

WOMEN AND THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE 35% AFFIRMATIVE ACTION UNDER  
PRESIDENT GOOD LUCK JONATHAN'S ADMINISTRATION.( 1999-2015)

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**Abstract**

When talking about countries where women play an inclusive role in governance, Nigeria is included. Out of 188 countries profiled Nigeria came 23rd in terms of mobilizing and appointing women into positions in government. While the Beijing platform for action seeks 35% share of decision making positions for women, hardly are the political women heard in decision making process but they are always used as an instrument of voting in political parlance and child bearing and rearing in socio-cultural milieu. It is against this backdrop that this paper takes us through memory lane of women and the implementation of the 35% affirmative action under President Good luck Ebele Jonathan's administration from 1999-2015. As a qualitative research, data for the study were gathered through secondary sources, while content analysis was used as the method of data analysis. The findings revealed that even though that there is a huge clamor for women inclusion in government, the present government has not yet attained the 35% benchmark for women representation. There is just a little paradigm shift in women's participation. The paper concluded among others that in spite of the constraints on Nigerian women, there is overwhelming evidence that women are formidable productive force in our society and a store of credible human resources which are required for national development.

**Keywords:** Women, Development, Politics and Affirmative Action

**Introduction**

**The Concept of Development**

'Development' according to Singh, is a subjective and value-loaded concept and, hence, there cannot be a consensus as to its meaning. The term is used differently in diverse contexts. It basically means 'unfolding', revealing, or 'opening up' something which is latent. When applied to human beings, it therefore means unfolding or opening up their potential power (Singh 2014: 2). Schumpeter defined development as a discontinuous and spontaneous change in the stationary state which forever alters and displaces the equilibrium state previously existing (Jhingan, 2006;4) Developmental issue has become such an obsession that it is easy to forget that the idea of development is relatively recent. In Africa, for instance, the idea really started coming into vogue after the early 1960s when many African countries had become independent (Ake 2002:141). For development to take place, it has to be holistic involving both human and material resources in our environment.

Human beings are both the cause and consequence of development. It is the human factor that is the pivot of the process of development. Though the study of a human being is basic to the study of development, it cannot be of a human being in isolation but rather of human beings in relation to their fellows, or of humans in society and in their environment (Singh,2009: 7). According to Singh, human development is both a means to an end of overall societal development. People should be provided freedom and opportunities to develop their capabilities especially the women folk and should be educated, empowered and motivated to contribute to achieving sustainable and equitable development. Freedom in this context refers to political or ideological freedom, economic freedom and freedom from social servitude. As long as a society is bound by the servitude of men to nature, ignorance, other men, institutions and dogmatic beliefs, it cannot claim to have achieved the goal of 'development'. Servitude in any form reflects a state of underdevelopment.

### **Objective of the Study**

The general aim of this study is to x-ray the great role women play in fostering development and democratic governance with particular reference to the Nigerian polity. Women play notable role in the development of any nation which goes unrecognized while men play crucial partner with the women in this noble role. Specifically, the work tries to:

1. Show the developmental roles women play in our society,
2. Use the 35% affirmative action to discuss the extent the womenfolk are either politically marginalized or represented,
3. Suggest ways on how to improve on women's participation in politics and contribute to national development.

### **Significance of the Study**

The significance of the study lies in the fact that it will:

1. Help to educate the Nigerian leaders on the crucial roles women play in societal and national development.
2. Expose the fact that in spite of the clamors for the 35% affirmative action in Nigeria, women are still not properly represented in the political sphere and there is an urgent need to address the issue.

### **Scope of the Study**

The scope of the study covers the role of women in fostering development and democratic governance in Nigeria with special emphasis on the 35% affirmative action under President Good luck Ebele Jonathan's administration, tracing it from the independent era till the present democratic dispensation. The rationale for this case study is to x-ray all the developmental roles women have played in national development, and the low level of political participation and appointments given to women in Nigeria. In essence, Nigerian leaders and the entire world should see the extent to which Nigerian women are marginalized politically while their potentials are unutilized.

