

MEDIA DISCOURSE ON WOMEN AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN NIGERIA IN THE CONTEXT OF FEMINIST THEORY: AN ASSESSMENT

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Abstract

Discourse on women and the discrimination that they suffer in social relations continue to animate discussion about the roles and place of women across societies especially in Africa. It is within the context of the discourse on the nature of the relationship that the term gender emanates. Thus, gender as use in social science discourse highlights the nature, forms and dynamism of social relations between men and women and how this inform power, privileges and aspirations between the sexes. As a social issue, discourse on gender within the media (print, electronic and social media) has gained ascendancy. The media as agenda setting institution has elevated discussion on gender relations inclusive of the discourse on women's active participation in the political process and the implications that its portends for national development. Therefore situating its discussion within the context of liberal feminist theory and drawing insights from news articles, opinion pieces, editorial, and commentaries from Nigerian newspapers and published academic materials this paper examines media discourse on women's political participation within the Nigerian political space. It highlights the centrality of media presentation to the task of advancing women's participation in the political process in Nigeria's Fourth Republic.

Keywords: Feminism, Gender, Media, Political participation and Nigeria.

Introduction

The discourse on gender and the struggle for gender equality dates back to the 3rd century BC. Roman women occupied the Capitoline Hill and barricaded all entrance to the 'Forum' when Consul Marcus Porcius Cato vehemently prevented attempts to repeal laws limiting women's use of expensive goods which men see as ostentatious life style but considered a necessity by women. Christine de Pisan, the first feminist philosopher, in late 14th- and early 15th-century France, challenged prevailing perception of women with a strident appeal for concerted effort at

promoting female education (Bell, 1984; Meyers, 2012; Byrne, 2016; Cram, 2017). The mantle of her advocacy was taken up later in the century by a 15th-century Venetian woman, Laura Cereta, who published *Epistolae familiares* "Personal Letters" (1488). The feminist discourse and debate as it relates to women advancement, empowerment among other issues did not reach England until the late 16th century. Indeed, discourse about women issue picked up in England when pamphleteers and polemicists joined the discussion and related advocacy over the true nature of womanhood.

The struggle for women emancipation of the 1960s and 1970s, often termed the “Second Wave” of feminism, is a movement that was aided by the tranquil suburban life that was entrenched in American popular culture (Baxandall and Gordon, 2002; Gordon, 2013; Honeybourne and Singer, 2013). The 1980s berths the rise of the “Third Wave” of feminist movements in Latin America and Europe. This movement primarily entails women in Latin American countries who have access to the social benefits enhanced by the continent’s partial industrialization process challenging the dominance of men in social, political and economic space. This they did by querying the basis for the stereotype of men as breadwinner and perception of women as vehicle for family procreation. This perception enhance gender gap that only began to close in the 1980s, with the popularization of the approach known as “Gender and Development” (GAD) (Huston and Alvarez, 1990; Bussey and Bandura, 1999; Chant and Sweetman, 2012).

As approach towards enhancing the status of women in development discourse and issues, GAD focuses on the nature of social construction of differences between the sexes and underscores the importance of challenging subsisting gender roles and relationship based on prevailing social values (Reeves and Baden, 2000: 33). This is informed by the position that gender relations neither occurs, nor operates in social vacuum but are rather products of the ways in which social institutions, agencies and their rules are organized and constituted (Kabeer and Subrahmanian, 1996: 17). The current gap between men and women was further closes with the proposition of the socialist feminism and

recent gender media discourse. Socialist feminists challenged capitalism and patriarchal dominance and hegemony in the society. They argued that the basis of the oppression of women is anchored on the social construction of gender relationship (Aguinaga, Lang, Mokrani, Santillana, 2013; Roberts and Connell, 2016).

