Empowering the Disempowered: Women Political Participation and Democratic Governance in Nigeria's Fourth Republic

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Abstract
Nigerian women constitute about half of the population of the country and are known to have played vital roles in societal administration as mothers, producers, community organizers and socio-political activists. However, in spite of the historical roles of women and their population, they are yet to be accorded the needed recognition in most societies and particularly in Nigeria. This scenario is attributed to some cultural stereotypes, abuse of religion, traditional practices, thuggery, and commoditization of politics, militarism, and rigid patriarchal structures. The prolonged military rule engendered lackadaisical attitude to women issues and their empowerment resulting into lack of serious political will to prosecute and propagate issues relating to women. Thus, the Nigerian women are marginalised in governance and decision-making processes. The transition from dictatorship to democratic governance however, has not significantly impacted positively on women participation in politics. Although the number of women in political offices has improved since the inception of democratic rule in 1999, the degree of improvement remains marginal. This has implication for enduring progress and development. Utilizing qualitative research, and with the use of secondary data, the paper therefore analyzes the situation of Nigerian women vis-à-vis the new democratic regime. It contends that with democracy, nothing fundamental has changed about the marginalized status of the Nigerian women. With no serious official governmental policy towards empowering women, the paper concludes that a systemic individualized approach resulting in authorities imbibing democratic culture and having a democratized mind is capable of transforming and empowering the women.

Introduction
The polemic of women's participation in the political processes of societies, especially democratic ones, has engaged the attention of scholars and researchers in the literature (Schwindt-Bayer, 2006 Olaitan, 1998 and Okome 2000). Studies on the role of Nigerian Women in politics have established that the level has varied over time and minimal. The argument was that women in some Nigerian
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communities played active political role in pre-colonial era; however, things changed for the worse in the period of colonization as women were relegated into the background of political participation (Nina Mba, 1982; Awe, 1992; Okonjo, 1994; Uchendu, 1993 and Olojede, 2009). There has been an inclination (by governments, policy makers, women leaders, women organizations, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), feminist groups and institutions etc) towards role equity, role change and increasing professionalism and involvement of women in government and other public institutions as far back as the 1980’s. The focus is the elimination of inequities resulting from cultural, religious, and social obstacles to the full participation of women in governance and poor quality of life for most people, especially women. The disadvantages suffered by women are so pervasive and universal that the international system, especially through the United Nations Organization has had to specially focus on, and seek to address, the problem. To this end, there have been international conferences on women and their interests, such as the one in Beijing (China) in September 1995, to articulate issues of concern to women, and to seek ways of significantly involving them in societal processes such as governance, while also significantly reducing the various forms of disadvantages and oppression suffered by them. Their position of disadvantage has tended to leave their potentials unexplored and restrict the scope of labour, energy, and human resources available for (national) development. (Bassey-Ekpo and Nkoyo-Toyo 2003; Friedlander 1995; and Williams 1978). In addition, for the success of the development process itself, the need to integrate women within the development framework has been stressed. One of the indexes of the progress and development of any nation is said to be the position of women in that society. Thus, women represent potent agents for positive change, depending on their condition and the opportunity offered them to actualise their potentials.

Doubtlessly, there has been an improvement in women’s participation in politics in recent time especially in the realm of voting, however, women’s contributions in governance has remained very marginal and negligible in terms of positions, they (women) occupy both in appointive and elective positions in government. By implication, therefore, women are hardly part of the decision-making processes and are excluded from policymaking and execution leading to their disempowerment and marginalization.

It is a truism that there is an interface between democracy and active and full women political participation. This is borne out of the ability of advocates within nations to influence policy and the ability of democratic governments to muster sufficient political will that is necessary to address gender inequalities through legislation as well as through the wielding of fiscal and monetary policy instruments. This paper focuses on the impact of democracy on women political participation with particular reference to the Nigeria’s Fourth Republic. Consequently, the paper examines the dimensions as well as the impact of the democratic governance on women political participation in Nigeria it contends that Nigerian women are disempowered by the state and its institutionalised structures to
the effect that women’s voice is rarely heard in governance and political processes and offer useful suggestions towards empowering Nigerian women for numerical visibility as well as influence in politics. Thus, rather than concentrating on the extant problem created by the prevailing social structure(s) in tackling women’s low political participation, the work analysed the impact and potency of democracy and democratic structures on women political participation. Doing this, the paper is subdivided into six parts; the first part is the introduction, the second part deals with elements of empowerment, the third part examines the Political System and women, the fourth aspect discusses Policy Options and Women Political Participation in Nigeria’s Fourth Republic, the fifth aspect focuses on Women Political Participation in Nigeria’s Fourth Republic, while the sixth concludes the work and make some useful recommendations.