### **Methodology**

This work is a qualitative research. A qualitative research according to McNabb, 2008 is a set of non statistical inquiry techniques for gathering data about social phenomena. They are used for creating understanding for subjective interpretation and for critical analysis as well. Exploratory research strategies were adopted and were used as a means of gathering fundamental information about the level of women's participation in Nigeria's politics, their level of representation and the place of women in our society.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The feminist theory has been adopted for this work. The **Feminist theory** is the extension of feminism into theoretical or philosophical discourse. It aims to understand the nature of gender inequality. It examines women's social roles, experience, interests, and feminist politics in a variety of fields, such as anthropology and sociology, communication, psychoanalysis, economics, literature, education, and philosophy (Chodorow, 1991). Feminist theory focuses on analyzing gender inequality.

### **History of Feminist Theory**

Feminist theories first emerged as early as 1792 in publications such as *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* by Mary Wollstonecraft, In 1851, Sojourner Truth addressed women's rights issues through her publication, "Ain't I a Woman." Sojourner Truth addressed the issue of women having limited rights due to men's flawed perception of women. Truth argued that if a woman of color can perform tasks that were supposedly limited to men, then any woman of any color could perform those same tasks. After her arrest for illegally voting, Susan B. Anthony gave a speech within court in which she addressed the issues of language within the constitution documented in her publication, "Speech after Arrest for Illegal voting" in 1872. Anthony questioned the authoritative principles of the constitution and its male gendered language. She raised the question of why women are accountable to be punished under law but they cannot use the law for their own protection (women could not vote, own property, nor themselves in marriage). She also critiqued the constitution for its male gendered language and questioned why women should have to abide by laws that do not specify women.

### **Literature Review**

#### **Women in Development**

Hegel, the great philosopher, regards women as passive members of the society. Women have been described as an indispensable group in the development of any nation because they constitute half of the world's population, perform nearly two thirds of its work hours, receive one tenth of the world's income, and own less than one hundredth of the world's property (United Nations Report, 1980). The 2006 population census put the number of Nigerian women at 68.3 million which is almost fifty percent of the total population of 140 million, while the men had a population of 71.7 million. (FG official gazette, 2009). In history, even among the most socially advanced nations of the world, the status of women was always seen as inferior to that of men. Not only were women's role secondary, women were, in several cases, totally excluded

from participation in certain activities. In Nigeria for instance, only a small number of exceptional women have achieved prominence on modern political and government spheres. Apart from numerical strength, women have great potentials necessary to evolve a new economic order, to accelerate social and political development and consequently transform the society into a better one. Olowoye, 1985 described the Nigerian woman as a crucial factor of production. According to him, they assume this status because they are largely responsible for the bulk production of crops, agro-based food processing, preservation of crops and distribution of yields from farm centers to urban areas. The importance of women from their roles as managers of homes cannot be quantified. It should be noted that the peace and stability at homes depend largely on the managerial abilities of women folk. Women, especially the mothers, plan, organize, direct and coordinate all the resources of the home-both human and material to the benefits of all the members of the family including their husbands. However, the effective management of the homes promote to a large extent national development but whenever this is lacking, the contrary is usually the case.

In the area of governance, according to Michelle Bachelet, when one woman is a leader, it changes her but when more women are leaders, it changes politics and policies (Afolabi, et al, 2003), and Agbalajobi (2010). Today, women hold political office in some of the richest and most powerful nations in the world. Margaret Thatcher was Prime Minister of the United Kingdom from 1979 to 1990, Angela Merkel became Chancellor of Germany in 2005, Madeleine Albright became the first female Secretary of State of the United States in 1997, and she was followed by Condoleezza Rice, in 2005 and Hillary Rodham Clinton in 2009. In Africa, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of Liberia and Joyce Banda of Malawi became the Continents first and second democratically elected female Presidents in 2005 and 2012, respectively.

