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SCAN ARTICLE

Is there Gender Justice within Political Parties? A Case for Participatory Politics and Revolutionary Compromises

Hildagard C. Desmond-Ihekaire Ph.D,MC Arb.*

and

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Abstract

This discourse exposes the queer conditioning of women as routine followers within political spaces: a politically inherited pre-colonial compromise that has suppressed women's legal rights in political parties. The paper embraced a doctrinal methodology within a social and historical cross-based analysis of the development of women in politics and the legal rights of women to participatory justice in political parties in Nigeria. The incorporation of gender-based perspectives in politics and policy making process is imperative for development, and this paper highlights the evident need for political parties to structure gender participation in power sharing and representation and the imperceptible ruin which political gender imbalance thrusts on the Nigerian society. The essence of political participation in any society, either civilized or primitive, is to seek control of power, and the goal of feminist theory is to explain why women are subordinated. In other words, to fully understand the experience of discriminated women, one must consider the total dimensions of their reality. The National Gender Policy 2021-2026 identified structural factors inhibiting the participation of women in politics and unless these factors are addressed, any effort geared towards improving the participation of women in governance and power, will simply be futile twirling. The paper concluded that women's wings of political parties must have clearer and achievable leadership goals and aspirations and the political party remains responsible to providing capacity building for women's rights as well as proactively securing more women in power.

Keywords: Women, Political Participation, Feminism, Political Party

Introduction

Women's wings of political parties must have goals other than drafted offices, prayers, and entertainment. The political party is responsible to provide capacity building for women's political rights, though there is no question that opportunities for women have opened in the past 64 years in Nigeria. Women's movement, the spread of democracy, and the realization of existing human rights amongst other factors have coalesced to open doors that have historically been closed to women. Goal 5 of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to ensure gender equality in all nations of the world continues to resonate different levels of progress in various quarters, and gender rights and the growth of feminist movements have influenced policies and decisions in social, and political landscapes.

Regrettably, despite concerted efforts to achieve more for women in politics, most countries of the world especially developing nations still contend with the global menace of gender discrimination in political participation and power sharing, and political parties cannot be detached from this discourse as they are best suited to carry out the campaign and activism for participatory political gender justice, bearing the needed structure to carry out political and social changes. Political parties play a crucial role in nurturing leadership, and while there are no statistics on women's membership of political parties across African nations, anecdotal evidence suggests that women constitute as many, if not more of party members.¹

An assessment of political party statutes, policies, and election manifestos, reveals that where parties have voluntary quotas in elective structures and electoral nomination lists, these provisions are often vague and regularly ignored and are often partitioned by party stalwarts who sometimes nominate candidates that are not best suited for these positions and who are basically in those posts to carry out the whims and caprices of their godfathers. Most women in decision-making in political party structures find themselves in additional-member positions or co-opted stations.² While the debate over whether political parties make democracy more democratic continues in many countries, what is not in dispute is that political parties are instrumental for advancement to national leadership. Political parties drive the recruitment, nomination and election of candidates for public office, socialization of prospective political representatives and leaders, disseminating political information and exposing citizens to politics.³

Engaging women in power and leadership in politics, often reveals queer compromises based on obvious need for balance of power sharing. Since equal political participation is *sine qua non* to democracy, a society cannot be truly democratized without the full and active participation of women in any country. The incorporation of gendered perspective in politics and policy making process is thus imperative for development.⁴ This paper highlights the evident need for political

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¹ CL Morna and S Tolmay, *Women's Political Participation: Countdown to 2023* (African Barometer 2nd edn, International IDEA publications, 2024) 91.

²*Ibid.*

³Morna and Tolmay (n 1) 61.

⁴O Samuel and J Segun, 'Gender Relations in Nigeria's Democratic Governance' [2012] (1) (2/3) *Journal of Politics and Governance*, 6; O Oluyemi, *Monitoring Participation of Women in Politics in Nigeria* (Paper presented by

parties to structure gender participation in power sharing and representation and the imperceptible ruin which political gender imbalance thrusts on the Nigerian society.

