

THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN INCLUSIVE GOVERNMENT AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted by world leaders in 2015, embody a roadmap for progress that is sustainable and leaves no one behind. Global efforts at addressing some of the most pressing challenges of our time - economic crisis, lack of health care, climate change, violence against women and escalating conflicts; considered women as not only more affected by these problems, but also possess ideas and leadership to solve them. Therefore, no appreciable breakthrough can be recorded in the achievement of sustainable development without recognizing women as significant players at all the realms of life including politics. Women do not only constitute a significant percentage of the population; they have been proved to pursue objectives that enhance the attainment of sustainable progress particularly in the areas of procreation, education, health and economy. The inclusion of women in decision making is considered as an effective way of mobilizing the human resources of any country for national development as evidences have shown among developed democracies in Europe. Discrimination on the basis of sex, undermining women's right and opportunity pose devastating effects on the overall development as evident among most of the third World democracies. In Nigeria, women remain largely marginalized in the mainstream of politics notwithstanding the improvement in the level of women involvement in politics since rebirth of democracy in 1999. Nevertheless, the level of women's involvement in politics and government remain abysmally low and the essences of this paper is to interrogate the linkage between the number of women in government and decisions making institutions in Nigeria and the prospect of attaining Sustainable Development Goals on schedule using a descriptive but analytical method. As an exploratory research it relies on both qualitative and quantitative data drawn from body of existing literature.

Key Words: Women representation, Gender equality, Sustainable development

i. Introduction

This paper argues that the lofty goals of sustainable development in Nigeria as part of the global quest for development will remain a mirage unless women are equitably involved

in politics and government. The contention of this paper is that women as a major component of the Nigerian population with a commanding percentage compare to the male component are critical to the achievement of development goals. That involvement of women in policy making and government activities to guarantee the protection of rights to gender equality and achievement of egalitarian society is a central to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The position taken by this paper on criticality of the role of women in development is germane to the extent that women in Nigeria have demonstrated capacity and competence in knowledge seeking, management and leadership positions among the private sectors and in informal sector of the economy such as commerce and services. The layout of the paper had the section on discussion of findings preceded by an exploration of the nexus between female gender and attainment of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Nigeria, followed by a historical overview of women involvement in Nigerian politics since independence. The paper in the conclusion section contends that women have not been given equitable involvement in government and that this needs to be redressed if Nigeria truly seeks to attain the sustainable development goals at globally set pace and time.

ii. **Women and Sustainable Development Goals**

It is noteworthy that no appreciable development can be made at the local, national or international platforms without recognizing women as major players in the realm of politics. Women's empowerment, capabilities, equal rights, participation and leadership in the economy are critical to achieving sustainable development in any economy, Nigeria inclusive. This is because women are agents of sustainable economic

development. Having realised this, many governments and donor agencies are targeting women for empowerment. Women play prominent role from home, to workplace, to society, as home builders, and job providers respectively. The contribution of women entrepreneurship to income generation and poverty reduction is quite important in developing countries.

Women's empowerment is critical to achieving gender equality on one hand and sustainable development goals on the other hand. An empowered woman has a sense of self-worth, has the capability to define her own choices, has access to resources and a wide array of opportunities she can pursue as well as being able to persuade the direction of social change to fashion a more just economic and social order (Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues - OSAGI, 2001).

In the view of the Expert Group Meeting (EGM) for Commission on the Status of Women (CSW 60), women empowerment goes beyond the idea that women are empowered when their capabilities are enhanced or when they are able to compete with men for jobs. Empowerment implies secure livelihoods, the ability to enjoy their human rights, a reduction in the unpaid work that hinders the enjoyment of rights, and meaningful participation as actors and leaders in their communities' (EGM, 2016).

Sustainable development is a political concept because it is about good governance, which will be hard to achieve until we get closer to gender parity. It is imperative to note that guaranteeing human right, dignity and wellbeing is critical to achieving sustainable development. If women were in more productive and decision-making roles, Nigeria would be moving faster towards economic, social and environmental sustainability. According to report of the World Commission on Environment and Development, also known as Brundtland Commission (1987), sustainable development should "meet the

needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”, which involves integrating the three pillars of sustainability: economic, social and environmental.

It can be deduced; however, from the above that sustainable development means reconciling economic and environmental sustainability and prioritizing social sustainability. It further entails realization of women’s human rights dignity and capabilities now and in the future. Achieving these requires paying adequate attention to the provision of care through the family and/or household, markets, the non-profit sector and the public sector and/ or state, particularly the “private” domain of non-market.