While the Beijing platform for action seeks 30percent share of decision-making positions for women, only 16 countries attained this objectives in the 1990s. According to them, the data compiled by the Nation's Economic Commission for Africa, indicates that four countries that came closer to achieving 30percent female decision makers in 1997 were Seychelles (27 percent), South Africa (27percent), Mozambique (25percent) and Eritrea (21 percent), but 36 countries had less than 10percent female representation in government. Recently, South Africa has increased women representation to 27 percent. Albright, the chairman, National Democratic Institute (NDI) (2010) observes that, every country deserves to have the best possible leaders and that means that women have to be given a chance to compete. If they are never allowed to compete in the electoral process, then the countries are really robbing themselves of a great deal of talent. Women influence the society starting from their homes if empowered. In most third world countries, such as Yemen, women lack economic empowerment as well as education and knowledge of their role in politics, seeing that illiteracy among women in Yemen exceeds 70% (Al-Shami, 2013). But their problem is lack of awareness among women which creates extra battles and burdens upon the intellectual women and sometimes mothers and women's relatives stand against any changing/progressive ideas in regard to women's roles and those really capable of changing the society.

In most countries of the world, women were severely under employed. According to the 1971 census in India, women constituted 48.2% of the population but only 13% of economic activity. Women were excluded from many types of formal job including politics. 94% of the

female workforce was engaged in the unorganized sector employed in agriculture, agro-forestry, fishery, handicrafts and so on. With growing awareness of women's issues in the 1970s, development planners began to try to integrate women better into their projects to make them more productive. The Women In Development (WID) approach initially accepted existing social structures in the recipient country and looked at how to better integrate women into existing development initiatives.

In Nigeria for instance, initially, under colonial rule, her economic and political spheres were focused on developing and improving the male gender only. The inequality between men and women in relation to economic, social and political emancipation seem to increase negatively the power play and boost underdevelopment of the nation. The poverty of women folk equates to the poverty of any nation as this has remained the instrument of increase poverty and squalor in our society. Thus in the year 2000, the federal government of Nigeria under General Olusegun Obasanjo formulated a National Policy on Women (Bill of right 1979). This policy is extensive, covering all aspects of women's rights. In the African continent, women's participation and inclusion in governance has been hampered by religious and antiquated traditional believes. These practices, however, define the place of the woman to be in the kitchen. Within the Muslim faithful, women are not to be seen but heard. The purdah in which women are subjected to, has made it difficult for them to extricate themselves from the cleavages of a male dominated world. Conversely, the African traditional belief that women must always play the second fiddle at all gathering remains a bigger burden they must put up with. All these informed the agenda of the 1995 Beijing women's conference in China. Since the end of the conference, the continent has witnessed an unprecedented upsurge of women in politics and participation in governance, as issues articulated keeps radicalizing their minds. Though, the emergence of women politicians in some African countries predates the Beijing Conference, the radical Nigerian women politicians and activists such as, Mrs Olu Fumilayo Ransome-Kuti, Gambo Swenbe, Margret Ekpo and the role played by the glorious Aba women's riot towards the attainment of Nigeria's independence cannot be described as infinitesimal or a mere storm in a tea cup.

Also in the light of the Universal Declaration on Democracy, there has been renewed recognition by international and other agencies promoting good governance processes of the need to support and protect women human rights. These include political, civil, economic, social, and cultural rights as laid out in United Nations, Convention on Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), (Human Right Instrument of 1986). Thus, the right-based approaches are generally associated quite closely with issues relating to gender equality and equity. The affirmative action that had been implemented in Nigeria sought to redress the imbalance, discrimination and under representation since the 1970s. Specifically, the 1979 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria provided the concept of Federal character which remained part of our national discourse and practicalised till date; though it is deficient because it did not take into cognizance gender imbalance.

### **Affirmative Action and the Rights of Women in Nigeria**

Women not only lacked the right to vote, but were deemed unfit for education, were debarred from many occupations, and had no legal right to own property. There has been clear evidence that the representation of women in Nigeria politics is not just below expectation but almost non-

existence. Meanwhile, the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria section 42 (2) provides that; “the composition of the government of the federation or any of its agencies and the conduct of its affairs shall be carried out in such a manner as to reflect the federal character of Nigeria and the need to promote national unity, and also command loyalty, thereby ensuring that there shall be no predominance of persons from a few states or from a few ethnic or other sectional groups in that government or any of its agencies.” The constitution, however, was not explicit in ensuring equal representation on gender bases. It did not take into cognizance the disadvantaged position of women and has no provision for gender equality. The use of affirmative action is not the problem but the practical effects and its linkage to fundamental ideas of fairness and justice. There are three areas that will be emphasized on in the discourse of affirmative action and the rights of woman in Nigeria. They are;

- a) Political participation
- b) Educational pursuit
- c) Employment opportunities

These chosen areas will cover the civil, political and socio-economic rights of women.