Elements of Empowerment
The process of empowerment involves transforming the economic, social, psychological, political, and legal circumstances of the currently powerless. For women to have a sense of belonging and be able to contribute meaningfully, to governance and development, they should be enhanced and empowered economically, socially and politically. Economic empowerment is about equity, equality in access to and availability of educational and employment opportunities. Political empowerment raises gender considerations on planning and implementation of policies. To strengthen socially is equivalent to specific consideration of women with due regard to their multipurpose roles as wives, mothers and managers. In the incisive words of Ihovbere, empowerment involves: ‘a form of socio-economic and political restructuring which removes the locus of power from the current custodians of state power and enables the currently disadvantaged to meet their basic needs, fully participate in decision making and provide opportunities to challenge internal and external oppression’. It equally refers to the process of ‘conscientisation’, which builds critical analytical skills for individuals to gain self-confidence in order to take control of her or his life. Empowerment of women is an essential process in the transformation of gender relations because it addresses the structural and underlying causes of subordination and discrimination.

As Sandbrook and Halfani have noted, empowerment is a multi dimensional process involving the transformation of the economic, social, psychological, political, and legal circumstances of the powerless. In the specific case of women, empowerment entails not only positive changes in these critical respects but also the dismantling of the cultural norms and traditional practices that devalue, disempower and dispossess women. The process must necessarily include the expansion of women’s access to educational opportunities, facilities for skills acquisition and positions of authority. Women empowerment entails fundamental alterations in power relations between the gender in the distribution of societal resources and in cultural mores. It implies that women are accorded opportunities to develop their individual talents and contributes more meaningfully to societal development. The
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possible effects include accelerated and balanced social development in addition to improved welfare, education and health for children since it is generally known that the improvement in the socio-economic conditions of a woman usually translates into improved welfare for her children. Besides, empowering women is, in itself, a just cause. More so, empowerment is seen as the power to do things one could not have been able to do or that which one is incapable of exercising authority on before. It subverts cultural norms and it is a precondition to social development. Gender Mainstreaming is an important element of women empowerment. This refers to the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women’s as well as men’s concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated (UN Economic and Social Council, 1997).

It is a goal-oriented process. It recognises that most institutions consciously and unconsciously serve the interests of men and encourages institutions to adopt a gender perspective in transforming themselves. It promotes the full participation if women in decision-making so that women’s needs move from the margins to the centre of development planning and resource allocation.

Another element of empowerment is affirmative action that has been defined as government inmat’d advocacy for the special rights of women, characterised by the conscious and systematic readjustment of the labour force through government policy. This is done through a programme of planned action that combines legislation, social policy services close monitoring through an agency of government (Lovenduski, 1986:253). At the same time, the more women there are in key decision-making positions of society, the greater are the chances of effective adoption and implementation of affirmative action measures. Thus, according to Okwuosa (Ibid), three major determining factors which promote affirmative action are highlighted below:

(i) a high level of commitment to the principles of affirmative action on the part of government and its incumbents, and its acceptability to the public;
(ii) the presence of extensive legal instruments for its implementation; and
(iii) an effective network of feminist organizations which can perform the functions of monitoring, intervention, debate and communication.

Moreover, women’s political participation is pivotal to their empowerment. In line with McClosky, political participation is defined as ‘those voluntary activities by which members of a society share in the selection of rulers and directly or indirectly, the formation of public policy’. Political participation is a civic duty, a sign of political health and the best method of ensuring that one’s private interests are not neglected and a sine qua non of democracy. The cogent activities involved...
are holding public and party office, being a candidate for office, soliciting party funds, attending a caucus or strategy meetings, contributing time in a campaign. The citizenry (men and women) must participate fully on equal basis in all the activities of political participation before it can be said that they are participating in politics. The extent of this participation is indicative of the level of their (women) empowerment.

In addition, democracy due to its inherent attributes is an important element of women empowerment. Democracy is about a system of government, it is about the establishment of certain institutional and procedural characteristics designed to facilitate mass participation in decision-making process and to guarantee accountability and basic material needs of the people. Generally, democracy involves the opportunity to participate in decision-making in the political process. It repudiates arbitrariness and authoritarianism. It extols the consent of the governed and it protects human personality and values. Democracy includes fundamental recognition of popular sovereignty, equal opportunity for all, majority rule, representativeness, minority rights, right of choice between alternative programmes, popular consultation, consensus on fundamental issues and more essentially, periodic elections. The concept of democracy confers the opportunity to participate in decision on all adult citizens. The citizenry enjoys widespread participation in the political process. Democracy is a form of government organised in accordance with the principles of popular sovereignty, political equality, popular consultation, and majority rule.\(^4\) The principle of popular sovereignty requires that basic governmental decision-making power be vested in all members of the community and not in any particular person or the ruling class (ibid). The principle of political equality means equal opportunities for all members of the community, not actual equal participation. As long as each member has a genuinely equal opportunity to participate to the degree that he/she wishes and can manage, the requirements of political equality are satisfied. The principle of popular consultation involves two requirements. First, a democratic nation must have some kind of institutional machinery through which public officials hear what public policies the people wish adopted and enforced. Second, having ascertained the policies preferred by the people, public officials must then put them into effect whether or not they believe them to be wise. The principle of majority rule in a democracy requires that no government decision be made against the ultimate desires of popular majorities. When the people disagree on a particular issue, the government should act on that issue as the large rather than the smaller number desire (ibid). Holden, (1988:5 Cited in Jega, A.M. (2005) defines democracy as: A political system in which the whole people, positively or negatively, make and are entitled to make, the basic determining decisions on important matters of public policy. Democracy obtains where the following, considered being the minimum requirements exist:

(i) Basic freedoms are guaranteed
(ii) Universal suffrage exists
(iii) Multiparty system operates
(iv) Periodic, free and fair elections are held
(v) Governance is based on the Rule of Law.
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Democracy whether liberal or African or modern includes fundamental recognition of popular sovereignty, equal opportunity for all, majority rule, representativeness, minority rights, right of choice between alternative programmes, popular consultation, consensus on fundamental issues and more essentially periodic elections.

