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PATRIARCHAL DEMOCRACY: INTERROGATING THE POLITICS OF WOMEN EXCLUSIONISM AND THE QUEST FOR DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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Abstract
This paper interrogates the issue of gender-based political representation in Nigeria and its implications on the country's efforts toward achieving socio-economic development. It adopts descriptive-historical-content analysis and patriarchal theory as the framework of analysis. It argues that the trend of men-dominated politics in Nigeria still lingers despite the professed commitment of successive regimes to implementing policies that are designed to improve women representation in politics. It submits that the domination of the political space by the men-folk is rooted in the patriarchal cultural belief system. The socialization in most Nigerian societies portrays governance as an exclusive arena of men. The implication of this is that most Nigerian women have accepted this culturally assigned role as given. They have internalized the social division of roles and accepted it as common sense such that women who are politically active are seen as deviants. However, for Nigeria to fulfill her ambition of attaining appreciable level of development, it is imperative that women are given fair access to key political decision-making institutions. To crack the seemingly hard shell of patriachalism, efforts toward dismantling socio-cultural obstacles and prejudices that put girls and women in a position of subservience must be intensified. The civil society organizations (CSOs) working to ensure gender equity in political representation need to prioritize changing the mindset of the people. This is necessary as the principle of equality and non-discrimination on the basis of gender constitute a cardinal element of democracy.
Keywords: Politics, Exclusionism, Development, Democracy, Patriarchalism, Representation

Introduction

> Where the issue of women and gender is concerned, Nigeria presents a paradox. The country has many well-educated and accomplished women… Nigeria has a long history of female activism, starting in the late eighteenth century and continuing through the nineteenth, twentieth, and early twenty-first centuries… Over half of the estimated 32 million formal and informal small and medium enterprises in the country are owned by women, and women make up more than 60 percent of the agricultural labor force. Yet despite years of investment in human development…, Nigeria also has some of the most dismal statistics when it comes to women (Okonjo-Iweala, 2018, pp. 107-108).

The above quotation says it all as regards the politics of women exclusion in the decision-making public institutions in Nigeria. In spite of the various efforts geared toward increasing women representation in both elective and appointive posts in the country, the culture of patriarchalism still dominates the political space, thereby deepening gender inequalities. At the end of 2019 general elections, Nigeria ranked 181st out of 188 countries in terms of female

representation in parliament (IPU, 2019), with only 18 female lawmakers (7 Senators and 11 House of Representative members). This is despite the fact that 235 and 533 women contested for seats in the Senate and House of Representatives respectively (*Premium Times*, 2019). Women do not also have better representation in executive positions both elective and appointive. However, given the centrality of the principle of equality to democracy, the level of women participation in the political process has become a subject of major concern to protagonists of democracy. Hence, to the advocates of parity democracy, once the principles of democracy have been accepted, equality of representation is extended to all groups in the polity (Ruiz and Rubio-Marin, 2008). Contrary to this democratic ethos, the reality in Nigeria is that of male-dominated political representation. Though, women do not often vote in lower numbers than men, but great differences exist at the levels of political representation between both sexes in Nigeria.

This is worrisome, most especially given the fact that Nigeria has a policy environment that intends to support equity in gender representation in political offices. Sections 17 and 42 of the 1999 Constitution (as amended) prohibit any form of discrimination against women. Nigeria is a signatory to series of international conventions on gender equality and women empowerment such as the United Nations' Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the West African Charter on the People's Human Rights. It is also in an attempt to boost women inclusion in decision making that the National Gender Policy was adopted in 2006. The National Gender Policy specifically intended to promote Affirmative Action that would bring about the actualization of 30 percent representation of women in legislative and executive arms of government (PLAC, 2018). In addition to the various institutional measures introduced by government, several Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) with the support from some development partners have developed programmes aimed at educating, mentoring, mobilizing and encouraging women to demand for greater inclusion in decision making posts. It is pathetic that despite these efforts, the percentage of women in elective and appointive public offices remains abysmally low.