Definition of Terms

Political Behaviour

Political behaviour is one of the significant contributions of electorates to democracies and other political structures in making choices and resolutions about political issues.⁵ It is a highly contested notion which often describes people's actions and inactions, opinions, and interest in the political process that establishes links between the public and political leaders. This is evident in activities such as voting, aspiring for political offices, petitions, protests, forming political parties, spending time or money on political campaigns, choices around which aspirants or political parties to vote for during elections, and choices concerning positions to take, and how to participate in politics to communicate views to policymakers to influence policy decisions.⁶

The term explains the characteristics of political institutions differentiated based on their sense of statutory or constitutional creations and their actual operations. Generally, political behaviour sustains institutions through a process of consensual validation, and a pattern of interactions which are highly repetitive and mutually intelligible, based on similar assumptions that these behaviours and actions are relatable.⁷ It explains diversity within nations and political groups.⁸ Authors seem to agree that it is a system of political actions, laid in a comprehensive system that might be considered as a political communication,⁹ and implies the attitudes, actions, and shared sets of expectations about the citizens' role to influence policy and decision making within the political system.¹⁰

Being a complex structure of rationally connected belief variables, shared by group members about what motivates people to respond to a situation and how the group is organized, it is safe

National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, Abuja, Nigeria)

<https://unstats.un.org/unsd/gender/Finland_Oct2016/Documents/Nigeria_paper.pdf> accessed 17 August 2024.

⁵ RJ Dalton and K Hans-Dieter, *The Oxford handbook of political behaviour* (Oxford University Press, 2007) 5.

⁶ Y Katsourides, 'Couch Activism and the Individualisation of Political Demands: Political Behaviour in Contemporary Cypriot Society' [2013] (21) (1) *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, 87.

⁷ AF Chikerema and V Chakunda, 'Political Culture and Democratic Governance in Zimbabwe' [2014] (2) (1) *Journal of Power*, 55.

⁸ R Inglehart and C Welzel, *Modernization, Cultural Change, and Democracy: The Human Development Sequence* (Cambridge University Press, 2005) 4.

⁹ I Baba, 'Political Culture and Democratic Transition in West Africa: The Nigerian Experience' [2015] (3) (3) *Universal Journal of Management*, 115.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

to say that within a community, lies distinct political behaviours, covering individual emotions, prejudices, and predispositions.¹¹ Unless citizens participate behaviourally in the deliberation of policies, and towards their choices, structure of government and actions, then democratic processes are meaningless.¹²

Feminism

Feminism employs a wide range of disciplines to analyze gender perspectives and uses the perceptiveness and experiences of women to understand research and theory.¹³ If one believes in gender equality and the radical notion that women are people, then such person is a feminist. Feminism, as a lens in viewing the status of women in society, is geared toward the liberation of women. Thus, it cannot be discussed independent of gender and gender issues.¹⁴ Garner defines sex as 'gender'; 'the sum of the peculiarities of structure and function that distinguish a male from a female organism.'¹⁵ Constitutional provisions often declare that equality is guaranteed to all; in all facets of life, but there remains a wide gap between men and women in terms of equality.¹⁶

Despite the enactment of several laws promoting gender equality, perceptions on gender are deeply rooted in cultural determinism and strict social and religious beliefs which are based on gender stereotypes. Noteworthy is the fact that gender discrimination leaves half the Nigeria populace without safeguarded human rights.¹⁷ Gender division are not fixed biology but constitute an aspect of the wider social division of labour and in turn, is rooted in the conditions of productions and reproduction and reinforced by the cultural, religious and ideological systems prevailing in a society. Historically, these attributes, opportunities and relations are skewed against women in favour of men especially in developing nations and even in developed

¹¹R Dahl, *On Democracy* (Yale University Press, 1998) 52.