The Political System and Women

Nigerian women are marginalised in governance and political participation, despite years of sacrifice and struggles by advocates; women have continued to play only a subordinate role in the public affairs of most nations (Nigeria inclusive). They are a negligible minority in the parliaments of the world and have only token representation in most cabinets. In other words, women are under-represented in the institutions of governance in spite of the well-known fact that they constitute half of the population of most nations.

In its response to the question of why few women are still participating in politics, the United Nations "State of the World’s Children" (SWC) 2007 outlined the following reasons:

Women are unlikely to run for political office. Double burden of public and private responsibilities: women’s work burdens are generally much heavier than men’s, leaving less time and energy for involvement in political life. A culture of exclusion: in many countries, men control both political and financial networks. Cultural practices that serve to nurture and consolidate bonds of male solidarity within these networks, such as drinking, smoking or golfing, are key stepping-stones on the path to political office. Higher participation in education. Those women, who run for office successfully, especially in developing countries, tend to be educated to tertiary level at least. The lack of women educated to tertiary levels in many countries can therefore act as a barrier to their participation in politics and government. Women face an uphill struggle to win over public opinion. Women leave politics in some cases due to electoral violence and death threats. In the particular case of Nigeria where there is no statutory reservation of quota for women (in deference to the Beijing Platform for Action), women representation in the two houses of the National Assembly is abysmally too low. Thus, there is a continuing trend of male domination of political and other public positions. Lack of internal party democracy has created a conducive atmosphere for discrimination against women based ostensibly on cultural and patriarchal perceptions of inequality, roles, and potential between women and men. In addition, weak compliance with democratic ethos has encouraged corruption and violence against women within the political parties. Political parties encourage women’s nomination as deputies thus, conforming to the notion of censored participation and second fiddleism of women in Nigerian politics.

The violent nature of Nigerian politics has kept many women, who would have been interested in contesting, away from participating in elections. Other impediments are patriarchal dominance in political parties, godfatherism, indigene-ship, intra-party rigging, political violence, thuggery, and high level of intimidation. The 2007 election, like all previous elections, was characterised by a wave of assassinations, murders, arsons,
looting and kidnappings. Given the general abhorrence of women for violence, many of them were discouraged from participating. Coupled with the above, the monetization of the political process by the state and the political class is another major impediment to women participation in politics. Available evidence shows that the monetization of the political process during the 2007 elections served as a disincentive to the participation of women in contesting for elective offices in major parties - Peoples Democratic Party (POP), Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN) and All Nigeria's Peoples Party (ANPP). In Nigeria, politics is money and money is politics. Unfortunately, many Nigerian women do not possess the wherewithal to mobilise for elections. Most women in the past or present have not occupied political offices such as president, governor, and local government chairman through which they could have enriched themselves.

In Nigeria, the surest way to funds is through political office or friends in those offices. Money politics was seen in action across the Federation (Economist, 2007). For example, in Kano (Central) the PDP budgeted 35 million naira for political mobilization, and the main opposition party ANPP budgeted 40 million naira for the presidential election. In one ward, Fagge A (Kano), the PDP budgeted 594,000 naira for 21,000 registered voters. This scenario manifested in most states of the federation. Since many of these men have a strong financial base, they were able to campaign effectively. Campaign offices of these contestants were visibly located in all the Nigerian states. Other campaign components such as vehicles, transportation (air, road, and water) for campaign teams, posters, handbills, radio, and television advertisements were conveniently financed. In general, the political landscape during the 2007 election was characterised by financial profligacy. Consequently, many female aspirants who, of course, were in the majority of financial 'have' nots' in the political scene, have tended to loose out more in electoral contest as witnessed in intra-party and inter-party elections regardless of their competence and leadership qualities.

Governments, in conjunction with women's organizations and political parties, have a vital role in ensuring women's empowerment. They do so by promoting gendersensitivity among officials or establishing comprehensive women's policy forums such as women's ministries and equal opportunity bureaus. It is opined that what matters most in terms of a government’s response to the needs and interests of women is not simply the number of women in parliament but that of equal importance are institutional mechanisms, such as support from political parties for women’s rights, and the strength and coherence of women’s organisation.