According to Elkington (1999), sustainable development increases economic uplifting, maintains social solidarity and environmental stewardship. The Brundtland Report (1987) offered one of the most acceptable definition of sustainable development as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their own need”. Also, according to World Bank, development is concerned with societal well-being (in terms of access to safe water, rate of poverty, access to health care services, access to sanitation, life expectancy at birth, infant and maternal mortality rate, population estimate, and the process of achieving transformation of the society, adult illiteracy, population estimates, and gross domestic product, (Tchouassi, 2012).

Similarly, Hemmati and Gardiner (2002) perceive that sustainable development hinges on full equal participation of women at all levels. Indeed, gender equity is an essential building block in sustainable development. The World Conference on Human Rights affirmed that the *“human rights of women and of the girl-child are an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of universal human rights”*

(Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action – VDPA, 1993).

In traditional Africa societies, women have been treated unequally and their roles are often downplayed in the wheel of development. It is surprising to note that women are one of the largest disadvantaged groups in Nigeria in particular and Africa in general. Certain socio-cultural belief system impinges on the right of women such as freedom to receive quality education and be integrated into formal economy. For example, some religious or socio-cultural belief still denies women equal access to quality education.

Socio-cultural factors that affect women’s representation in politics are intrinsically associated with stereotypical beliefs about the ability and capacity of women in Nigeria. Another major factor that hinders women’s participation in politics is patriarchal ideology. Violence against women and girl child has become prevalent in recent times. There are reported cases of paedophile against minors. Parents are scared to put their girl child in care of uncles/nephew and other male counterparts. School proprietors/teacher alike is not spared in this regards. Many parents now prefer to enrol their children in vocational training to sending them to school. This development has adverse effect on girl child education on one hand and sustainable development goals on the other hand.

The role of women is of paramount interest to the economy of nations. Therefore, women inclusion in all facets of economic endeavour is fundamental to bring gender inequality to a decline and promoting overall economic growth. The promotion of gender equality has dual rationale vis-à-vis guaranteeing human rights and social justice (equal opportunities, rights and responsibilities), and ensuring that equality between men and women is a pre-condition for sustainable people-centred development (Office of the Special Adviser on Gender

Issues-OSAGI, 2001). The status of women should be considered in a tri-dimensional sustainable development approach because of their relatively poor economic and social status in the society.

The Outcome Document from the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals (United Nation, 2014) stresses the importance of social justice and gender equality and mainstream gender issues in relation to many of the goals (for instance, it recognises women's role as small-scale food producers under Goal 2 ('End hunger')). This is particularly relevant to Goal 4: 'Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote life-long learning opportunities for all'. Within the proposed targets, there is a focus on formal education, with reference to eliminating gender disparities. Goal 5 (Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls) by contrast does not mention formal education but emphasises the 'use of enabling technologies, in particular ICT, to promote women's empowerment'.

The United Nations Millennium Declaration, adopted in 2000, built upon the outcomes of the major summits and world conferences of the 1990s. In the Millennium Declaration, Member States affirmed six fundamental principles essential to international relations, namely freedom, equality, solidarity, tolerance, respect for nature and shared responsibility, and called for action in key areas, including development and poverty eradication, peace and security, and democracy and human rights. Governments also confirmed their resolve to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women as effective ways to combat poverty, hunger and disease and to promote sustainable development (UN General Assembly resolution 55/2 of 2000). The notion that no matter the level of education woman is able to receive, she will end up in the kitchen is prevalent in some parts of Nigeria. Equally, in traditional Africa

societies, women are not allowed to own property and take decisions regarding economic activities. These and other widespread socio-cultural belief significantly reduced women's role in sustainable development. Married women are only responsible to raise children and take care of house chores. Though, this trend has changed drastically with the advent of globalisation. Several cooperative societies have sprung up given loans to women to start their petty business thereby improving the country's gross domestic product (GDP). Educating women is a foremost factor that brings about gender equality and women uplifting for sustainable development.

Discrimination on the basis of sex, undermining women's right and opportunity has devastating impact on the economy and it is prohibited by international human organisations. For example, Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) stipulates that all countries and stakeholders should take appropriate measures to ensure the full development and advancement of women (CEDAW, 2012).

It is worth noting that women's education is critical to sustainable development in Nigeria. Concerted effort has to be intensified by all and sundry to eliminate the menace of child labour, child trafficking early marriage/forced marriage, paedophiles and the likes. Adequate attention ought to be paid to girl education, girl freedom to choose career pathway and right to choice of suitor. This would help reduce the poverty and unemployment among womenfolk. This above view is corroborated by UNESCO's International Research and Training Centre for Rural Education (*UNESCO-INRULED*, 2012, p.23) which underscores the importance of education, training and support which centred around the three fundamental criteria of sustainable development: i) claiming a stake for the marginalized in development; ii)

responding to the feminisation of poverty; and iii) ensuring that sustainable production and consumption involves everyone, not just the poor.