¹²A Bengtsson and H Wass, 'Styles of Political Representation: What do Voters Expect?' [2010] (20) (1) *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties*, 55.

¹³Bengtsson and Wass (n 12) 76.

¹⁴A Maduka and P Okoro, 'Gender and Issues of Good Governance' in I Eze-Anaba and U Nwaogbe (eds), *Women's Human Rights in Nigeria: Lobby and Advocacy Strategies for Civil Society Groups* (LEDAP, 2004) 74.

¹⁵BA Garner, *Black's Law Dictionary* (10th edn, Thomson Reuters, 2014) 1583.

¹⁶Y Olomjobi, *Human Rights on Gender, Sex and the Law in Nigeria* (Revised edn, Princeton & Associates Publishing Co. Ltd, 2015)55.

¹⁷*Ibid.*

societies. Thus, the universal asymmetrical pattern of gender relationship in which women are subordinated to men is cultural and not biological or immutable.¹⁸

Political Gender Participation

Democratic government is predicated upon freedom, justice and equal treatment of all citizens, and this is because democracy presupposes equal opportunity platform for political participation and decision-making process. Incorporation of gendered perspective in policy making process is thus imperative for sustainable democracy. Gender equality is a human right at the core of development. The essence of political participation in any society, either civilized or primitive, is to seek control of power, acquisition of power and dispensing power to organize society, harness and distribute resources and influence decisions in line with organised or individual interests.¹⁹

Global challenges can be overcome only by lifting barriers faced by women, girls, and sexual and gender minorities. Gender equality and women's participation in decision-making contribute to more inclusive institutions and pro-poor policy choices.²⁰ Women's participation and representation in decision-making bodies involves their enhanced presence and their empowerment through participation. On the one hand, women's political leadership allows them to set agendas and, it is in such roles that they are made responsive to constituencies and the public.²¹

The Nigerian National Gender Policy 2021-2026 expects the adoption of the gender Affirmative Action of 50:50 parity in all elective and appointive positions, in line with the global and regional best practices. Regulation of the political environment to reduce god-fatherism and monetized politics which are detrimental to women's participation in politics and popular democracy; compliance of all political parties in the country with the 50% Affirmative Action for women in leadership positions (elective and appointive) within political party system and in presenting candidates for political offices (e.g. political parties' primary elections). Gender

¹⁸Samuel and Segun (n4) 6.

¹⁹D Arowolo and FS Aluko, 'Women and Political Participation in Nigeria' [2010] (14) (4) *European Journal of Social Sciences*, 582.

²⁰ World Bank, *Accelerate Gender Equality for a Sustainable, Resilient, and Inclusive Future* (World Bank Gender Strategy 2024-2030, Consultation Draft) 18.

²¹ United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW), *Equal Participation of Women and Men in Decision-Making Processes, with Particular Emphasis on Political Participation and Leadership* (Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) Report of the Expert Group Meeting, EGM/EPDM /2005/REPORT, Addis-Ababa, Ethiopia, 24 – 27 October 2005) 6.

equality is globally accepted as a requisite for achieving development and democratic governance that give men and women equal voices in decision-making, policy implementation and attaining SDGs. Despite widespread democratization in most countries and the struggle of feminist movements for the integration of gender balancing in the national politics of countries over the world, women remain systematically alienated from political power and political decision making in Nigeria.²²

Several efforts such as the establishment of women political empowerment office, women trust funds and women lobby group, the institution of an INEC gender policy, and the national multi stakeholder dialogue have been made to address the political gender representation of women in elective and appointive positions in Nigeria.²³ Women, who have headed national governments, while a varied lot, have something in common: none have evolutionally challenged in fundamental ways, the patriarchal legal, economic and power structure of her society. To do so, would have been political suicide. But the pursuit of sustainable development has made it possible for women to participate in activities which imprecisely remain exclusive reserve of the men.