Political parties and women’s groups are central to the advancement of women’s participation in politics. Parties have a critical function in recruiting and endorsing candidates for elections and putting their weight behind specific items in parliamentary agendas. Women’s groups often provide the civil society impetus and expertise that are required to promote, develop, and sustain the legislative initiatives and accountability mechanisms that can advance the rights of
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women and children. Thus political parties are pivotal to active participation of women in politics as they provide the platform for acquiring political offices. However, in the particular case of Nigeria, political parties that should ordinarily serve as platform for accession into political offices are very repulsive to women as they are dominated by men who in most cases are violent and wealthier to the extent of dislodging women at will. With no institutionalised party policy and legislation for women empowerment, Nigerian women seem to be experiencing censored participation in politics. Political parties in Nigeria have always been, and are still, dominated by men. Party manifestoes and activities are yet to fully reflect women’s issues; instead, they remain confined to the women’s wing of the various parties where they are treated as subordinates and mere supporters rather than equal partners. The only position given to women in the executive arm of the political parties is in most cases that of the women’s leader which does not advance the cause for women political participation significantly. Political parties thus constitute the institutions that prepare, present, and support candidates for elective position and other key decision-making positions; therefore, for women to have access to these positions there is need for them to have the support of the political parties. Today, there is still a high level of corruption, godfatherism, violence, and thuggery within the various parties. In addition, the prevalence of patriarchy at various levels prevents the recognition of women as equals with men and their inclusion in party decision-making body as such. Therefore, though women are increasing numerically in the political parties: they are striving to make an impact.

Thus, simply having a greater number of women in local government, however, will not guarantee their effectiveness as advocates for the interests and rights of children, women, and families. In South Africa, for example, an analysis of the problems and opportunities faced by women in local government revealed that, as with their colleagues in parliament, their effectiveness was largely determined by factors other than their numerical presence. These included cultural norms and expectations of women’s roles; local hierarchies; the abilities and attributes of individual councilors; and the extent of political parties’ commitment to gender equality. It is evidenced from the above that most of the inhibitions being experienced by women in national development and political participation are embedded in the myths inherent in the socialization process. These inhibitions are reinforced and sustained in most societies/states. Nonetheless, it has become expedient that both sexes (male and female) must cooperate and contribute to development, the impediments such as the ‘early gender-socialising process from the family level must be a major target for sensitizing parents about the need for positive changes based on the goal of actualizing individual potentials of children regardless of the sex.’ The state also needed to be rigidly committed to gender sensitiveness by enacting law(s) and providing an enabling environment for both sexes to thrive. Sustainable development should, therefore, hinge on gender complementarity and procedural equality.

Thus, women’s participation in governance in the Nigeria’s Fourth Republic shows
that Nigeria still has a long way to go. Their participation in the 2003 election was less than 10 percent and the general elections held in April 2007 in Nigeria were not too encouraging. The 2007 general election was very important in many respects. First, it was the first time when the incumbent civilian administration conducted elections and handed over power to another government. Secondly, women participated in these elections though the target of achieving one-third in all elective offices could not be realised as the elections were flawed as attested to by the international and local observers. A comparative analysis of women participation in the 2007 generally elections does not reflect a significant improvement to that of 2003 general elections. The figures are based on data collected from the website of Nigeria’s Electoral Commission (INEC). The data excludes election conducted for the local council chair for the FCT. 7,160 candidates participated in the April elections, out of these numbers, 628 were women. From the aforementioned data, it can be deduced that the percentage level of women participation in different offices is still low. Among the 50 political parties that participated in the April 2007 election, women had only 6% representation of the total number of candidates who contested for offices and majority of them contested for positions in the House of Assembly and House of Representatives. This low participation can be accounted for in the light of the above factors. The above factors are relevant to our discussion to the extent that they aid our understanding of the gender problem and subsequent solution towards envisioning a more gender inclusive world.

The factors needed to be addressed while a democratic culture of empowering women be sustained to make meaning of active involvement and women participation in politics. Women within the polity needed to be strengthened to constitute a critical act within the National Parliament as numerical strength may not guarantee the needed empowerment.

Policy Options and Women Political Participation in Nigeria’s Fourth Republic

According to Kousoulas, public policy is an aggregate of decisions and plans formulated by governmental authorities to deal with public and social problems and to determine the disposition of state revenues and other resources. It is a general plan of action adopted by government to solve societal problems. Policy making is always largely influenced by the institutional arrangement of each political system; its hallmark is the desire on the part of the policy actors to make efforts to provide alternative ways of addressing public problems. The processes involved in policy making in any political system is reflective of the society, whether it is developed or underdeveloped; democratic or undemocratic. Nigeria is a heterogeneous state and a colonial creation. Thus, various contending interests are competing for relevance and supremacy within the polity. Therefore, policy making tends to tilt in favour of that group or institution that can influence the power that-be most. Since Nigeria is a patriarchal state, the men in most cases dominate the policy process and get their wish (es) implemented. Policy framework in the country has been
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Conducted in either a constitutional context (under Civilian Government) or autocratic context (under the military). In both cases, it is dominated by men and characterised by constant change, unethical behaviour, continuous pressures, conflicting values and competing political objectives. Public policy in Nigeria is elitist and top-down. Since men constitute the bulk of policy makers and implementers, most policies in Nigeria are masculine and are put up (inadvertently) to reflect the wishes and aspirations of the makers.