It is however ironic that Nigeria is striving to attain an acceptable global level of development and strengthened democracy amidst the pervasive politics of women exclusionism. Development, as an "advancement of human capital, economic and social upliftments" (Saliu, 2010, p. 7), is however easily achieved in a social setting where women are actively engaged in decision making. The basic principle of the equality of persons and the consequential need for equal enjoyment of certain basic rights also make parity in political representation a prerequisite for internalizing democracy. Given this scenario, this paper represents another contribution towards the quest for improved women representation political institutions in Nigeria. It interrogates the dominance of the men-folk in political representation in the country with the ultimate aim of showcasing its implications on the country's efforts towards attaining the deserving level of socio-economic development and consolidating democracy. Predominantly, the paper relies on information sourced from extant literature and limits analysis to the period between 1999 and 2019.

Theoretical Discourse

The imperative of citizen participation in political processes has well been established in literatures. In recent years, the level of women inclusion in Nigeria's political processes has become a subject of major concern to protagonists of democracy. This is not unconnected to the realization that the amount of political power any group has, in a polity, hinges directly on the degree of that group's participation in the political process of that polity. Politics is concerned with the competition for the control of public policy-making process within the

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organized framework of government. In a democratic political system, that control is achieved by persons and groups, through a process of participation which eventually leads to occupation of various positions at the pinnacle of power (Okwuosa, 1992). As such, in the modern democratic system, there can be no political power without political participation. Participation in politics here means taking part in political decision making-process as elected or appointed public officers. Given that politics, in its broadest sense, consists of all enduring interactions and disposition which are directly or indirectly aimed at achieving binding decisions as to who gets (or does not get) desired material and non-material resources, women are seen as a political group engaged in the struggle to share political power, vis-à-vis their men counterparts in Nigeria.

The quest for greater and meaningful involvement of women in political decision-making process is legitimated by the basic democratic principle of equality of persons and the consequential equal enjoyment of basic rights by both sexes. This is more so as the urge to 'be involved' in social activities is inherent in human nature. Fundamental to every human being is the inherent tendency to participate in organized formal and informal activities that are oftentimes political in nature. The principle of equality and universal suffrage, as cardinal ethos of democracy is intended to embrace the entire population of men and women within the concept of 'democratic state'. However, the most discernible observation in Nigeria, since independence in 1960, is that women have not been visibly included in key decision-making institutions. It is important to stress that Nigerian women are participating in politics. They participate as party supporters and voters; they attend political rallies in large number and listen and contribute to political discussion on mass media. However, they are susceptible to all manner of political gimmicks from politicians. For instance, during the 2019 electioneering process, women were visible in political rallies and constituted the bulk of voters in many states. In spite of their active participation in the electoral process, Nigerian women are lagging behind in terms of leadership of politically significant institutions at both state and national levels. Though they enjoy *de jure* equality of political right with men (as the 1999 Constitution guarantees freedom of political association and participation for all, and the electoral law is based on universal franchise), there is de facto men dominance at the gladiatorial levels of political representation and, consequently women invisibility in the top echelon of power.

Nigeria, as a 'democratic state' thus remained a patriarchal state. The prevailing male-dominated social order as a foundational myth of most societies in Nigeria still persists. Patriarchal conceptualization of society is that of female subjectivity to male. Men are seen as independent beings while women are seen as dependants of men and subjugated by men (Ruiz and Rubio-Marin, 2008). This culture is rooted in the Classical and the Enlightenment eras. It predominated in the Aristotelian republican tradition; a tradition that sees not society, but, rather, the realm of politics, as the environment par excellence for human freedom, sanctioning the distinction between men and women, and condemning women to dependent status in the polity. Jean-Jacques Rousseau also opines that, men "are naturally free, whereas women are made to please (men) and to be subjugated by them". To Rousseau, nature has made man strong and active while woman is made weak and passive. As woman needs to depend on man, liberty contradicts her nature. As such, he believes that "only men are capable of reason, of searching for abstract truths, principles and axioms. Women, on the other hand, lack theoretical intelligence and strength for independent actions" (Quoted in Ruiz and Rubio-Marin, 2008, p. 307).