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, adopted in 1995, set international agenda for women's human rights, gender equality and women empowerment. The Declaration provides that "the advancement of women and the achievement of equality between women and men are a matter of human rights and a condition for social justice and ... are the only way to build a sustainable, just and developed society". According to Sharma (2016), women education is the need of the hour that guarantees empowerment, improves economic position, gives income through employment prospects, and improves self-confidence, among others.

The synergy between gender equality and sustainable development is vital for three reasons. First, gender equality and sustainable development has moral and ethical implications. For instance, it guarantees human rights and dignity of womenfolk which is an important parameter of ensuring a just and sustainable world.

Second, gender and sustainable development is designed to address the impact of social economic and environmental shocks on womenfolk. This is because unequal access to resources limits women's human rights and undermines their responsibility for sustaining their families. Third, gender and sustainable development is vital to women's empowerment and economic viability

It is evident that there is a linkage between gender equality, economic, social and environmental sustainability. For instance, when women are allowed to participate in decision making, resources are more likely to be allocated towards investments in human development priorities, including child health, nutrition and access to employment (Chattopadhyay and Duflo, 2004). Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

(FAO) has described women's access to and control over agricultural resources as crucial for achieving food security and sustainable livelihoods (FAO report, 2011). The reason is not farfetched, quite a number of women in Nigeria engage in informal sector of the economy such as farming, sales and distribution of agricultural produce and the money realised is often used to support socio-economic development of the family and society at large.

According to African Gender Institute, women are more active as economic agents in Africa than anywhere across the world, performing significant proportion of agricultural activities, having ownership of one-third of firms and constituting about 70% of employees in some countries as well as playing central household economic roles and seeing to the welfare of their families. Women own up to 62% of businesses in Cote d'Ivoire even though they are micro-enterprises with low value added potentials of marginal returns, (AGI report, 2015). Women's knowledge and skills are considered important for ensuring economically, socially and environmentally sustainable pathways to manage local landscapes; produce and access food; and secure sustainable water, sanitation and energy services (Seguino, 2000; Kabeer and Natali, 2013). Certain aspects of gender equality, such as female education and women's share of employment, can have a positive impact on economic growth.

The three pillars of sustainable development — economic, environment and social — are relevant to discussions of gender equality. These dimensions have equal and interrelated importance. Globally, women usually bear some of the responsibility of raising children and households. As a result, they lack mobility which affects their career. Sometimes, they leave labour force to bear children at the same time when men are climbing to the top. They then return at an older age and often peak later than men

owing to greater family responsibilities. In light of the above, women have a different career trajectory than men and also need to work flexible hours and schedules to accommodate the heavy demands on their time. One of the greatest challenges facing women is inadequate childcare, particularly in Africa where there is no flexibility in work hour. It is important to stress that helping women achieve more work/life balance is central to sustainable development because women in labour force are economically independent compared full time house wife.

The socio-cultural belief system in most part of Nigeria affects women's role in ensuring sustainable development. There is a widespread socio-cultural belief that women should not directly participate in economic activities. Though, this trend is fast declining due to widespread public campaign and harsh economic situation women find themselves in recent times. Studies by McKinsey (2012) found that organisations with more women in leadership positions tend to have better performance and higher profits.

Electoral instigated violence is another factor that hinders women active involvement in Nigeria's politics. In Nigeria, women more often than not are potential targets of political thugs. Male candidates are more likely than female candidates to introduce political violence and hooliganism in their campaigns. The World Bank Survey (2001) identifies three requirements for appraising whether policies, programmes and actions implemented in the name of sustainability are likely to achieve gender equality and women's rights, particularly the rights of vulnerable groups. The first requirement has to do with women's capabilities and human rights, particularly the rights of the poorest and vulnerable groups. As a result, policies and programmes aimed at sustainable development should be appraised against compliance with human rights standards and capabilities of womenfolk. Development effort is not sustainable if it

limits women's capabilities and enjoyment of human rights. For instance, family planning programme that limits women's reproductive choices or make them prone to health risks through inappropriate contraceptive methods negate the idea of sustainability proposed.