Under the Nigerian Democracy, attempts have been made towards engendering women empowerment and more participation of women in politics and governance generally. These attempts have resulted in policies formulation with little or no significant effect on women empowerment and their political participation. Three (3) of such policies: National Policy on Women, National Gender Policy and the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) are hereby subjected to analysis with a view to underscore their import for Nigerian women.

The Nigeria State: National Policy on Women and National Gender Policy

The democratic imperatives of the 21st century are such that has made most countries of the world to ascribe to the clarion call for gender parity and fairness. The National Policy on Women (NPW) was approved by the Federal government under president Obasanjo to address the plethora of problems jnd issues being confronted by the women fold, shortly after the inception of the Fourth Republic in 1999. The policy fulfils the yearning as well as efforts of Federal, State and Local Governments, Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), International Development partners, the private sector, concerned corporate bodies and individuals to integrate women fully into national development in order to remove those gender inequalities that have evolved in our society overtime through structures and processes created by patriarchy, colonialism, and capitalism. The policy is expected to consolidate largely salient revolutionary changes already stimulated by past and current women in development programmes.2

Equally, the National Policy on Women is seen as one of the most direct activities of chapter 11, section 17, and subsection 2 of the 1999 Nigeria Constitution, which states that: Even’ citizen shall have equality of rights, obligations, and opportunities before the law.

And subsection 3:
All citizens, without discrimination on any group whatsoever, have the opportunity for securing adequate means of livelihood, as well as adequate opportunity to secure suitable employment.

While the constitution guarantees equal rights for all citizens regardless of gender, circumstance of birth, etc; the National Policy on Women articulates into a coherent whole, all Gender and Development (GAD) policies and programmes and also formulates new policies that will actualise the provisions of the constitution.28 The philosophy behind this policy is based on national constitutional stipulations, the need to restructure the economy and our political and social
institutions to ensure social equity and economic growth; it also derives from our traditional commitment to the stability of the family and the complementarity of gender roles.

Objectives of the Policy
The objectives of the National Policy on women are:
(1) Ensuring that the principles and provisions as contained in the Nigerian constitution are effectively enforced.
(2) Bringing into the mainstream gender perspective in all policies and programmes based on a systematic analysis at all levels of government.

Without doubt, the National Policy on Women is one of the dividends of democracy. It symbolises the result of years of struggle by women NGOs, individual women and concerned gender sensitive organizations as well as international agencies working on gender issues. The policy thrust covers equity, social order and social wellbeing, resource allocation, economic growth and efficiency, patriarchy, ideology and framework as well as culture. Sect orally, it deals with women issues under education, science, and technology, health, employment, legal services, politics and decisionmaking, agriculture, industrially, environment, social services etc clearly stating both the objectives and the implementation strategies. According to the new policy, the National Assembly shall provide adequate legislation to enable women to participate freely and equally in politics and decision-making. In addition, affirmative action of proportionate ratio or 30 percent representative will be employed to increase the total representative seats in each of the legislative houses, executive arm, party hierarchy, and structures, which shall be reserved for women for trial period up to the year 2010. This is yet to be done one year after and the male dominated National Assembly is not thinking in this direction.

A cursory perusal of the NPW signaled a superlative intention of the Obasanjo administration towards gender sensitiveness. It represents the first major attempt, albeit on paper, to integrate Nigerian women fully into national development and as such, it is seen as a plus for women struggle and democratic governance. However, despite the fact that Nigeria's constitution frowns at inequality and discrimination and Nigeria is a signatory to different international instruments protecting women's rights as human rights, Nigerian women are still being discriminated against in education, employment, state and Federal legislature, state and Federal cabinet etc. as at today. The myth of the women as a sexual domestic functionary still persists and abides in many cultures. Under the common law tradition and in most of our indigenous cultural practices, a woman ceases legally to be a person upon her marriage. She was then without legal capacity. A husband and wife were regarded as the person, and the person was the husband.

To further consolidate on gender equality and women empowerment and in recognition of the extant National Women's Policy and other sectoral policies to respond to the challenges of gender inequalities and attendant low socio-economic indicators, a National
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Gender policy was developed to replace the women’s policy.29 The goal of the National Gender Policy is to ‘build a just society devoid of discrimination, harness the full potential of all social groups regardless of sex or circumstance, promote the enjoyment of fundamental human rights and protect the health, social, economic and political well-being of all citizens in order to achieve equitable rapid economic growth; evolve an evidence-based planning and governance system where human, social, financial and technological resources are efficiently and effectively deployed for sustainable development. 30

The National Gender Policy is to promote a cooperative approach within and across sectors, as gender becomes a crosscutting issue in development. This will thereby enable each sector to adapt and adopt gender frameworks into their policy thinking, planning, and practice as a matter of necessity and responsibility to the national mandate of ensuring gender equality in all national institutions, and projecting gender equality as a norm. 31 The main goal of the National Gender Policy is therefore, to establish a clear vision and framework to guide the process of developing laws, policies, procedures and practices that will ensure equal rights and opportunities for women and men in all spheres and structures of government as well as in the workplace, the community and family.