### **The Political Arena**

According to Gauba, “Moving towards gender equality is not a technocratic goal---it is a political process---It requires a new way of thinking---in which the stereotyping of women and men gives way to a new philosophy that regards all people, irrespective of gender, as essential agents of change” (Gauba, 2007). Women face numerous obstacles in achieving representation in governance. (UNICEF, 2006). Their participation has been limited by the assumption that women’s proper sphere is the “private” sphere. Whereas the “public” domain is one of political authority and consternation, the “private” realm is associated with the family and the home. By relegating women to the private sphere, their ability to enter the political arena is curtailed. In 1893, New Zealand became the first country in the world to extend the right to vote to all adult women. Australia followed a year later, and was the first country to grant women the right not only to vote, but also to run for public office. Finland was the first European country to grant voting rights to women in 1904, and in 1907 it became the first country in the world to have democratically elected female members of parliament. “Most Western nations adopted women’s voting rights after World War I, with Germany and Great Britain, for example, granting that right in 1918 and the United States in 1920, while women in France had to wait until 1944; Switzerland proved to be a real latecomer, only granting women the right to vote in 1971. “Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) was the first African nation to allow women to vote, in 1919, albeit with a caveat: a husband’s financial status decided whether or not his wife was allowed to vote. “In 1954, women in the eastern regions of Nigeria were allowed to vote, and one year later, the western region followed – as long as the women were taxpayers.

Examining the status of Nigerian women in the political arena cannot be divorced from the consideration of the entire political situation in Nigeria. For the larger part of Nigeria since independence in 1960, Nigeria has been governed by military dictatorship. The military governments were largely male dominated with token appointments given to women. Successive military governments from 1966 to 1999 with a brief spell of civil rule in 1979-83 only further

perpetrated the exclusion of women in governance and decision making process especially in the public sector. Nigerian women were not in the military hierarchy therefore could not be members of the highest legislative and executive body combined in the various military ruling councils. With the adoption of democratic rule in 1999, the position of women has only slightly improved. Although women actively participate in the membership of political parties, they only serve in the lower cadres of social welfare and serve as supporters and cannon fodder for the male to acquire the political positions. As a result of various socio-economic factors only negligible percentage of women contested for the elective posts in 1999.

Politically, women constitute at least 49% of the Nigerian's population (2006 census). Colonialism affected Nigerian woman adversely as they were denied the franchise and very few of them were offered political or administrative appointments. For instance, it was only during the 1950s that three women were appointed into the House of Chiefs, namely, Chief (Mrs) Olufumilayo Ransome-kuti (appointed into the Western Nigeria House of Chiefs); Chief (Mrs.) Margaret Ekpo and Janet Mokelu (both appointed into the Eastern Nigeria House of Chiefs) (Effah 2002). Before Beijing, social consciousness among Nigerian women could be said to be virtually nonexistent. Other women leaders/activists were people like Queen Amina of Zaria, Flora Nwapa, and Hajiya Gambo Sawaba. Of course, we also knew of events such as the Aba Women's Riot of 1929, which was one of the very few struggles for the liberation of womanhood in Nigeria, if not Africa. It is however; wrong to give the impression that since then, Nigerian women have been politically docile or socially inactive, either collectively or individually. There have been other notable Nigerian women leaders and role models such as Kudirat Abiola, Grace Alele-Williams, Bolanle Awe, Hajiya Usman, to mention but a few. It was also only in the 1950s that women in Southern Nigeria were given the franchise. The women's wings of political parties possessed very little functional relevance then.

In the post-colonial era, the role of women in Nigeria's politics did not reflect sufficiently, in terms of appointments to policy making posts until in the recent years when very few women started benefiting from political patronage. For instance, by 1960 in Southern Nigeria, women had the franchise, when Mrs. Wuraola Esan from Western Nigeria became the first female member of the Federal parliament. In 1961, Chief (Mrs) Margaret Ekpo contested elections in Aba Urban constituency under the National Council of Nigerian Citizen (NCNC) platform and won, becoming a member of the Eastern Nigeria House of Assembly until 1966. Mrs. Janet Mokelu and some other also contested elections won and became members of the Eastern House of Assembly.