Patriarchialism, thus, holds that public arena is the exclusive territory of men; women are born to remain far away from the public sphere and to put their virtues at the domestic realm. In a society where patriarchal values predominate like Nigeria; women are perceived as

inferior to men. Consequently, the power relations these ideas and beliefs create give men more opportunities and more concessions over and above women in the society. As efforts are being made towards unraveling the keys to development and internalizing democracy in Nigeria, this patriarchal articulation of the meaning of political process needs to be interrogated.

Gendered Dimensions of Representative Democracy in Nigeria: 1999 – 2019

Given years of military autocracy and its attendant poor record of citizen involvement in decision making process, the 're-democratization' of Nigerian political system in May 1999 presented a prospect of evolving a women-inclusive politics. Women activists therefore welcomed the Fourth Republic with optimism and enthusiasm and hoped to play active role alongside their male counterparts in shaping the destiny of Nigeria. The experience, after more than 20 years of democratic experiment, however, shows that there are still high-leveled disparities between the involvement of men and women in decision making. In both elective and appointive leadership positions, women are still being underrepresented as shown in Tables 1, 2, and 3 below.

Table 1: Women Representation in Selective Elective Posts (1999 - 2019)

Posts	Total Seats	1999 -2003		2003 – 2007		2007 – 2011		2011 – 2015		2015 – 2019		2019 -	
		M (%)	F (%)	M (%)	F (%)	M (%)	F (%)	M (%)	F (%)	M (%)	F (%)	M (%)	F (%)
President	1	1 *(100)*	0 (0)	1 *(100)*	0 (0)	1 *(100)*	0 (0)	1 *(100)*	0 (0)	1 *(100)*	0 (0)	1 *(100)*	0 (0)
Vice President	1	1 *(100)*	0 (0)	1 *(100)*	0 (0)	1 *(100)*	0 (0)	1 *(100)*	0 (0)	1 *(100)*	0 (0)	1 *(100)*	0 (0)
Governor	36	36 *(100)*	0 (0)	36 *(100)*	0 (0)	36 *(100)*	0 (0)	36 *(100)*	0 (0)	36 *(100)*	0 (0)	36 *(100)*	0 (0)
Deputy Governor	36	35 *(97.2)*	1 *(2.8)*	34 *(94.4)*	2 *(5.6)*	30 *(83.3)*	6 *(6.7)*	33 *(91.7)*	3 *(8.3)*	30 *(83.3)*	6 *(6.7)*	32 *(88.9)*	4 *(11.4)*
Senate	109	106 *(97.2)*	3 *(2.8)*	105 *(96.3)*	4 *(3.7)*	100 *(91.7)*	9 *(8.3)*	102 *(93.6)*	7 *(6.4)*	102 *(93.6)*	7 *(6.4)*	102 *(93.6)*	7 *(6.4)*
House of Reps.	360	348 *(96.7)*	12 *(3.3)*	339 *(94.2)*	21 *(5.8)*	335 *(93.1)*	25 *(6.9)*	334 *(92.8)*	26 *(7.2)*	338 *(93.9)*	22 *(6.1)*	349 *(96.9)*	11 *(3.1)*
State HOA	990	966 *(97.6)*	24 *(2.4)*	950 *(96.0)*	40 *(4.0)*	933 *(94.2)*	57 *(5.8)*	922 *(93.1)*	68 *(6.9)*	939 *(94.8)*	51 *(5.2)*	950 *(96.0)*	40 *(4.0)*

Source: Compiled from NBS (2019) and INEC Released Results for 2019 General Elections