The gender media discourse exposes the resultant usefulness and importance of women in the society other than in the reproduction cycle, domestic aid to men and caregiver to children. It stresses their economic prowess, political capability and social dynamism for a sustainable growth and national development. Most of the earlier media discourses on feminism have negative connotations in Africa, most developing countries and a few developed countries. For these lopsided orientations to be resolved, women and feminist writers have to pay vigorous attention to both the electronic and print media by given more attention to women emancipation at the grass root. This position was given credence to by Cole (2013) when he averred that discourse on feminism should not be seen as been primarily concern with equality for women alone, because is main focus is about equality for all groups regards of gender and sexual orientation, skin colour, culture and ethnicity, religion, nationality and/or age.

GAD is a constructivist approach. It emphasize that both genders are social constructs, beyond biological categorization, and that women are shaped not only by gender, but by other forms of social categorization such as their ethnic and cultural origin, their sexual orientation and age. It makes strong argument for the incorporation of gender-differentiated

policies in development policy and planning as a way to reduce poverty with the objective of enhancing equality between the sexes. The approach also de-emphasizes the centrality of 'the household' as unit of analysis for development-related sciences as was previously common with development policy. The approach also highlight that the media projection of the gender role disparity is also a factor which contributes to women social categorization and thus need to be given attention.

The role of the media in gender studies development does not seem easy to pin point as either a positive vehicle or a negative convener. It is one of the privileged vehicles for information dissemination playing an important contribution to citizenship rights and duties. The media more than ever in the twenty first century have sharpen the roles given to women to a more restricted social household perspective. The emancipation of the women can much more be made pronounce by the achievements of the women in places where men had initial domination. The media owned by women, the schools and other socio economic outfits established by women will make the society view react contrary to any negative role projected by the media.

There are some major milestones and transformations in feminist media criticism of recent and precisely over the past two decades. These changes are due to recent development in the socio-political space of academics debates and societal growth such as the changes in feminist politics and gender policies. Other transformations in feminist epistemology is as a result of the development, reconstruction and diffusion of theories that discuss gender and

feminism such as post-structural theory, post-colonial theory, critical race theory, queer theory and theories of post-feminism. Major changes are traced to the emergence and growth of new areas of feminist media research and studies (e.g. internet studies, fan studies) and attendant proliferation of literature and publishing outlets devoted to feminism and gender studies. This has aided feminist media criticism growth outside of the academy, especially as a result of the democratic revolution in the 1990s and the blogging revolution of the 21st century.

No doubt, the women folk in most society have penetrated to the top political scene of most countries and the core social values of the society depend on their conduct and reactions. To some extent media reportage purports women as the most supporters of men against their fellow women. This unclear picture of gender dominance and role segregation carried out by the media can be reverted provided that the gender discuss is more handled by the female folks and more women emerge with progressive support for fellow woman in politics and seldom collaboration with men of like passion. Given the contrasting and often confusing presentation of women issues in media discourse, it becomes imperative to address women representation within the context of their participation in political process. To that end, this study examines media presentation of women and their participation in the political process. The study utilizes data drawn from published news articles, opinion pieces, commentaries and editorials from Nigerian newspapers and newsmagazines. It also draws information from journal articles, books, chapter in books and reports.

Feminist Theories and Discourse on Women

There are various perspectives and notion to women socio-economic emancipation, participation in politics and active engagement in the running of societal life in general. All of these are summed up in the basic assumptions underpinning the postulation of feminist theory. The main discourse and orientation of the feminist theory tilt towards the political emancipation while other cohorts of feminist theoretical postulation concentrate on social and economic emancipation of women (Ponzanesi, 2007; Lucas, 2016; Marinucci 2016). However, in any of the social, political or economic emancipation movements for women, the central agitation is always hinged on giving women more power and freedom to act just like the men folk within the population.