Lofty as the intention, purpose, goals, and objectives of the National Gender Policy are, a clear demonstration of lack of political will by the government for implementation as well as confronting patriarchy and mobilising resources for achieving result have impeded their realisation.

Women and the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy

The National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) was the response to the development challenges of Nigeria NEEDS is Nigeria’s plan for prosperity. It is the people’s way of letting the government know what kind of Nigeria they wish to live in, now and in the future. It was the government’s ways of letting the people know how it plans to overcome the deep and pervasive obstacles to progress that the government and the people have identified. It is also a way of letting the international community knows where Nigeria stands in the region and in the world and how it wished to be supported. The primary aim of NEEDS is to create a new Nigeria citizen who values hard work and who realises that one cannot have something for nothing. 32

Thus, the clarion call for democratic empowerment of women must be preceded by their economic empowerment. On this ground, the place of women on the economic positional ladder of any democratic nation affects their political empowerment in significant ways. The NEEDS vision is based on the constitution; the Kuru declaration; previous initiatives, such as vision 2010; and the widespread consultation and participation throughout Nigeria that was part of the NEEDS process. The Kuru Declaration embodies the vision:
To build a truly great Africa democratic country, politically united, integrated and stable, economically prosperous, socially organised, with equal opportunity for all and responsibility from all^ to become the catalyst of (African) Renaissance, and making adequate all-embracing contributions, sub-regionally, regionally and globally.33

The NEEDS documents identified six groups as being vulnerable, these are the rural poor, the urban poor, women, youth, children and the rural communities. In the particular case of women, the NEEDS targeted instruments for protecting them include;

affirmative action to increase women's representation to at least 30 per cent in all programmes, education, including adult education; scholarship; access to credit and land, material and child health.

However, as costly as the goals and vision of NEEDS are, it should be stressed that Nigerian women did not provide the necessary input(s) into its formulation as well as implementation. Men dominated the formulation and implementation stages of NEEDS. Since the interest of the neglected is in most cases neglected in policy formulation and when represented, such interest does not usually reflect the wishes and desires of the neglected. The comatose nature of the economy coupled with male dominance has ensured that women are relegated into the background. The stiff economic realities of the 21st century have made most financial institutions to be moribund. Thus, women are really affected by the harsh economic realities. There is no legislation to ensuring that the affirmative action to increase women's representation to at least 30 percent in all programmes; education, scholarships, access to credit and land, maternal and child health is implemented. Therefore, most women lack the necessary collateral to access bank loans and worse still, there is no provision for gender budgeting. This has contributed to the economic hardship of women as well as their quest for gender equity.

**Women Political Participation in Nigeria's Fourth Republic**

Political participation thrives on democratic acquisition and utilization of state power as well as its dispensation towards the collective good of all the citizens. As one of the tenets of democracy, Political Participation is liberal and unrestricted. Subscribing to this, Okolie perceives political participation as 'freedom of expression, association, right to free flow of communication, right to influence decision process and the right to social justice, health services, better working condition, and opportunity for franchise'.34 The cogent activities involved are holding public and party office, being a candidate for office, soliciting party funds, attending a caucus or strategy meetings, contributing time in a campaign. The citizenry (men and women) must participate fully on equal basis in all the activities of political participation before it can be said that they are participating in politics. Although, findings have indicated that the involvement of women in Nigerian politics is largely noticeable at the level of voting and latent support. Adeniyi has identified violence and other forms of electoral conflicts perpetrated and perpetuated by men and male youths as the major barriers confronting and inhibiting women active participation in Nigerian politics.35
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Doubtlessly, the Nigerian democratic government since the inception of the Fourth Republic in 1999 impacted on women participation in politics. In 1999, there was one (3%) deputy governor, and in 2003, two (6%). There was 3.3 percent female representation in the lower house of the National Legislature in 1999, 6.4 percent in 2003 and 7.5 percent in 2007. In the 1999 Senate, 2.8 percent women representations increased to 3.7 percent in 2003 and further increased to 8.3 percent in 2007 (Field Research). Findings from Table 1 clearly attest to this.

However, the just concluded General Elections (April 2011) revealed the peculiarity of the Nigerian Democracy; it showed that the country’s democracy is still largely patriarchal with most actors abhorring democratic political culture and values that could sustain the gains of women in Nigerian Politics. Consequently, therefore, the numerical gain by women in elective positions over the past four elections has waned especially at the level of the National Assembly. Thus, the number of elected women in the elections diminished both at the Senate and at the House of Representatives. This is in spite of government’s commitment to implementing various treaties at international, regional, and national levels, in particular, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPF A), which provides for the Affirmative Action Policy, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) as well as the National Gender Policy.