The second requirement is on the impact of unpaid care work of women and girls, particularly vulnerable women. If policies and programmes that are intended to enhance environmental sustainability increase women's unpaid care work, then they are not on a sustainable development pathway. For instance, strict regulation of forest use that undermines local livelihoods and intensifies women's unpaid care work is unsustainable.

The third criterion has to do with full participation of women in sustainable development effort, as actors, leaders and decision-makers in the processes that shape their lives as well as the future of their households, region, nations and the world. For example, in the sphere of food security, policy efforts aimed at national and local food sufficiency and low-chemical and environmentally sustainable agriculture, which are desirable objectives from the perspective of ecological sustainability, need to consult smallholder farmers, particularly women, about their priorities and constraints.

Addressing violence against girl children is important for sustainable development. Researchers have written extensively on women's underrepresentation in politics since the middle of the last century (Duverger, 1955; Kirkpatrick, 1974; Epstein and Coser, 1981; Lovenduski and Hills, 1981). It is evident that in Sweden, Rwanda and Argentina, women representation in politics has improved considerably in the last two decades while in other countries, women either continue to lack the right to vote as it is in Saudi Arabia or are entirely represented by male legislators as the practices in Kyrgyzstan, Micronesia, St. Kitts, Solomon Islands and United Arab Emirates (Waylen, 1996).

Research has found that women make difference in politics. For instance, a study conducted by Thomas (1991) maintained that women are more likely than men to prioritize policies and programme related to children, family, and women. Similarly, in the study of Sweden by Wangnerud (2000) and that of Latin America by Schwindt-Bayer (2006) it was found that female legislators prefer different legislative priorities than male counterparts. Furthermore, Bratton and Haynie (1999) demonstrated that women are more likely than men to introduce policies to reduce gender discrimination and to sponsor bills related to education, health care, children's issues, and welfare policy. In the analysis of Honduran legislature Taylor-Robinson and Heath (2003), women are more likely to introduce policies on women's rights but are not more likely than men to initiate bills on children or families. Differences in performance of male and female could be partly explained by the number of successful bills passed. For example, research found a pattern of male domination in the committee meetings where bills are first discussed and debated (Kathlene et al, 1991:569). It also affirms that women sponsored bills receive more scrutiny, debate, and hostile testimony than male-sponsored bills (Kathlene et al. 1991).

Devlin and Elgie (2008) argued that there is a direct relationship between improved presence of women in parliament and the representation of issues affecting women (Carroll, 1994), that policies concerning women are more likely to have wider direct impact on the population than those of men in a country.

However, Fox and Lawless (2005) opined that family responsibilities and 'the challenge of reconciling career and a family affairs reduces women's zeal to contest political offices. Generally, women have limited time at their disposal to cross the boundary of their private lives into the public sphere. Crossing the

boundary of the private sphere into the public sphere is more difficult in developing countries, where childcare facilities are not readily available.

According to Sirleaf (2010), low level of women representation in politics is not limited to Africa; it is global, with the Nordic countries being among the notable exceptions. She further said that there are six African countries namely: Burundi, Mozambique, Rwanda, South Africa, Tanzania and Uganda that have been able to achieve 30 percent or higher women representation in their national parliaments. Almasry (2012) contended that Rwanda and Andorra are the only countries that have achieved a gender balance in parliament. According to Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) report (2012), the percentage of women in Rwandan parliament is 56.3% while Andorra is 50% and they are the highest rank in World women representation in parliament. Conversely, there are seven countries in the world: Belize, Micronesia, Nauru, Palau, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the Solomon Island that do not have women parliamentarians. Studies on the United States and Netherlands affirmed that married women participate less in politics than single women (Bolzendahl and Coffe, 2010); giving that after marriage, women's leisure time reduces and they tend to increase the amount of time spent on housework (Sayer, 2005).

For India, one of the most democratically advanced countries in the world, only 11 percent of the parliamentarians in the lower house are women with 10.1 percent in the upper house thus India ranks 106th in the world representation of women in parliament, (IPU report, 2014). In Nigeria, it can be recalled women played an important role during the administration of President Olusegun Obasanjo. Women, although quiet few of them were entrusted with key government positions including renowned academic and professionals such as then Minister of Finance, Prof. Ngozi Okonjo-

Iweala, who lobbied Western nations and creditor organizations on debt relief for Nigeria at the time. Others were Prof. Dora Akunyili, Director General of National Drug Law Administration and Control (NAFDAC) and Prof Oby Ezekwusili, erstwhile Minister of Education during that dispensation. The remarkable performances of these women and few others earned Nigeria a reputation of country with growing relevance of women in government and politics. Similarly, the administration of Earl Johnson-Sirleaf in Liberia has been acknowledged for being able to stabilise Liberian society which was hitherto ravaged by violent conflicts for several decades; a feat that earned her the prestigious global award of the Noble peace prize. However, it is a regrettable fact that women in political limelight remain very countable in the third world till present.

iii. Historical Overview of Women Representation in Nigerian Politics

Women participation in politics include suffrage i.e. right to vote, opportunities to contest elections or be appointed into political offices as well as mounting political influence or lobbying for political patronage either as members of political parties or as citizens.

