for us to build a resilient community where equality and progress dominate.

Importantly, socio-economic factors inhibiting women's political potency should be properly addressed. Specifically, conscious efforts should be made by Nigerian governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), development agencies (local and international), and women organizations to liberate women from the grips of culture, religion, male-dominated party system, poverty and illiteracy, among others. Failure to address these inhibiting factors implies that women political underrepresentation will continue in the Nigerian polity. Let us conclude with this inspiring statement of Gloria Steinem: "The story of women's struggle for equality belongs to no single feminist nor to any one organization, but to the collective efforts of all who care about human rights". Essentially, all hands must be on desk for the gender agenda to continue to

gather momentum until women equality is attained in the Nigerian society and others. Therefore, actions are demanded in all fronts!

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