Despite these commitments and the numerical strength of women, they still occupy less than eight per cent of elective and appointive positions at all levels of governance in the country. Although the 2011 general elections witnessed an increased number of women stepping forward to contest their

Table 1: No. of Women elected in 1999, 2003, 2007, and 2011 Nigerian Elections

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<tr>
<th>S/N</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>No. of Available Seats</th>
<th>No. of Women in 1999</th>
<th>No. of Women in 2003</th>
<th>No. of Women in 2007</th>
<th>No. of Women in 2011</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Presidency</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Senate</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>House of Reps</td>
<td>360</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Governorship</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Deputy Governorship</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1 (out of 26)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>36 States Houses of Assembly</td>
<td>990</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1532</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source; Fieldwork 2011.
parties’ primaries, only few emerged as candidates and fewer still won any of the positions they contested. Female candidates, for instance, constituted 9.1 per cent of the total number of those who contested the last National Assembly election from all the political parties. Thus, out of the 3,306 candidates in this category, only 302 of them were women. Worse still, only six of them won seats in the 109 seats Senate, representing about 5.5 per cent. The story is not different at the House of Representatives where, out of the 360 available seats, women accounting for about 7.2 per cent, won only 26. This is an abysmal drop in the light of the success recorded in 2007, 2003 and 1999 elections, where the figures were respectively 27 (7.5 per cent), 23 (6.3 per cent) and 12 (3.3 per cent). Similarly, out of the about 348 governorship candidates across the country, only 13 women about 3.7 per cent of the total number, contested in 10 states, and none of these was successful. In addition only one woman: Mrs. Joke Orlo-p-Adefulire from Lagos state was elected as a Deputy Governor out of the 26 states where elections took place. What that means is that to date, Nigeria, is yet to produce a female governor. Except, of course, for the brief period when Dame Virginia Etiaba held forth for Governor Peter Obi in Anambra State. Likewise, there was only one female presidential candidate in the person of Mrs. Ebiti Ndok of the United National Party for Development. Mrs. Sarah Jubril, a presidential aspirant on the platform of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) earlier lost out at the party primaries held in Abuja where she succeeded in getting a self-vote (one vote). This scenario represents the exclusion of about half the population of the country from mainstream political activities and such exclusion fails the basic test of democracy and cannot facilitate Nigeria’s achievement of its commitment to the MOOs and women empowerment. Thus, despite the number of women getting involved in politics, the percentage of successes has remained unimpressive compared to their male counterparts.

This level of gender inequality could, indeed, be devastating, not only for women but also for the country in general. A society that continues to marginalise its women can only be cutting its nose to spite its face. This is because research has shown that countries that encourage gender equality have higher standards of living and significantly more achievements in all other facets of life. Reports also have it that where women leaders are present in critical numbers and are able to participate effectively, economically, politically, and socially, the result is more socially responsive governance. If according to the United Nations, UN, securing peace and social progress, as well as the full enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms require active participation, equality, and development of women, then, sidelining this segment of the society would only amount to injustice.

Although there is, still a paucity of women in politics, their interest in this area is increasing. Today women’s interests are more consciously represented in almost every sphere of public affairs. This is to the effect that, the participation of women in politics has helped in overcoming most of the challenges of the past. Men are now more willing to cede political ground to women. The People
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Democratic Party (PDF); the ruling party in Nigeria, has promised to give 35 percent of all Ministerial and Ambassadorsial positions to Nigerian women if its presidential candidate Dr. Jonathan is elected as president. Specifically, on the occasion of the grand Finale of PDP Presidential Campaign, on Saturday 26th March 2011 at Abuja maintained that: ‘to the women, I promised more involvement in governance and more challenging jobs; I also assure you of your 35 percent in appointive offices.’ More women are now contesting and winning as well as loosing elective positions in the executive and legislative arms of government.

More women are occupying top most positions on boards and management of big business organizations; women are now more able to influence policies that are more gender friendly. Women have more say now in determining issues affecting them. In all, women are making more contribution to the political, economic, and social development of Nigeria now than in the past. They have thus become a political resource within the national political resources whose political influence cannot be ignored within the body polity.

The impact of women involvement will have positive consequences for the development of the nation. Through increased political participation, women will be able to develop skills and resources that are likely to be used first in the development of their local communities. The quality of life at this level is a decisive indicator of the extent to which the goals of national development has been achieved.

It is opined that the criteria for evaluating the development of a nation includes the extent to which the various social groups within the country attained their group objective, as well as, the assessment of the efficiency of the production system to satisfy the basic needs of the population, such as food, clothing and housing. The point to be emphasised is that until or unless women are active participants in the political process, their group interests will be neglected. These interests may include equal education and employment opportunities, equal fringe benefits, equity in borrowing credit aid in the procurement of property and legal protection against forced marriages and family violence. Such issues will not receive proper or adequate treatment by local, state, or federal institutions without the felt presence of female within the political process. After all, the interest of the excluded is always in danger of being overlooked and when looked at, is seen with very different eyes from those of the persons whom it directly concerns.

With equal opportunities as men, women are capable of doing more. Women’s increased participation in public life will bring about positive changes and if Nigeria is to move away from ‘the business as usual’ syndrome, it will need to encourage women to participate more in the running of public affairs. As character molders of future leaders, women are the conscience of every society and cannot be undermined.