In the United States, women received the vote nationally in 1920, but women's voter turnout did not equal men's until the 1980s (Andersen, 1996 and Burrell, 2004). But recent report by Centre for American Women and Politics (CAWP) held that women are more likely to vote than men in the United States, Barbados and Sweden (CAWP, 2006) while women are less likely to vote in Romania and India (Pintor and Gratschew, 2002).

In Africa, the beliefs that women do not have the wherewithal and capability to participate in politics or that woman belongs in the private sphere have been established in African political thought (Okin, 1979; Coole, 1988; Pateman 1989). Of many countries in

the World in which women are or were presidents or equivalent, only Liberia's Helen Johnson-Sirleaf and Malawi's Joyce Banda are Africans; but other developing countries - Bangladesh, Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago – currently have women as commanders-in-chief. Apart from Malawi's Banda, who succeeded her predecessor and a few other appointed ones, all other female world leaders were democratically elected.

Historically, there has been a prejudice against women's role in politics because people tend to assume that leadership is a masculine trait and when women do lead they face a problem -people evaluate autocratic behaviour by women more negatively than the same behaviour by men (Eagly et al. 1992). It is instructive to note that Goldie Mier, was the first woman elected as Israeli Prime Minister in 1969 and the third woman to hold such position in the World, Britain's Margaret Thatcher and Pakistan's Benazir Bhutto, stepped up to their men.

Nigerian women played a key role in politics during the pre-colonial era. Some of them participated in politics and government through the institution of women chiefs, the authority of first born daughters and the age grades. It is evident that in the Hausa society, women held high political offices. A particular case in point was Queen Amina of Zaria who succeeded her father's throne and ruled for thirty-four years. Among the Yoruba ethnic groups, women held titles like the *lyalagbo*, *lyalode*, *lya kere* and contributed to the smooth functioning of the political machinery. More importantly, they were responsible for the spiritual wellbeing of the Oba in Yorubaland, being in charge of market places, taking custody of the palace treasures respectively.

Colonialism and advent of colonial state administration prompted the estrangement of women from public administration while enthroning male domination. Lugard's system of indirect rule had no place for women in any

part of Nigeria and such prohibition, discrimination and deprivation against women's rights were at the heart of the first violent riots by women that took place in Aba in 1929. It was only in the 1950s that women in the Southern Nigeria were given minor political recognition through the appointments of Chief (Mrs) Olufunmilayo Ransome-Kuti to the Western House of Chiefs and the duo of Chiefs (Mrs) Margret Ekpo and Janet Mokelu into the Eastern House of Chiefs (Kolawole et al, 2013). Post-colonial period in Nigeria did not show any preference for women involvement in politics. During the first republic (1960-1979), women were not feasible, except for the election of first and only female member of the federal house of representatives in 1960 in person of Mrs Wuraola Esan and subsequent elections into the Eastern House of Assembly of Mrs Margret Ekpo in 1961 as well as Mrs Janet Mokelu and Miss Ekpo A. Young in 1966 respectively (Oloyede, 2016). In the second republic (1979 – 1983), none of the major political parties – Unity Party of Nigeria, National Party of Nigeria, Nigerian Peoples Party, Great Nigerian Peoples Party, National Advancement Party and Peoples Redemption Party, reflected gender affirmative action in their internal politics and in prosecuting the general elections, only a few number of women contested and won elections into the national and states assemblies with only two women appointed as federal ministers, Chief (Mrs) Janet Akinrinade for Internal Affairs and Mrs Adenike Ebun Oyagbola for National Planning. In 1983, Ms Franca Afegbua became the only female member to be elected into Senate, (Oloyede, 2016). The aborted third republic (1989 – 1993) was no different from the eras before it. The transition programme of Babangida military administration that kicked off with local government elections across the country in 1990 produced a number of women as councillors in some states with only one

female candidate elected as local government chairperson from one of the western states. Following the conduct of governorship elections in 1992 two female deputy governors emerged - Alhaja Sinatu Ojikutu for Lagos State and Mrs Cecilia Ekponyong for Cross River State. In the national assembly elections, only Mrs Kofo Bucknor-Akerele from Lagos was the female elected member into Senate while just a few women got elected into the House of Representatives among who was Chief (Mrs) Florence Ita Giwa from Calabar federal constituency (Oloyede, 2016)