The struggle and agitations for the girl child, women and female liberation in general during the Renaissance never became a huge success and a coherent philosophy or movement with general acceptance. The coherence however materialised in the Enlightenment era when women began to demand and lay claim on the political, social and economic reformist agenda and expressions about liberty, equality, and natural rights which is supposed to be applied to both sexes. The Age of Enlightenment gave rise to political agitations marked by socio-political revolutions in France, Germany, and Italy. In the United States and England, feminist activism and popular struggle for women emancipation come to limelight when by female abolitionists sought to apply the concepts of freedom and equality to their prevailing circumstances (Meyers, 2012; Barnett, Sligar and Wang 2016). By the mid-19th

century, issues revolving around feminism and gender discourse had compounded the process of social change, with ideas being exchanged across Europe and North America.

Much as progress have been recorded in the pursuit of women emancipation and in pushing the ideas and practices that encourage and promote women active participation in societal life there still remains impediments to the realization of the ideals at the core of feminism and feminist postulation. Speaking to this position, Hooks (2000: 2) notes that the permeation of human society with primarily “Christian” culture (same for Islam), have entrenched popular believe that God has ordained that women be subordinate to men in social relations. While women have entered the workforce in large number, and with women as sole breadwinner for family, yet the vision of domestic life which continues to dominate popular imagination is one in which the logic of male domination still subsist. This view speaks to the continued domination and suppression of women in socio-economic and political life in societies across the world.

It is within the context of the continue suppression, domination and social discrimination against women on the basis of gender differentiation that feminism both as theory and social movement flourish in recent decades. By drawing attention to the powerful impact of gender in the social ordering of relationship between the sexes (micro-level analysis) and how this plays out in social institutions (macro-level analysis), that the feminist theoretical perspective gained ground notably in the discipline of sociology (Lindsey, 2011: 12). While disagreement persists on the elements that need to be

included in the underlying assumptions of feminist theory, however, at the minimum, the general position is that a theory is feminist provided it can be used to challenge a status quo that undermines the position of women within society and in social relations. Aside this, there exist tensions and contention about what it means to be a feminist and what should be the ultimate objective of the struggle by feminists and feminist movements (Watkins, 2000: 4; Pettman, 1999: 487). This contention also holds for feminism, gender studies and feminist movement in Africa (Ahikire, 2014: 8).

Taking off from above stated position, Lindsey (2011: 14) underscore the dynamism of feminism as a thought and social movement. The dynamism is encapsulate within the understanding that as global change presents new and ongoing challenges for women, feminist agenda also change in ways as to address the changing circumstance. To this end, feminism and feminist theory is never in a finished form. While feminists accept the goal of ending sexism by empowering women, however, there is no general agreement about how this goal is to be accomplished. This lack of agreement about the strategies and tactics to be deployed to end women subjugation and discrimination in social relations clearly underscore the dynamism of feminism and speaks to the variation in the position of the protagonists of the variants of feminism theory. That said, it is also important to states that the variants of feminism are neither mutually exclusive nor exhaustive. Feminists irrespective of the variants of feminism theory they subscribe to affirm the view that gender inequality is not an individual matter, but rather deeply ingrained in the structure of societies. This is because inequality and

attendants social implications that women suffer are woven into the fabric of marriage and families, work and economy, politics, religions, the arts and other socio-economic and cultural productions. Thus, inequality and discrimination against women is embedded within social structures and social institutions. This then inform the nature of social interactions and relations between men and women (Lindsey, 2011: 14; Lorber, 1997: 8).

Liberal feminism, also referred to as 'egalitarian or mainstream feminism' is often perceived as the most moderate of all variants of the feminism theory. For many that canvass for women social emancipation, liberal feminism theory is taken to be far more assessable as a realistic theoretical path to achieving feminists' objectives and claims as it relates to women emancipation especially on socio-economic and political issues when compare to other variants of feminism theory. Liberal feminism is anchored on the argument that people are created equal and thus should not be denied equality of opportunity on the basis of gender (Lindsey, 2011: 14). As it relates to core underlying presumption, liberal feminism hold the view that gender differences are not based on biology/physiology but socially constructed based on social values.