African Feminist Struggle and Compromises in Political Gender Justice

Feminism is an ideology, which is first understood before it can be embraced. It is unlike the colloquial and misconstrued interpretations on social streets, leading to counterattack and disdain, by people who seek to debase the struggles by disparaging its protagonists with discourteous labels. According to Simone de Bouviour,²⁴ 'one is not born, but becomes a woman.'²⁵ Tickner avers that feminism is a movement dedicated to achieving political, social, and economic equality for women. The goal of feminist theory is to explain why women are subordinated.²⁶ In other words, to fully understand the experience of discriminated women, one must consider the total dimensions of their reality including their cultural orientation, socioeconomic status, age, etc.

²²Samuel and Segun (n4) 4, 5.

²³Oluyemi (n4).

²⁴S De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (Short edn, Vintage Feminism, 2015) 3.

²⁵ M Colenutt, 'One is not Born, but Becomes a Woman' *TORCH | The Oxford Research Centre in the Humanities, University of Oxford* (22 March 2021) <<https://www.torch.ox.ac.uk/article/one-is-not-born-but-becomes-a-woman>> accessed 20 September 2024.

²⁶ JA Tickner, 'Gender in International Relations: Feminist Perspectives on Achieving Global Security' [2014] (22) (1) *Indian Journal of Gender Studies*, 179.

This point is one of the most significant contributions of intersectionality which is giving voice to women from diverse social and cultural background, emphasizing structural inequalities like ethnicity, sexism, and social class.²⁷ The African Barometer 2024 detailed that, in Africa, women make up only 22% of news subjects and sources. Politics and government news constitute 30% of the news coverage across Africa's newspapers, television, and radio broadcasts.²⁸ Politics remains 'Who Gets What, When and How' according to Harold Laswell,²⁹ and politics in Nigeria has become a game in which aspirants employ all forms of tactics (including violent means) to ensure they win, hinging manipulative tendencies on Machiavellianism.³⁰

The electoral landscape in Africa is adjusting to feminist compromises. On a continent once dominated by the First Past the Post (FPTP) system, 19 African countries now have a proportional representation (PR) electoral system. Globally, the PR electoral system has proven to be more conducive to the inclusion of women, other minority, and marginalised groups. The combination of the PR and FPTP system and quotas generally yields good results for women. Congo-Brazzaville has a FPTP system and adopted a 30% quota in 2016. In August 2022, at the opening of the 15th legislature of the National Assembly, the percentage of elected women rose from 11% in the 14th legislature to 15%, despite the 30% quota.³¹ Women's representation in South Africa's National Assembly dropped from 46% in 2020 to 43% following the 29 May 2024 elections that witnessed the ANC winning less than half (40%) of the votes for the first time. As a result, South Africa also drops from twelfth to twenty-second place in the global ranking of women's political participation.³²

Women's wings constitute an important auxiliary structure of political parties. Generally, women's wings in Africa have served as the 'hospitality' arms of parties, with entertainment, prayers and mediation assignments. However, the liberation struggles in the continent saw a new face and structure of women's groupings emerging. These became more evident in 'new'

²⁷N Ghafournia, 'Culture, Domestic Violence and Intersectionality: Beyond the Dilemma of Cultural Relativism and Universalism' [2014] (11) (2) *International Journal of Critical Cultural Studies*, 23, 28.

²⁸Morna and Tolmay (n1).

²⁹ Sage, 'Politics; who gets what, and how' *Sage publications* (2017) 4
<https://us.sagepub.com/sites/default/files/barbour_8e_ch-01_0.pdf> accessed 20 September 2024; Rice University 'Introduction to Political Science' *Openstax* (2024) <<https://openstax.org/books/introduction-political-science/pages/1-1-defining-politics-who-gets-what-when-where-how-and-why>> accessed 20 September 2024.

³⁰ O Ekpenyong and Others, 'Politics in Nigeria: To What Extent has the Gender Agenda Gained Momentum?' [2015] (20) (5) *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science (IOSR-JHSS)*, 1.