However, attainment of another era of democratic dispensation in 1999 marked a difference in women involvement in politics in Nigeria. For instance, the National Centre for Women Development (2010) reported that proportion of seats held by women in the National parliament increased from 3.1 per cent in 2000 to 7.5 per cent in 2008. While there were 9 female senators in 2008 compared to 4 in 2003. Also, there were 26 female members in the House of Representatives compared to 23 in 2003. Between 2006 and 2009, two women were appointed to the Supreme Court bench for the first time, while female Deputy Governors increased from 2 in 2003 to 6 in 2007. Despite these improvements, women are still under-represented at different levels of government in the fourth republic. Data from the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) on the April 2007 elections show the high levels of female marginalization in Nigerian politics. For example, of the 7,160 candidates that contested in the April 2007 elections, only 628 were women; 25 candidates vied for the office of the President and only 1 was a woman, while 5 women contested for the office of the Vice President. Also, only 9 of the 109 Senators were women, while 25 of the 360 House of Representative members were women and there were only

54 female members of the State Assemblies across the country.

Women representation in politics in Nigeria has improved considerably since rebirth of democracy in 1999. Successful administrations are increasingly integrating women into political processes so as to enable them have sense of belonging in the scheme of things. This upward trend could be as a result of pressure emanating from women advocating gender equality in politics, or the realization based on global trend that women would make a significance difference if saddled with responsibility either as an elected political office holders or political appointees. Ibeanu (2009: 2) identified four major socio-economic and cultural changes that have potentially transformed women's political representation in Nigeria. The first is the growing "voice" and rising profile of women in the economy, community work and various spheres of professional and public engagements. The second is the gradual but steady withering of cultural restrictions on the perception of women in public affairs since the last three decades. The third is the rapid expansion in the work of activist women organizations supporting increased participation of women in politics and a resultant rise in the number of women joining politics and standing for elections. While the fourth is the increasing tendency of women to

take up economic roles in the family previously reserved for men and to question the myth of the "male-as-breadwinner" in many middle and low income families.

Despite drastic change in the level of women's role in politics in the fourth in Nigeria, no woman has been elected as President or state governor in Nigeria, although there we an instance during 2015 governorship election of a woman emerging the governorship candidate in person of Hajia Aisha Alhassan of the All Progressives Congress (APC) in Taraba State but lost out to a male candidate of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), Governor Darius Ishaku. However, it was almost becoming a political philosophy among the western states of Oyo, Osun, Ogun, Ondo, Ekiti and Lagos to field women as deputy governors. For instance, since 1999, Lagos State has only had a male deputy governor in person of Mr Femi Pedro with the rest being female.

With no history of female president or state governor, women representation in the key elective positions is at abysmal level in Nigeria with the only possible level of measuring women representation in elective positions being through legislative assemblies. Over the periods of five legislative elections in Nigeria- 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011 and 2015 the record of women's political representation has been somewhat mixed.

Table 1: Nigeria's place in World ranking of women in parliament

Elections	House of Representatives			Senate			
Year	Seats	Women	%	Seats	Women	%	World Ranking
1999	360	20	5.6	109	7	6.5	181 st
2003	360	24	6.8	109	7	6.4	125 th
2007	360	25	7.0	109	9	8.3	117 th
2011	360	17	4.9	109	3	2.8	107 th
2015	360	12	3.4	109	3	2.8	104 th

Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union, "Women in National Parliaments" (2018)

As table 1 illustrates, Nigeria achieved the highest percentage (7.0 percent) of women's representation in the lower parliament (the

House of Representatives) in 2007 after the dismal record of 3.4 percent and 4.9 percent in 1999 and 2003, respectively. However, the

figures declined to 6.8 percent and 5.6 percent in 2011 and 2015. It should be noted however, that following the conclusion of a number of election petition cases by 2017, the figure went up to 6% (22 in the House of Representatives and 7 in the Senate), (Orji et al, 2018). Nigeria reached a crescendo of woman representation in the national assembly in 2007 producing highest number of female members in both legislative chambers in all the national assembly elections so far held in fourth republic. Regrettably, there has been a steady decline since then. The obvious implication of the World ranking is that Nigeria is among the least countries witnessing women in parliamentary and women representation in government. Among about 150 countries practicing different forms of representative democracy, Nigeria had only come to 104th position in 2015, an evidence of abysmal level of women involvement in politics and slow pace of commitment to the

realization of sustainable development goals (SDGs).