To this extent, liberal feminism argued that women and men are not different in significant manner. Indeed, whatever differences that may be observable based on procreative differentiation are superseded by our common humanity. Informed by this position, liberal feminism avers that both sexes should be treated equally and not differently under the law. Liberal feminism accept that suppression of women is the most fundamental form of

oppression and that it transcends boundaries of race, culture, and economic class. Therefore an intention on social change is advocated not change of revolutionary proportions (Ponzanesi, 2007; Allen, 2016; Carey, Dickinson and Olney, 2017). It is based on this thought that liberal feminism argued that women should have the same rights as men and the same educational, work opportunities and pay as men (Lorber, 1997: 9).

In a general sense, liberal feminist theory relates to the position that women unequal relations with men is anchored on some customary rules and legal constraints that impedes women's access to and success in public space. It intervention is directed at enhancing women's: active participation in public spaces rather than questioning prevailing behaviour within these realms or challenging gendered roles and statuses within the private sphere. It advance the promotion of women's voice via representation in formal legal, political, educational and institutional outlets, more than interrogating the social construction of women's voices. It also believes in reforms to social structures and the relations it underpins through legislation and representation in formal instructions and structures, rather than uprooting or overhauling the values underpinning society (Lindsey, 2011: 14).

On the political front, liberal feminism and its proponents had focus their attention and activism on dismantling the visible sources of gender discrimination. To this end, issues such as gendered job markets; inequitable wages; differential educational opportunities; and getting women into positions of authority in the professions, government, and cultural institutions have been focus of attention and activism. Liberal feminists and activists have make

good use of civil rights movement anti-discrimination legislation and affirmative action as weapon to prosecute the battle for gender equality for women especially as it concern dismantling inequalities in the social, economic and political aspects of women social life across societies. Liberal feminists held the position that a total overhauling of social structures and institutions of society is not compulsory in order to achieve the objectives of women empowerment and incorporation into position of authority. On the contrary liberal feminists aver that women can work within a pluralistic system and mobilize their constituents to effect positive and productive social change (Lindsey, 2011: 14).

As a variant of the feminism, the main contribution of liberal feminism is that of showing the extent of discrimination against women in modern society. It main success have been the breaking down of barriers on the basis of which women are suffers discrimination in social, economic and political life of their societies. Liberal feminism is largely successful in advancing the understanding that women are in no ways inferior to men. Liberal feminism has to a large extent been successful in its advocacy for women empowerment and the advancement of women interests in society (Lorber, 1997). It success at pushing women advancement and empowerment notwithstanding, liberal feminism has been strongly criticize as being bourgeois, heteronormative, white and/or racist. It is argued that it is limited in terms of its potential capacity for effecting change to the nature of social relations on which the foundation for women discrimination is built.

Media Discourse on Women and Political Participation: An Assessment

In the years immediately following the French and the American Revolutions the discussion of women's participation in politics was literarily absent from the media presentation. In these early post-revolutions years, society pays more attention to important issues notably; the new constitution, charter of human rights, nationalism, and privatization. The few voices raised on gender issues were on the themes of abortion and motherhood. Indeed, there were vehement denial of the existence of gender discrimination, while the idea of quotas in political representation for women was rejected. The notion been that politics is gender-neutral thus, it was assumed that men would automatically represent and deal with the problems of both sexes through proactive public policy (Havelková, 1999; Osuntokun, 2016).