³¹Morna and Tolmay (n1) 56.

³²*Ibid*, 62.

democracies such South Africa and Namibia, where women's wings of ruling parties, the African National Congress (ANC) and the South West African Peoples' Organisation (SWAPO) played significant roles in pushing the gender agenda to even influence the national programme for gender equality. In Namibia, women in SWAPO founded the SWAPO Women's Council (SWC) in 1969. Post-independence in 1990, the SWAPO women took up positions in government, parliament, and other spheres of governance. But, as with many new democracies, the role of the wings got swallowed in the national agenda. SWAPO women seemed to loosen the grip of power internally. Recently women in the Council started pushing the gender agenda, to change the face of representation. The Women's Council became instrumental in pushing for the 50% gender quotas within the party and into the constitution.³³

Women's leadership and participation in decision-making can contribute to a more sustainable and resilient future. Women's leadership is associated with improved sustainability, resource management, and social resilience.³⁴ Article 7 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women 1979, called upon States parties to take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the political and public life of the country.³⁵ Black Feminist intersectionality evolved to explain additional factors that intersect with gender. It assumes that each social group has unique qualities and there are interactions between different social identities such as race, gender and class.³⁶

Across its phases, the African feminist movement has been marked by rebellion, opposing and differing views.³⁷ The struggle has seen the growth of liberal feminists,³⁸ who do not advocate a reorganization of the society, but seek to expand the rights and opportunities for women,³⁹ and radical feminists who believe in the fundamental differences between men and women and struggle for equality by considering women's separate needs according to their different biological or social conditions.⁴⁰ Feminism seeks to understand the ways in which women are

³³Morna and Tolmay (n1) 86.

³⁴World Bank (n20) 18.

³⁵ United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW) (n21).

³⁶SM Omodia and Others, 'The Role of Women in Nigerian Politics: Conceptual and Theoretical Issues for an Enhanced Political Participation in the Fourth Republic' [2013] (5) (1)*Journal of Studies in Social Sciences*, 88.

³⁷RA Amaefula, 'African Feminisms: Paradigms, Problems and Prospects' [2021] (37) *Feminismos Africanos*, 289.

³⁸Ghafournia (27) 23.

³⁹VN Azu 'Cultural Ideology and Domestic Violence against Women in South-Eastern Nigeria' [2020] (25) (10) (5) *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 60.

⁴⁰Ghafournia (n27) 27.

oppressed - socially, economically, politically and psychologically - in order to reduce, if not eliminate their oppression.⁴¹

Feminism and Political Gender Justice in Nigeria

Politics and political arrangement in Nigeria has undermined female legitimacy resulting in women's political powerlessness.⁴² The damage done to the status of women at the onset of colonial rule has led to assumptions of women in public leadership roles as 'mere women.'⁴³ Women political activism such as the Aba women riot against colonial tax policies of 1929/30, the Ngwa women's opposition against the municipalization of their community in 1954, the Eastern Region women's opposition to new school fees in 1958; and the series of protests between 1946 and 1958 by the Abeokuta Women's Union were invaluable in the country's struggle for independence and are excerpts of political behaviours. However, the limited gains of these women did not translate into participation in decision making during the colonial period. This is because the reporting of these giant political strides is repressed by a weak press. Men dominated the first political parties and women did not feature prominently in the leadership of the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP), National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC), Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM) and other parties during the nationalist era and after independence.⁴⁴

The political marginalization of women continued through the First Republic 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. Through the Second- Fourth Republic, women have tried to prove political influence, worth and relevance.⁴⁵

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,

⁴¹ C Bressler, *Feminist Literary Theory: An Introduction to Theory and Practice* (New York, Prentice Hall, 2007) 144.

⁴² Ekpenyong and Others (n30).