The above Table shows the patriarchal nature of representative democracy in Nigeria. No woman politician has been elected as president of the country and state governor since 1999. The two political parties that have ruled since 1999 also found no woman worthy of being nominated as presidential running mate. The highest elective executive post occupied by women remains the deputy governorship position where handful of women had been picked as running mates. Even their representation here is also paltry as the highest number of female deputy governor recorded within the six democratic dispensations since 1999 remains 6 (i.e., during the 2007-2011 and 2015-2019 dispensations). At the Senate, from the 4th National Assembly to the current 9th Assembly, women representation amounts to 38 out of 654 for six assemblies, representing a percentage average of 5.8% over these periods of democratic dispensation. The same trend also manifests at the House of Representatives where women representation amount to 117 out of 2160 for six assemblies, representing a percentage average of 5.4% over these periods. This is in spite of the fact that some women have shown interest in occupying these positions. For instance, as can be seen in the Table, only 62 women out of the 2,970 who contested for different political offices in the 2019 general elections were elected.

This represents a meager 4.17% of elected officials and a decline from 5.65% recorded in 2015 general elections (*Punch*, 2019).

As lopsided as this representation is, it is gorier in the Northern part of the country. For instance, during the last democratic dispensation (2015-2019), all the six female deputy governors produced were from the Southern states (Akwa Ibom, Enugu, Lagos, Ogun, Osun and Rivers). Out of the 7 female senators in the 8th National Assembly, only one came from the North (Adamawa) while only 7 out of the 22 women elected as members of House of Representatives came from the North (Adamawa, Benue, Borno, Gombe, Kwara, and Plateau) with 2 from Gombe State. This later reduced to 6 as a result of Princess Olufunke Adedoyin, member representing Ekiti/Irepodun/Isin/Oke-Ero in Kwara State. Also, as shown in Table 2, out of the total of 22 women who were elected as deputy governors, senators, and members of House of Representatives, only 7 come from the North. Though for the first time, since 1999, a Northern state (Kaduna) has a woman deputy governor, but the number of women elected as members of House of Representatives from the North dropped from 7 in the 8th National Assembly to 3 in the 9th Assembly. Generally, women representation in the House of Representatives declined from 22 during the 8th National Assembly to 11 in the 9th Assembly.

Table 2: Distribution of Elected Women by Geopolitical Zone (2015-2019 & 2019-2023)

2015-2019							
Geopolitical Zones	**North Central**	**North East**	**North West**	**South East**	**South West**	**South South**	**Total**
Deputy Governor	0	0	0	1	3	2	**6**
Senate	0	1	0	1	4	1	**7**
HoRs	3	4	0	5	2	8	**22**
Total	**3**	**5**	**0**	**7**	**9**	**11**	**35**
2019-2023							
Geopolitical Zones	**North Central**	**North East**	**North West**	**South East**	**South West**	**South South**	**Total**
Deputy Governor	0	0	1	1	1	1	**4**
Senate	0	1	0	2	1	3	**7**
HoRs	2	3	0	2	4	0	**11**
Total	**2**	**4**	**1**	**5**	**6**	**4**	**22**

Source: Compiled by the Authors

The nature of electoral system in Nigeria does not make it easy for many women to contest for elective posts. Given their low economic status, getting the financial requirements for contesting posts is somehow difficult. This is worsened by the violent nature of competitive politics in the country. However, when it comes to appointive position women have not fared better. For instance, since 1999 no woman has been appointed as Secretary to the Government of the federation. The appointment into ministerial position, since 1999, as shown in the table below, further attests to the gender insensitive nature of political appointments in Nigeria.

Table 3: Sex Distribution of Ministerial Appointments (1999 - 2019)

Sex	1999	2003	2007	2011	2015	2019
Male (%)	40 (85.1)	35 (83.3)	32 (82.1)	30 (71.4)	24 (80.0)	36 (83.7)
Female (%)	7 (14.9)	7 (16.7)	7 (17.9)	12 (28.6)	6 (20.0)	7 (16.3)
Total	**47 (100)**	**42 (100)**	**39 (100)**	**42 (100)**	**30 (100)**	**43 (100)**

Source: Compiled by the Authors

During the first tenure of President Obasanjo's civilian administration, women constituted 14.9% of the ministerial appointments. This was raised to 16.7% during his second tenure.