The twenty first century represents a wakeup call period for women in politics and in the media especially as it relates to the framing and presentation of discussions that hinged on women active participation in the political live of their societies. The ripple effects of the affirmative action that granted women's percentage representation in positions of power and political authority had made good effects on women's visibility in the media. The media visibility attributable to the increase in representation arising from the implementation of affirmative action policies in some societies had raise the voice of women not just on social and economic issues as it affect them, but also enhance their credential as policy maker and administrators. Indeed, the celebration of international women's day has turned to become a day for media projection and promotion of women issues especially as

it relates to who women are, what they are capable of doing and what they have accomplished across fields, disciplines and professions. Aside this, and as it relates to Africa's political scene, the media on the continent have projected the office of the 'first lady' to the (president and governors) to be a viable office for the advancement of women's visibility in politics and as vehicle for their social emancipation. In Western democracies, first ladies have acted as political symbols, host political fundraising and spearheaded socio-political functions that specifically target a partisan agenda and this also resonates with first ladies in Africa's democracies (Beasley, 2005; Anderson, 2002).

Like the traditional media platforms, the advent and development of the internet and the burgeoning of social media platforms has expanded the frontiers of feminist activism and the struggle for women emancipation. However, it is important to note that access and use of the internet/social media mirrors the sex/gender, class and other power dynamics offline, and so do the violations that arising therefrom. It is this realization that informed the UN Human Rights Commission (2012) affirmation that: 'the same rights that people have offline must also be protected online, in particular freedom of expression, which is applicable regardless of frontiers and through any media of one's choice, in accordance with Articles 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights' (A/HRC/20/L.13; Library of Congress, 2012).

Feminists in Africa have continued to engage with the deployment of internet/social media platforms in ways that support and advance creativity,

activism, social connections, pleasure and change. By so doing African feminists are strategically moving into the virtual world in ways that will continue to ensure voice and visibility for women's rights and promote their emancipation. That said, it is also important to note that there is a flip side to the issue of internet/social media and advancement of women's rights. To this end, Finnegan, (2013) notes that the rights of women are increasingly being impacted by the internet revolution, not necessarily through violence and discrimination alone, but also through policies and legislations that failed to give due recognition to their specific concerns, contexts, and capacities.

Earlier media reportage on the concept of feminism reveal that feminism was associated with demonizing descriptions in the news content about 10% of the time in the 1970s. "Radical and militant are the two demonizing words most commonly associated with feminism and feminist activism" (Okiriguo, 2016). Affirming media demonization of feminism as a movement and ideology, Lind and Salo (2002) note that the media uses five guiding frames to present news media content on feminist discourse. These reportage include the; demonization frame, personalization/trivialization frame, goals frame, victimization frame and agency frame. These frames reveals that feminists and feminist discourse were presented differently from regular discourse on women which is not necessarily a negative. It also notes that feminism is still presented in negative light in the media. It is important to note that feminists are more likely to be associated with negative epithets such as gold digger, bitches, and radical among others than regular women and women activists (Okiriguo 2016).

Despite the the democratic transitions in the 1990s across the Africa continent which brought liberalization of the media, interest in how gender is constructed in African media has moved from extreme negativity to a midpoint that is somewhat characterized by mid negativity. This negative media and society notion of feminism and women in public sphere prevails in Nigeria print and audio visual media. The presentation of discourse on women has reverberate in societal occupation stratification especially contest for political offices. Indeed, the notion is that contest for political office and the wielding of political authority that arise therefrom is exclusively 'men zone'. The resultant effects is that very few women venture into partisan politics and the few that brace the old are often seen as bitches, radical and socially irresponsible. As Yusuf (2004) notes for women to make a successful entry into politics and continue to tread the path of success requires certain skills and resources that are not easily accessible to the average Nigerian women, who apart from competing with male chauvinists also had to fight off various myths and negative social stereotype. These couples with patriarchal norms that limit women's political expressions to that of foot soldiers for party and candidate, entertainers at political rally, mobilizers for male candidacy and voters during elections all combined to limit women voice, visibility and participation in partisan politics especially that of vying for important elective positions (Anifowose, 2004; Ibrahim and Salihu, 2004; Akiyode and Arogundade, 2003; Ako-Nai, 2003). Media narrative and presentation of women discourse have tended to reinforce many if not most of these societal perceptions and bias that undermines women visibility in political

activities and curtail their active participation in partisan politics.