The problem of women's political underrepresentation in Nigeria is seen, strictly, as a question of women's lack of resources; discussion of barriers to women's participation in politics focus largely on issues that diminish women's political resources and undermine their capacity to engage in politics. These issues include traditional values and norms, community expectations, conservative family upbringing, lack of good education, lack of work or professional experience, structural and physical violence against women, and discriminatory roles assigned to women in the political parties (Orji et al, 2018). These issues are contextual and present at differing intensities across the regions and culture in Nigeria. The factors impairing women representation are more germane or prevalent in the North than the South. For instance, women's political representation in the South has always exceeded the North.

Table 2: No of elected women during 2011 General Elections across the Six Geo-political Zones

2011	Governor	Senate	House of Representatives	State House of Assembly	Total	%
North Central	0	1	2	15	18	18.1
North East	0	1	4	4	9	9.0
North West	0	1	1	2	4	4.0
South East	0	2	6	21	29	29.2
South South	0	1	4	12	17	17.1
South West	0	1	8	15	24	24.2
Total	0	7	25	69	101	

Source: National Bureau of Statistics (2015)

Table 2 shows women representation after 2011 elections on the basis of geo-political zones in Nigeria – North Central (Kwara, Kogi, Niger, Nasarawa, Benue, and Plateau states), North East (Adamawa, Yobe, Borno, Bauchi, Gombe and Taraba states), North West (Kano, Katsina, Kaduna, Sokoto, Zamfara, Jigawa and Kebbi states), South East (Abia, Anambra, Enugu, Imo and Ebonyi states), South South (Rivers, Cross-Rivers, Akwa Ibom, Delta,

Bayelsa and Delta states) and South West (Lagos, Ogun, Oyo, Osun, Ondo and Ekiti states). Each of the geo-political produced 1 female elected member into Senate except South East with 2 female; while elections into the house of representatives recorded 2 female from the North Central, 4 from North East, only one from the North west, 6 from South East, 4 from South South and the highest in the category was produced by the

South West with 8 female. The houses of assembly elections across the 36 states produced 15 female for the North East, 4 for North West and poorest number of 2 female for the North West; the South East produced the highest in this category 21 female, while South South had 12 and South West 15 female elected members of houses of assembly respectively.

Comparatively, South Eastern region has produced more women representatives through elections than any other region and North Western region has been consistently least supportive of women participation and election into political offices in Nigeria. President Muhammadu Buhari lends credence to this statistical fact about the bias against women's political representation in the North with his consistent stance on the role of women as kitchen attendants having come from Katsina State in the North West region himself. President Muhammadu Buhari has responded to the BBC interview over his wife, Aisha, questioning his leadership, while on state visit to Germany, during a joint press briefing with German Chancellor Angela Merkel as "I don't know which party my wife belongs to, but she belongs to my kitchen and my living room and the other room." (Punch Newspaper, Oct 14 2016).

Oloyede (2016) has articulated the challenges facing women participation in politics and which can be held responsible for their political underrepresentation as follows:

1. Patriarchy- it refers to a society ruled and dominated by men over women, which in turn has given rise to women being looked upon as mere household wives and non-partisans in decision making process in households not to talk of coming out to vie for political positions.
2. Stigmatization - following the way politics in Nigeria is played, it is being perceived that it is for individuals that have no regards for human right and are quick at

compromising their virtue for indecent gains. Therefore, women aspirants who ventured into politics are looked upon as shameless and promiscuous.

3. Low level of education - The low participation of women in education is also part of the shortcomings. The National Adult Literacy Survey, 2010 published by National Bureau of Statistics revealed that the adult literacy rate in English in Nigeria is 50.6 per cent while literacy in any other language is 63.7 per cent (female adult age 15 and above). This explains why most women are least qualified for political offices due to low educational attainment. This is also an effect of colonialism, where men were more favoured than women.
4. Meeting Schedules - The time scheduled for caucus meetings to strategize and map out political plans either for the pre or post-election periods are odd and is not conducive for responsible and family women. The slated time are often time which women are expected to take care of their children and family. This method of schedules is viewed as an attempt to sidelining women from engaging in political process.
5. Financing - Competing for political positions in Nigeria requires huge financial backup. Most Nigerian women who seek these positions could not afford meeting the financial obligations therein, despite the wavers giving to women aspirants by some of the political parties. And so, they could do little or nothing to outweigh their male counterparts. Furthermore, giving that elections have become an all expensive expedition and the competitions for office so deep that membership dues have become negligible components of party finance (Akande and Ajisebiyawo, 2016); the kind of funds political parties require to maintain a network of party structures and prosecute

elections, female candidates cannot measure up to their male counterpart.