Obasanjo also gave women, for the first time, important ministries to man. Prominent among them are, Dr (Mrs) Okonjo Iweala (Ministry of Finance, later, Ministry of Foreign Affairs) and Dr. (Mrs) Oby Ezekwesili (Ministry of Education). The percentage of women minister increased to 17.9 during the Yar'adua regime. In 2011, out of 42 ministers appointed by President Jonathan, 12 were women representing 28.6%. During this period, women also headed Ministries of Finance, Petroleum Resources, Aviation, Education, Housing and Urban Development, and Water Resources. Despite the fact that the regime did not meet 35% requirement of Affirmative Action, male politicians lamented that women had too much power during President Jonathan administration. In the second tenure of President Muhammadu Buhari civilian administration, percentage of women ministers diminished from 20% (from 2015-2019) to 16.3% (2019).

What is obvious from this analysis is that the series of activities by government and women activists geared towards involvement of women in politics have not transformed to increased opportunities for women to be elected or appointed into powerful decision-making posts. This is against the reality of impressive rise in women's political representation in sub-Saharan Africa in the last two decades. For instance, four of the world's top ten countries, in terms of women representation in parliaments are in sub-Saharan Africa – Rwanda, Seychelles, Senegal and South Africa (PLAC, 2018). Thus, while some African countries are making progress in terms of women involvement in decision making, Nigeria seems to be retrogressing. The question begging for answer is: Why does the gender gap in political representation continue to persist in Nigeria despite the fact that the country has a policy environment designed to ensure increased women representation in politics?

Periscoping Women Political Exclusionism through the Prism of Patriarchalism

Gender disparity in political representation in Nigeria persists, in spite of the existence of favourable policy environment, mainly due to the entrenched patriarchal ideology in most African societies. Patriarchal ideology can be described as a social belief system which entrenches the domination and subjugation of women by the men folk in the society (Abdul-Isma'il, 2014). The dominance of patriarchal culture in most African societies breeds social construction of gender roles which results in the belief that nature has consigned women to position of inferiority in relation to their men counterparts (Osaghae and Odoemelam, 2013). In societies where patriarchal value system predominates, there exist sexually segregated roles which militate against the advancement, progress and participation of women in the political activities. The socialization process in these societies portrays public governance as exclusive arena of men while domestic realm is assigned to women. Thus, aggressive political commitment is considered unfeminine and unhealthy for women; politics and leadership are masculine in nature and should be reserved for men. This depoliticizes female children personality in childhood and adult socialization as they are taught not to concern themselves with matters of public governance, and to show no ideological favour towards issues which can induce in them the motivation for political leadership.

As such, many communities in Nigeria emphasize women's traditionally assigned roles as mothers and housewives and restrict them to those areas. This conception of women role was brought to the glare of international community by former President Muhammadu Buhari in October, 2016 when he remarked in Germany (standing next to Chancellor Angel Merkel, one of the most prominent women leaders in the world) that his wife belongs to his kitchen, living room and other room. The former President, while responding to criticism from his wife said: "I don't know which party my wife belongs to, but she belongs to my kitchen and my living room and the other room". In a later interview, the Mr. Buhari boldly reiterated his stance, asserting that his wife's most important duty was to look after him and the home even

if she is working (Alonge, 2016). The former President's statements reflect the mentality of most men in the stubbornly patriarchal Nigerian societies. His assertions validate the widespread perception in Nigeria that women exist merely as subordinate to their husbands.