While there have been rhetoric that support women active participation in socio-political live inclusive of partisan politics and their socio-economic emancipation and empowerment notably by few women elite and those with socio-political visibility, the rhetoric has failed to translate into appreciable success. For instance, spouse of political office holders (president and governors) “the first ladies” have often deployed their position as spouse of executive office holders to promote and project women’s human rights, canvass for the elimination of barriers hindering women active participation in social live and promote agendas that enhance women welfare. For instance Gbadamosi (2017) notes that the wife of Ondo state governor, declared at the inception of her spouse administration in 2017 administration that the government of her husband is ready to support women and girls to be the best they can be. However, her ability to advance women cause in the administration of her husband hinged on her capacity to influence the formulation and implementation of policy agendas that impact positively on women and girls child issues and welfare.

At the beginning of the Nigeria’s Fourth Republic in May, 1999, the percentage of women who contested for elective positions was put at three percent (2.7%) in the Senate and about five percent (5%) in the House of Representatives. In 2007, the number jumped to eight percent (8.25%) for the Senate and seven percent (7.22%) for the House of Representatives. The 2007 figure is without doubt too far from meeting the affirmative action benchmark of thirty percent (30%) as

recommended at the 1995 International Women Conference in Beijing, China and it subsequent increase to thirty five percent (35%). At the conclusion of the 2015 general elections, just seven (7) out of the one hundred and nine (109) senators elected into the upper legislative chamber in Nigeria are women. This amounts to six percent (6.4%) of the total number for the senate. Similarly, only twenty five (25) of the three hundred and sixty two (362) members of the House of Representatives or approximately seven percent (6.9%) are women. In states likes Osun, Ekiti, Lagos, Anambra, Akwa Ibom and Anambra where women have previously served as deputy governors, it has become the maxim and political agenda to facilitate the emergence of a female as deputy governor for gender balancing. This is no doubt based on their contribution in the past (Osagieon, 2014; Odoshimokhe, 2015; Odebiyi, 2017).

While the phenomenal of female deputy governor has become entrenched in above mentioned states, it is however, necessary to highlights that the number is but little and constitute mere the tokenism (Omotola, 2007: 42-43).At the national level the number of women that have been appointed into executive positions as Ministers and Special Advisers had increased from what obtained at the beginning of the Fourth Republic in 1999. Indeed, under the Presidency of Goodluck Jonathan (2009-2015) the all-important Ministries of Finance and Petroleum Resources were manned by women and Ngozi Okonjo Iweala, the Minister for Finance designated as the Coordinating Minister for the Economy. By all indices, the Jonathan Presidency was one in which women representation at the national level was at its highest. The Jonathan presidency also pushed though without

success attempt at installing a female Speaker of the House of Representatives. While affirmative action policies might not have been constitutionally enshrined in Nigeria, yet as Omotola (2007: 42) had noted, the marginal increase in women representation in positions of power and authority since 1999 are due in part to attempt at implementing affirmative action and mainstreaming women in politics and governance.

The attempt notwithstanding, women are yet to fully make serious in-road to the inner circle of power politics in Nigeria and this is glaring the most at the sub-national level of authority. Aside, the marginal increase in women representation especially in appointive positions has not translate to much increase in women's ability to promote and influence the formulation and implementation of gender-friendly legislations and policies at both the national and sub-national levels (Omotola, 2007: 43). To that extent, it might be rational that those championing women's cause in Nigeria should refocus feminism and gender advocacy beyond the promotion of affirmative action policies alone. Thus, all known strategies must be deployed towards the realization of the objective of women visibility in political life and the acquisition of political power.