Therefore, barriers must be dismantled, more women encouraged, and supported by political parties and powers-that-be for elective and appointive positions in government. This can be enhanced through legislation or reservation as the case may be. Though women
constitute an insignificant part of the National Assembly in terms of representation, there is need for a better data and thorough research Is needed to fully assess the impact of women legislators in legislations and as a catalyst for active women participation in politics. In addition and in spite of all the odds against women’s quest for greater participation in politics, democracy has enlarged the political space for women participation in politics though this has not transformed into meaningful participation. Thus, rather than enhancing women political participation, the Nigerian state has only widely encouraged political patronage and opportunism in the appointment of few women, rather than electing them, into political offices resulting in censored participation through the activities of the male dominated political parties and other institutions of the state. Doubtlessly, this has occasioned restricted participation and put the women at the mercy of their appointers (men) rather than the electorate. Nonetheless, the practice has the potency of liberating the women from the cocoon of poverty while catapulting them into the limelight of active political participation. This is in the form of twining the existing femocracy to active and real participation in governance. Nigerian women are beginning to utilise their femocratic advantage into gendercracy; they are beginning to transform to real participants in the political field by leveraging on the hitherto femocracy. Women now contest for elections and see relevance in democratic process rather than relying mainly on the opportunistic advantage of being connected to a man. Specifically, women like professor Dora Akunyi-H contested for Senate in Anambra State; though she lost the election to a man, Mrs, Remi Tinubu equally ran for and won the Lagos Central Senatorial seat; her success was attributed mainly to the support and political weight of her husband-Senator Bola Tinubu; Pauline Tallen and Jumoke Akinjide contested for Governor in Plateau state and Senate in Oyo state respectively; both of them lost to men. While Honourable Mulikat Akande-Adeola was elected into the House of Representatives for the second term, she lost in her bid to become the Speaker despite the zoning arrangement of her party; the People Democratic Party that zoned the position to her goo-political zone; the Southwest and the official support she got from the presidency. Thus, the Nigeria state is rigidly committed to patriarchy and it will take a democratised mind within the body polity for women to be democratically empowered.

**Conclusion**

Thus far, this study has revealed that patriarchal structures are still very much entrenched in the Nigerian state resulting in low political participation for women. The low level of women’s participation at all tiers of government (federal, state and local) shows not only the resilience of patriarchy attitudes, but also the limited impact to date of efforts to promote gender equality in Nigeria. That initiatives by NGOs, international agencies and government institutions have not yet brought about a significant cultural shift in attitudes underpin a nexus of mutually reinforcing obstacles to women’s political participation. With low levels of education, skills, economic resources and self-esteem, women are in a poor position to assert
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themselves in the political arena and challenge the cultural biases. Hence, the multiple forms of exclusion and disadvantage tend to reinforce each other. The situation of poverty is a further constraint, making it difficult for Nigerian women to break out of this vicious circle of disempowerment.

Recommendations
Democracy thrives based on equity and fairness to all and its essence is the development of the human race and the society. Sustainable socio-economic development is a product of efficient and effective utilization of the existing resources most especially the human element, which is made up of both male, and female. To this end, attempt at making progress within a nation-state and its components must be cognisant of the level of women in relation to men (or male in relation to female) i.e. gender equity and fairness. This is seen as a catalyst for improving the quality of life for the population and for promoting growth and development. This work has clearly revealed that women are willing to contribute towards the development of the country especially in the area of politics. However, it is suggestive that the Nigerian women would greatly help the cause of their full participation in governance if they endeavour to consolidate their gains at every stage of their struggle for equality.

Whatever additional gains the women seek to make largely depend on what they make oftoday’s opportunities. Women should therefore:

(1) Work very hard to consolidate today’s gains.

(2) The women should not aim to rock the political/socio partnership in governance (the travails of the erstwhile speaker of the House of Representatives - Olubunmi Etteh, should serve as a pointer that the man may not yet be too trusting to surrender leadership to women).

(3) Nigerian women occupying political leadership positions should exhibit strong character of honesty, uprightness, fairness, and accountability inherent in women.

(4) Nigerian women now participating in governance should be conscious that their conduct might enhance or jeopardise the chances of others’ participation.

(5) Women should build a mutual trust among themselves. Women in leadership positions should inspire others to also strive to develop their potentials in political life.

(6) Women need to build a support network for their fellow women.

(7) Above all, Nigerian women should strive to carry not only women but also men along in the discharge of public responsibilities. Doing this, aggressive lobby and enlightenment of the men on the need to imbibe and display democratic culture and values is pivotal to empowering women in a die-hard patriarchal Nigeria’s state. In addition, education of the girl-child and implementation of the affirmative action are imperative.
Endnotes

20. Ibid.
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28. ibid.


31. ibid.


33. ibid.


36. Fieldwork (2011). Gubernatorial Election was not held in ten states of Kogi, Bayelsa, Adamawa, Cross River, and Sokoto where the Court of Appeal ruled favourably on the one year tenure extension for governors. Also, the Election did not take place in Anambra, Osun Edo, Ekiti and Ondo states due to the victory of the incumbent governors at the Election Petition Tribunals.

37. Item of news monitored on the NTA Network News on Thursday 17/12/2011 by 9.00 pm