The implication of this patriarchal belief system is that most Nigerian women have accepted their assigned passive roles as given. They have internalized the social division of roles and accepted it as common sense such that women who are politically active or criticize their husbands are seen as cultural deviants. For instance, some Nigerian women on social media condemned Aisha Buhari for daring to criticize her husband in public, saying she should stand by him no matter his deficiency. The ideas of feminism and gender parity in political representation are still viewed suspiciously by many women (even well-educated and professional) in Nigeria. These women see these ideas as Western ideology aiming at usurping the traditional roles of men in the society thereby distorting the social system. This scenario, as succinctly put by Okwuosa (1992: 14),

> …explains the paradox whereby Nigerian women, who have become notorious for the formation of all manner of women's associations and clubs, are unable to match this joiner-syndrome with a level of gladiatorial political participation that equals that of the men… The Tocquevillean thesis that high rate of civic association and assembly matches high participation in the democratic process, seems to hold no water with Nigerian women. They are, if anything, only too eager to stress the "non-political" nature of their numerous clubs and associations, and thereby remains blatantly underinvolved in modern democratic power institutions. *This is out of an anxiety not to be seen to be dabbling too much into what is considered a man's world* (Emphasis by authors).

The point being emphasized is that the barriers against women inclusion in public decision making are not legal but purely socio-cultural. There is nothing in the Constitution and electoral laws and regulations that limit women chance of being elected or appointed into public offices. A cursory look at the 1999 Constitution (as amended) and the 2010 Electoral Act (as amended) on qualifications to stand for elections or to hold any appointive office will show that women have equal rights like their men counterparts. However, the force of role-stereotyping of men and women on the basis of their biological features inhibits the involvement of women in political activities. The dominant patriarchal culture in Nigeria frowns at women who aspire to occupy leadership position. Those who do so are often looked upon as women who are exceeding their customary role in the kitchen and who want to rub shoulder with men. This culture has to a great extent affected the perception of women themselves on what their rights in politics and decision making should be.

The Imperative of Women Political Inclusion for Developmental Democracy

Women political inclusion is necessary for the realization of the objective of democracy as a means of societal development. By developmental democracy, we mean a kind of democracy that is intended for societal development. This variant of democracy contrasts with liberal democracy. From liberal perspective, democracy is a value in itself as it protects political and civil liberties. Developmentalists, however, hold that the value of democracy lies in its contribution to individual and national development (Carothers, 2009). Also, from liberal perspective, democracy exists when there are routine competitive elections in which the bulk of the citizenry participate. To the developmentalist, however, election rituals are not enough for democracy. Equally important is the ability of those entrusted with public governance, through election, to positively transform individual lives and the society at large (Slater, 2012).

In essence, from the perspective of the developmentalists, democracy is a means to an end; the end which is the development of the society.

Central to the success of developmental democracy is social inclusion. This ensures maximum utilization of human and material resources. People are the drivers of development in any human society, and women constitute a substantial percentage of human resources in Nigeria. They constitute a high percentage of workforces, and hence, contribute greatly to national income. The contribution of women to Nigerian economy, as observed by Amali (2006), is more pronounced in the informal sector of the economy, and most of the production in the rural areas is in the informal sector. This, according to her, makes it difficult to quantify the actual contribution of women to national economy. The great contribution of women to national economy makes them indispensable in the process of development. This is more so giving the fact that, for a society to develop it needs to optimally aggregate available human and material resources.

As such, there is a growing consensus among stakeholders that involving women in political decision-making process is not only "the right thing to do" but also "the smart thing to do" (ODIHR, 2014, p. 41). World Economic Forum in its 2011 Gender Gap Report, for example, submits that countries and companies will thrive if women are educated and are engaged as fundamental pillars of the social, economic and political institutions. Their engagement in leadership would most easily lead to innovative solutions to tackle the emerging socio-economic challenges, and pave way for equitable and sustainable development (WEF, 2011). World Bank also argues that promoting gender equality is "smart economics". It submits that countries that create better opportunities and conditions for women in economic and political sectors can raise productivity, make institution more representative, and advance development prospects for all (World Bank, 2012).

This is not unconnected with the fact that women involvement in political decision making would bring about expansion of the pool of resources- skill, knowledge, and expertise- that are necessary for effective policy making and implementation. This has been attested to by some countries with appreciable number of women in their parliaments. For instance, in Denmark, parity in political representation is seen as an issue of fully utilizing women's specific competence and experience as well as their special contribution to what had hitherto been regarded as male field of expertise (ODIHR, 2014). Given the traditional gender-based division of labour which confines women to domestic realm, they are often more in touch with the problems facing their societies. Compared to men, more women are involved in humanitarian volunteer works; more of them are also engaged in the non-profit sector, and are particularly active in civil society, as well as non-governmental organizations operating at the grassroots and national levels.