In line with this thought, and through the campaign titled "the change women want in 2019 and beyond" the Centre for Democracy and Development, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and women politicians groups declared their readiness to champion the cause for the advancement and promotion of women's active involvement in politics in Nigeria. The participants in the campaign also advocate that for every three political positions in the coming 2019 general

elections, one should be reserved for women (Opoola, 2017). These positions were aimed at finding practical solutions to amplify women's voices in Nigerian politics in preparation for the coming general elections. It was noted that about forty nine percent (49%) of Nigeria population are female but the representation of women especially in elective positions has been on a declining trend since the 2007 general elections. It is believe that if political and socio-economic issues that constitute hindrances, hampering women active participation in socio-political life of their communities are address with view to their gradual elimination women will have more access to positive media reportage. This will in turn enhance their socio-political voice, visibility and ultimately boost women's attempt at contesting and winning elective positions at both the sub-national and national levels.

It is in this context that the importance of popular education, mobilization and sensitization of the general population on the need to promote the advancement of women in political participation becomes essential. This cannot happen without a favourable media representation, projection and promotion of women cause. It is on this basis that the role of the media both traditional and social media becomes essential to the promotion of women cause in Nigeria and the continent at large. Thus, the need to enlist the media to champion the cause of the feminism movement and women advocacy becomes crucial. To this end, and in line with submission of Omotola (2007: 43) that all means practicable must be deployed by women advocacy group in the struggle to enhance women political voice, visibility and attainment of political power, then enlisting the media in the feminist and

women struggle for equity in power and representation becomes a necessity.

The centrality of enlist and bringing the media on board is predicated on the important roles of the media especially that of agenda setting and image laundering. For the cause of pushing women active participation in partisan politics to get positive reception from the larger society require that women issues be place at the front burner of societal discourse through media agenda setting function. The cause of women advocacy will also be better served through positive and favourable media presentation and projection. Thus, the combative posture of radical feminism and feminist activists need to be moderated for feminism to draw the sympathy of mainstream media to the cause of women advocacy and rights campaign. The assistance of the media is also greatly needed to highlights the challenges that women face in their quest to actively engage in socio-political life inclusive of partisan politics. The media can be used to engage the society on the deleterious impacts of patriarchal practices, violence against women and girl child, early marriage, female child poor education enrolment among other issues and how they impact negatively on women aspiration, empowerment and rights. Through media discourse, promotion of advocacy programmes and positive reportage, women activists can get across to the larger society and be able achieve gradual change in societal practices, value and perception about women rights inclusive of the right to partake in partisan politics like their men counterpart. Herein lies the importance of the media to the cause of advancing promotion of women rights to participate actively in the political life of their societies in Nigeria.

Conclusion

Women has the capacity and capability to make meaningful contribution to the cause of societal advancement and national development. The need to recognize and harness their potential becomes crucial given that they constitute over half of global population. Where they have been fully incorporated as equal partner in the development process, women have bring their experience, expertise, resilience and enthusiasm to politics and policy process in ways that have enhance development. Recognizing the centrality and importance of women to the task of national development, stakeholders in politics and policy process in Nigeria are engaging in the increasing facilitation of women inclusion in key decision making process in politics and policy arena. As such, the historical marginalization of women and their relegation to the background in social, economic and political spheres of life is gradually been addressed through election and appointment into political positions and promotion into key positions within national and sub-national bureaucracy.

Though women incorporation into politics and policy positions in Nigeria can be taken to be slow, and this is the case in many countries in Africa, however, the process is a clear representation that the country is moving in the direction of global trends as it relates to women empowerment. As data across the global indicates, there are sizeable number of women at the highest level of governments and public policy institutions and agencies across the world. Notable figures past and present includes; Golda Meier in Israel, the Bandaranaike's mother and daughter in Sri Lanka, Indira Gandhi in India, Begum Hussaina Mujibur Rahman in Bangladesh, Tansu Ciller in Turkey, Margaret Thatcher

in Great Britain, Magot Brundlandt in Norway, Benazir Bhutto in Pakistan, Megawati Sukarnoputra in Indonesia. Other female Presidents or Prime Ministers include Edith Cresson (France), Yingluck Shinawatra (Thailand), President Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner (Argentina), Michelle Bachlet (Chile), Park Hun Yeon (South Korea) and Dilma Vana Rouseff (Brazil) the last two impeached. And in Africa, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf is serving her second term in office as the first elected female president in Africa and Joyce Banda ascended into the Presidency in Malawi after the death of President Bingu wa Mutharika.