6. Political Violence - Nigerian elections have always been characterized by one form of violence or another since the return of democracy. Female aspirants of various political parties cannot withstand political violence; therefore, women participation in politics is drastically reduced.
7. Religious and Cultural barriers - Both Christianity and Islam do not accord women much role in public life, and same is obtainable in most cultural values, where women are seen culturally as quite submissive and image of virtue. However, they are not to be seen in public domain. And so it is a challenge to women participation in politics, more so, women found in the corridor of politics are not often religious in practice.

These and other cultural, socio, economic and ideological biases against the womenfolk has continue to undermine their rights to and capacity for political participation which poses severe hindrance for the achievement of development on sustainable basis giving the strategic position of women in procreation, education of children, family economy and social networking.

iv. Theoretical discourse

This paper viewed women inclusion in politics as mean of achieving sustainable development from various theoretical perspectives which include modernization, politics of presence and critical mass theories.

Modernization approach is premised on the assumption that as level of income increase, women get economic resources, it brings about improved egalitarian sex role and cultural values change, leading to increasing level of women representation in political life (Inglehart 1990, 1997) and implicitly fits with the classic linear understanding of citizenship rights (Marshall, 1950). Scholars agreed that

women face pervasive oppression in terms of exclusion from leadership roles, resources to mobilize, private patriarchy and male control over female political spaces (Beck 2003; Geisler 1995, 2004; McEwan 2000, 2003). All of these factors are likely to block women's participation in political life.

Theory of politics of presence is premised on the assumption that female politicians are best equipped to represent the interests of women. In other words, (Phillips, 1995:85, Akande, 2017) argued that variation between women and men in their everyday lives, such as education and occupation, child-rearing, divisions of paid and unpaid labour, exposure to violence and sexual harassment, restrain women from participating actively in politics. He used the expression a "shot in the dark" to refer to specific role of female politicians to influence politics in any specific ways. She said that rigidity in political institutions and parliaments are some of the challenges women have to contend with in politics.

Lastly, critical mass theory has gained wide popularity among politicians, the media and international organisations as a justification for measures to bring more women into political office (Krook, 2005). The theory argues that there is a working relationship between the numbers of women elected and the passage of legislation beneficial to women as a group. Crowley (2004) argues that women make a difference – and, indeed, perhaps a greater difference – when they form a very small minority. While corroborating above view, Carroll (2001) contends that increase in the proportion of women elected actually decreases the possibility that female legislators will act on behalf of women as a group. However, disagreements regarding the stance of the critical mass theory made some scholars to lose confidence in 'critical mass theory', leading many to question its continued utility and relevance in research on the substantive

representation of women (Childs, 2004; Sawer *et al.*, 2006).

v. **Conclusion**

The paper concludes that women play a critical role in bringing about sustainable development if given a level playing ground in Nigeria. There still exist wide gap in gender equality in terms of political representation and there are no serious efforts at addressing the shortcoming, at least not at the moment. The vision of achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by the global target year of 2030 remains elusive for Nigeria, giving the continue disorientation towards women's inclusion in the pursuit of development agenda by allowing for more women participation in elections including into the executive arms of government and appointment of more of them in key positions across critical sectors of the economy as well as mobilization of women across social strata to drive the goals of sustainable development in Nigeria.

The leadership at all levels must show commitment towards ensuing gender equality and dignity, protection of women's rights, capacity building programmes for women and policies promoting wellbeing of girl children. Given the abysmal performance of women in

electoral politics since 1999, it is daring to address the factors that continue to militate against women participation including socio-cultural belief, economic inequality and increased family obligations. Government policies and programmes should be focused on increasing income-generating initiatives based on women's traditional roles in the home, health services, nutrition, and agriculture. Policymakers should avoid making broad and stereotypical assumptions about women's and men's relationships with the environment. Instead, policies and programmes must respond to the specific social context and gender power relations.

Efforts to address women's political underrepresentation in Nigeria should typically focus on expanding women's political resources by, among other things, educating women, mentoring them, expanding their networks, and providing them with financial assistance. As experience has shown, these efforts have produced marginal results and incremental change in other societies, (Orji *et al.*, 2018). Nigeria's low profile of women representation especially in the executive arm of government as critical hub of decision making in government threatens her chances of achieving sustainable development goals in 2030 and even beyond.

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