⁴³ Unwomen Caribbean, 'The Gender Agenda: Gaining Momentum' *UNWOMEN* (March 6, 2013) <<http://caribbean.unwomen.org/en/news-and-events/stories/2013/3/the-gender-agenda-gaining-momentum>> accessed 17 September 2024.

⁴⁴ Samuel and Segun (n4) 7.

⁴⁵ Samuel and Segun (n4), 9.

economic, and political discriminatory policies or practices.⁴⁶ Nigerian Government in its efforts to tackle the phenomenon of low women's political participation and manage feminist pressures, ratified some national and international instruments such as the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1989 and adopted a National Policy on Women in 2000 (replaced in 2006 and 2021), working with the Protocol to The African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa 2003.⁴⁷

All groups seek to influence the dispensation of power in line with their articulated interests as a fundamental motive of political participation. Women, in their gradual consciousness, in recent times, increasingly seek power equation and distribution and redistribution of resources in their favour. Although, careful observations have indicated that the involvement of women in Nigerian politics is largely noticeable at the level of voting and latent support, identified factors such as violence and other forms of electoral conflicts perpetrated by men and male youths are the major barriers confronting and inhibiting women active participation in Nigerian politics.⁴⁸

The priority areas of concern for promoting gender equity and equality, women's empowerment and social inclusion in leadership and political participation are expressed in the Federal Republic of Nigeria, National Gender Policy 2021-2026, where it was expressed that structural factors inhibit the participation of women in politics and unless these factors are addressed, any effort geared towards improving the participation of women in governance will be futile, and in the manifestoes of registered political parties in Nigeria, only a few refer to gender equality and women empowerment agenda, and there is weak commitment to gender equality in elective representation.⁴⁹

In Rivers State for instance, the People's Democratic Party (PDP) has improved women's political power. Between 2015-2023,⁵⁰ women were elected as councilors from wards in Rivers State to represent their people in the 23 local government councils; more women have been elected into the State House of Assembly; the Party has maintained the election of a female deputy governor; women have been elected into the Senate and House of Representatives;

⁴⁶ Ekpenyong and Others (n30).

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ Arowolo and Aluko (n19).

⁴⁹ *Federal Republic of Nigeria, National Gender Policy* (Federal Ministry of Women and Gender Affairs, 2021-2026) 3.7.

⁵⁰ During the tenure of Chief Barr. Ezenwo Nyesom Wike, CON, as Executive Governor of Rivers State.

women have taken leadership as Local Government Area Councils Vice -Chairmen and several women remained part of the State Executive Council. Outside the sphere of politics, women occupy several judicial positions and have become Chief Judges in the State. These developments are commendable and a shift from the negative status attributed to female political office holding prior to 1999. Yet, there is room for more!⁵¹

The National Gender Policy 2021-2026, noted that within party structures, very little attention has been given to gender-oriented principles. For example, political parties are formed and managed on male fraternal connections and relationships. Women's electoral participation is often hindered by a variety of political, legal, social, economic, and cultural barriers and it is important for the electoral management body (EMB) to identify and address these within the particular country context. Such careful analysis, which can help advance the development of gender-friendly electoral processes and procedures, is best done in consultation with women's groups and other relevant stakeholders.⁵²

Traditionally, women's wings in political parties in Nigeria were concerned with promotion and advancement of women in the structures, as well as advancing social issues such as women's health and education. The structure had little or no power to influence policy and leadership within the political party. Most tended to play on the sidelines.⁵³ Women began to form themselves into groups in consciousness of the wave and potency of globalisation and industrial capitalism that inevitably moved towards loosening the socio-economic and political shackles of women and attempted to hasten the pace and tempo of institutionalization of equal rights for all.⁵⁴