Given this statistics, it is not a question of whether it will be salutary for women to participate and to take the commanding heights in politics, governance and policy establishment rather it is a question of equity, fairness and justice. Countries with high rate of women's engagement in politics and leadership positions often rank high on the yardsticks of democratic inclusiveness and egalitarian ideals. Enhancing women participation in politics and governance is in line with global task of aiding the realization of the objectives of gender equality and empowerment of women and girls which is a core pillars of sustainable development goals. On this note, it is imperative that stakeholders and governments at all levels across states but more importantly in Africa rise to the challenge of promoting and advancing the participation of women in social life of their communities inclusive of politics and governance. To achieve this objective there are number of issues that need to be given priority to by women rights advocacy groups, feminists, activists and policy makers.

Female education should be a right and not privilege. Female education should be at par with that of their male counterpart. In the public universities the ratio of admission for most courses should be 50:50 in favour of both male and female. If and when we have almost the same number of women and men vying for the same positions, inequality would gradually disappear and a more egalitarian society will be build. Discrimination in the job market will never be completely eliminated but it can at least be made illegal. Educated women and the majority of their male counterparts actually view politics as a "dirty game", which is largely played by lawyers and other self-employed professionals. Also due to the usual violence and or thuggery associated with partisan politics, women and self-respecting men shy away from it. There is also the problem of finance. Politics in recent times have become a reserved hobby or profession of the rich and the plutocrats. One cannot be a successful politician in Nigeria unless one is well heeled with godfathers or godmothers who are ready to finance the client's political career as an investment. In this way, aspiring candidates compromises their independence and the seed of favouritism, nepotism and corruption is sown. Women generally do not seem cut out for this kind of life.

The is also the need to pay serious attention to the media reportage of women as it relates to active and partisan participation in the political life of their society and in public space. The usual perception is the question of what is an aspiring woman politician doing with a husband who is apathetic or hostile to political participation. The general impression of a woman politician in the minds of Nigerian is that of somebody

who is either out of husband control or immoral. This is because most male politicians hold caucus meetings at nights to the disadvantage of self-respecting women. The repercussion of women that engaged in active partisan politics is often that they jettison bonding with their families more importantly their husband, daughters and sons. While this might not be totally true in all situations, context and for every women politicians, at least that is the popular perception notably in Nigeria.

Feminism extremism or leftist media reportage of few women politician is extremely harsh or easily confused. One cannot identify a pattern, norm or paradigm in countries with women heads of government. But what is discernible is that women tend to be more authoritarian when they are heads of government than men perhaps because they have to emphasize themselves more than it is necessary for men to succumb to them. Mrs Margaret Thatcher used to say she was the 'only man' in her cabinet. The level of corruption is not less than when men are in power. From empirical data, there is hardly any difference in the way women or men behave in power. Perhaps the only trait one can isolate is that women in power seem to feel like men and to put other women at a distance. Whatever the shortcoming of women in power, the absence of the feminine touch wherever they are barred from participation is definitely a loss to the polity and society at large.

Since the Beijing conference on women empowerment, the United Nations and the collective voice of the world have stood behind women self-realization in every facet of our human existence. It therefore behoves us to ensure that our women-folk have access to political power as their men

counterparts. As a resource, man or woman is the ultimate factor in human development. The media perception of women in reportage and presentation should be that which project positive image as against negative presentation. By so doing, the media would be aiding the vigorous projection of the liberal feminism agenda and thus help to advance the cause of women participation in politics inclusive of elections and appointment into positions of power and authority.

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