Women are, therefore, uniquely positioned to offer realistic suggestions on how to address societal problems. Electing and appointing greater number of women to public offices can contribute to improved legislative and policy agendas and thereby catalyze the pace of socio-economic development. Their involvement in policy making would bring vital attention issues that are central to societal development such as poverty, education and health, including maternal and reproductive health; and care of dependants, including children and the elderly. If women are not elected or appointed into executive position or constitute a small fraction of elected members of legislature, important issues such as these are not likely to be prioritized.
Peace, undoubtedly, is a condition for sustainable development. No society can develop in an atmosphere of perennial crises like the case of most countries in the sub-Saharan Africa. Women, as observed by ICG (2006) are deeply committed to peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction, and have unique and powerful suggestions to offer. Because women and

children suffer more casualties during armed conflicts, they often advocate most strongly for stability, peaceful resolution of crises, prevention of conflict escalation, and reconstruction (PLAC, 2018). It is in recognition of this, that the United Nations Security Council, through Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, emphasizes the imperative of involving women in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security. The Resolution was passed on 31 December, 2000 and calls for: women participation in peace process; the protection of girls' and women's rights; gender training for peacekeeping operations; and gender mainstreaming in the United Nations' activities around conflict, peace and security (UNCS, 2000). Mainstreaming gender in conflict prevention and resolution can improve outcomes before, during, and after conflict.

It is partly in recognition of the strategic roles of women in societal development that notable international conventions, declarations, and policy agenda stress the need for gender parity in political representation. The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) advocates for equal rights of men and women, including the right to participate in government. The 1979 United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) specifically advocates for the removal of barriers against women socio-political inclusion. The 1995 United Nations Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action also mandates member states to put in place all necessary policy environment to ensure women's equal access to and full participation in power structures and decision making. Similarly, Goal 3 of the UN Millennium Development Goals (MGSs) emphasizes the need to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women as effective ways of combating poverty, hunger and disease, and to stimulate development that is truly sustainable. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as a successor to the MDGs also recognizes the importance of gender parity in the process of development. Goal 5 of the programme seeks to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.

Though the government (most especially at federal level) has shown commitment to these conventions, declarations and global development agendas, women are still under-represented in public leadership positions at all levels of government, resulting in the non-utilization of invaluable women talents and skills in her decision making and developmental processes.

Conclusion and Recommendations

For Nigeria to fulfill her ambition of attaining appreciable level of development, increased women inclusion in decision making apparatuses is imperative. Inclusive and representative governance system, which meaningfully engages both men and women, is a prerequisite for developmental democracy. Though, Nigeria has commitment to providing equal opportunities for men and women in political life, as well as integrating gender equality into policies and practices, available evidences show that womenfolk remain under-represented in key decision-making political institutions in the country; they are lagging behind in terms of leadership of significant political institutions. This is in spite of the fact that the Constitution, Electoral Laws, and parties' guidelines do not discriminate against women. However, due mainly to the entrenched patriarchal culture in different parts of the country, majority of Nigerian women still see political sphere as a masculine venture.

Though recent years have witnessed some level of improvement in terms of women participation in politics, a lot still has to be done to meet the 35% Affirmative Action on women representation. To further crack the seemingly hard shell of patriachalism, efforts towards dismantling socio-cultural obstacles and prejudices that put girls and women in a position of subservience must be intensified. There is the need for intensive enlightenment programmes

geared towards attitudinal reorientation of both men and women in the country. The civil society organizations (CSOs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working to ensure gender equity in political representation needs to prioritize changing the mindset of the people over women economic empowerment. The CSOs together with media outlets and academic institutions need to carryout awareness raising activities to combat gender-based stereotypes of women in politics.

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