⁵¹ F Ajayi, 'Beautiful, Brilliant Female Deputy Governors' *Punch* (19th February 2023) <<https://punchng.com/beautiful-brilliant-female-deputy-governors/>> accessed 24 September 2024; D Chapp-Jumbo, 'IWD: LG Chairman Hails Rivers Governor, Nyesom Wike on Women Empowerment' *Kristina Report* (Mar 7, 2022) <<https://kristinareports.net/iwd-lg-chairman-hails-rivers-governor-nyesom-wike-on-women-empowerment/>> accessed 24 September 2024; W Chapp-Jumbo, 'Women in Politics, Time to Think Strategically About Your Role in the Game, and the Future' *Medium* (Apr 29, 2021) <<https://wisdomchappjumbo.medium.com/women-in-politics-time-to-think-strategically-about-your-role-in-the-game-and-the-future-c336bd3a3100>> accessed 24 September 2024.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ Morna and Tolmay (n1) 86.

⁵⁴ Arowolo and Aluko (n19); UNWOMEN, 'It's election season in Nigeria, but where are the women?' *UNWOMEN* (February 6, 2019) <<http://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2019/2/feature-women-in-politics-in-nigeria>> accessed 17 September 2024.

It is easy to achieve gender equality if a political party has gender equality as one of their mandates. This is because, besides influencing the policy of the government in power, at the party level, their constitution can be tailored towards making room for Nigerian women to participate and also get elective positions. Fairly, the People's Democratic Party (PDP) in Rivers State adopted this strategy by ceding exclusively the position of vice chairman of Local Governments to women only. Although, this was commendable, it does not go to the root cause of gender inequality in politics, and it did not really give women a true and active independent voice.

Political Factors Endangering Participatory Gender Justice in Politics

Political behaviour influences norms, values, and social perceptions. According to António Guterres, the UN Secretary General, during the celebration to mark International Day of the Girl Child, 2018, 'We need to equip girls with transferable and lifelong skills such as critical thinking, creativity, and digital awareness. Having role models will also be critical ... let us recommit to supporting every girl to develop her skills, enter the workforce on equal terms and reach her full potential.'⁵⁵ Political parties are agents of change as key stakeholders in changing attitudes and norms in political sphere because they represent varied interests, cutting across religious, social, cultural and economic differences, to unite for a common force which can be found in their political ideology. They have the power to motivate and educate their members for better understanding of their ideology. For this reason, they are a veritable tool and have a pivotal and active role to play in addressing gender inequalities in politics.

Some political factors militating against participatory political gender justice in Nigeria include:

- a. Violence, thuggery, and intimidation** which female aspirants of various political parties cannot withstand.
- b. Stigmatization** on women aspirants who venture into politics and vie for offices. Such women are often frowned upon as unladylike, without virtues, promiscuous, uncanny and unsubmitive.

⁵⁵A Guterres, 'The Secretary General – Message on the International Day of the Girl Child' *MINUJUSTH United Nations Mission for Justice Support in Haiti* (11 Oct 2018) < <https://minujsth.unmissions.org/en/secretary-general-%E2%80%93-message-international-day-girl-child>> accessed 17 September 2024.

- c. **Low level of education of women** which results in low participation of women in politics and for key appointments, as few women are often less qualified for certain positions and offices due to limited educational and professional attainments.
- d. **Nature of political party formation** which often begins with informal unions initiated by male friends and partners, which exclude women at the formation stage, denying them of benefits accruing to foundation membership.
- e. **Inadequacy of willing and educated women in politics** which inevitably reduces the number of qualified and willing women for both appointive and elective positions.
- f. **Meeting schedules for caucus meetings** to strategize and map out political plans either for pre or post- election periods are odd and are often not conducive for 'responsible' and 'family-oriented' women. These schedules are intentional and often an attempt to sideline certain group including women from engaging in political decision-making processes.
- g. **The issue of indigeneship** is a major barrier that militates against active women participation in politics. Women are often torn between sinking ships. Women who are married outside their constituencies of birth are usually regarded as non-indigenes by the people from that constituency, and when such a woman seeks elective position, she is regarded as over-ambitious and may be prevented or discouraged. When she tries to participate politically in her place of birth, she is advised to go to her husband's people.⁵⁶Such is the dilemma of women even in seeking employment or other positions after marriage.
- h. **High cost of election** affects men, but distresses women in more pronounced forms in Nigeria. The high cost of financing political parties and campaigns is a big obstacle to women, as few women can singlehandedly raise finance to purchase forms for elective positions or mobilize and finance campaigns.
- i. **Finance** thus becomes a greater issue. Competing for political positions in Nigerian requires huge financial backup. Most Nigerian women who seek these positions cannot afford the financial obligations, and this is despite waivers given to female aspirants by some political parties. Cultural discrimination against women holding lands is one of the

⁵⁶Arowolo and Aluko (n19).

major reasons that prevent them from getting financing to embark on large scale businesses which would empower them economically.

While patriarchy,⁵⁷ and cultural and religious barriers, are other factors that affect gender participatory justice, political parties need to put in more efforts to address the low representation of women in elective and appointive positions in Nigeria.⁵⁸

Conclusion

Political campaigns and public discourse on gender equality or feminist politics must awaken a consciousness which will in turn influence government policy. Political parties can support women's participation in politics by reducing the amount payable to obtain forms to contest elective officers, reserve quota seats in national and State Houses of Assemblies exclusively for women and fix party meetings at times that will suit their roles as mothers and wives also. This is what true inclusion means. Alignment of political party agendas with gender equality will boost acceptance of female candidates by voters, and gradually quell the influence of patriarchy and political distrust of women to achieve goals, and purge society of the misconstructions on 'feminists' political ideologies which political parties and politicians ought to inculcate in order to support and promote gender equality.

Political parties are in a better position to challenge gender bias and inequality in socio-political landscapes and there is need to begin by celebrating women's political achievements. Nigeria is amongst the countries of the world that are far behind in an attempt to achieve this feat as till date Nigeria is yet to have a female president or governor and any attempt by women's groups to pursue such standard is discouraged from its foundation. Women in Nigeria are conditioned to believing that certain political leaderships are too great to be handled by them. Political parties must remember their roles as pressure groups, and in carrying out the ideologies of their parties distill fragments of human rights protections and gender justice.

Recommendations

It is recommended as follows:

⁵⁷ Omodia and Others (n36) 99.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 102; RI Ako-Nai and BF Obamamoye, 'The Women's Movement for Gender Quotas in Nigeria and Ghana' [2018] (6) *Modern Africa: Politics, History and Society*, 1.

- a. Political party constitutions and manifestos should specifically include provisions to advance women's political participation such as quotas on nominations of women candidates and leadership within political parties and should have clear guidelines on how they seek to achieve gender inclusiveness.
- b. Women's wings of political parties must have goals other than prayers and entertainment. The political party is responsible to provide capacity building for political parties on women's rights and various principles in the constitutions and election laws, provide timely financial support for women contestants during campaigning, proactively reduce nomination fees for women candidates, and field women candidates across the board: presidential, legislature and local government.
- c. Political parties must take conscious steps to expose and train women on electoral processes and procedures, campaigning, media engagements, public speaking, and fundraising.
- d. There should be equality in the sharing of political offices based on quota system between competing candidates. This will enable both men and women have equal chances of control in such public offices. Political parties need to ensure that they not only substantively observe quotas but create an enabling environment for women to overcome the entrenched and informal systems and structures that keep them out of decision-making.
- e. Money politics should be discouraged in Nigeria while women who want to take active part in politics be encouraged to do so without any fear or favour. Alternatively, third party funding can be encouraged by political parties to give women level playing ground.
- f. There should be structures put in place such as the legal funds. These structures will enable women politicians challenge any form of electoral malpractice in Nigeria political terrain at minimal cost.
- g. Political parties should develop and implement actionable and voluntary quotas, affirmative action, and other special temporary measures to drive the process of gender equality, in all structures and at all levels of decision-making.

ARTICLE INFORMATION

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