During the second republic (1979-1983), there was further progress. A few Nigerian women won elections into the House of Representatives at the national level. At the same period, a number of women were appointed Federal Ministers. They were Chief (Mrs.) Janet Akinrinade (Minister for Internal Affairs) and Mrs. Adenice Egun Oyagbela (Minister for National Planning), Mrs. Francisca Yetunde Emmanuel was the only female Permanent Secretary in the Federal Ministry of Establishment and later Federal Ministry of Health). A number of women were appointed commissioners in the states and very few women contested and won elections into the local government councils during this time (Effah, 2002).

All that is now changing fast! The 1995 International Women's Conference, held in Beijing, was a significant turning point for women. The Conference ended with what is now referred to as the

Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, unanimously adopted by 189 countries, including the developing nations of Africa. Nigeria was signatory to this historic agenda for women's empowerment and gender equality. During the third Republic, between 1993 and 1998 two women were appointed Deputy Governors. They were Alhaja Latifat Okunu of Lagos State and Mrs. Pamela Sadauki of Kaduna State. Very few women emerged as councilors. We had only one woman elected into the senate seat. The House of Representative had people like Chief (Mrs.) Florence Ita-Giwa for Calabar constituency. Unfortunately, it is noteworthy that the number and percentage of women who were successful at the polls in 2011 were less than the figure in 2007. The 2007 figure was higher than the figure in the 2003 general elections. The government of President Obasanjo tried to redress this position by appointing nine women as ministers and advisers out of the total of 44 ministers appointed giving the women a boost of 20.5% of appointees in the federal government in his 1999/ 2003 term. The situation was not quite the same at the states and local government levels. Some states such as Ogun State did not appoint any female commissioner throughout the four-year term. The number of women in elective positions only slightly improved with the 2003 general elections. Although there were more political parties registered totaling 28 in number and more women aspirants as a result of political party's decision to waive for the women the payment of pre -registration levies for political aspirants, yet the women who eventually scaled through the election primaries were very few. This resulted in the election of a lower percentage of women into the elective posts at the 2003 elections. There were two female contestants for Presidency and two for the vice presidential positions and none of them was elected. Unlike the 1999 elections where only one Deputy Governor emerged, the 2003 elections witnessed two Deputy Governors. Appointments for ministerial and advisory positions at the federal level by the re-elected Obasanjo Government also boosted women participation with not only an increase in the number of women political appointees but also women holding key ministries such as Finance and Housing.

### **Women's Political Affirmative Action**

The fourth republic which started in May 29<sup>th</sup> 1999 introduced a number of women political appointees. The year 2000 witnessed the introduction of the National Policy on Women. It is a form of affirmative action. It is a fact that women constitute about 50% of every nation's population but they are not so represented in politics and decision making bodies. Affirmative action actually involves equity for every human being. It also refers to federal character and quota system. Affirmative action, however, is rather a subtle systematic and gradual machinery of achieving both equity and liberation without force. It is predicated on government's positive policies and the will to actualize such positive policies (Ikpeze, 2002).

Affirmative Action (AA) also refers to policies that take race, ethnicity or gender into consideration in an attempt to promote equal opportunity in employment, education, public contracting and health programme (Jeffcloth, 2003)). Again, it means positive steps taken to increase the representation of women and minorities in areas of employment, education, and business from which they have been historically excluded. According to the Encarta dictionary, affirmative action is a policy or programme that seeks to redress past discrimination through active measures to ensure equal opportunities in education and employment. In a research conducted in Kaduna with the help of Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and



published by Women in Nigeria (WIN), it showed an example of the 1999 position of the Federal, State and Local Government council regarding electoral positions and party offices. They are as follows:

- 1) Women membership of political parties – 5%,
- 2) Female party executives – 7%,
- 3) Women qualified as party delegates -8%

In elected positions, women make up only 1.6% of total representatives. Thus at (a) local government chairperson 9 out of 774, approximately 1.2% (b) councilors, 143 out of 8,810 approximately (c) States Assembly, 12 women out of 990 -13%, (d) Governors were none out of 36 states – 0%, (e) House of Representative 12 out of 360 – 3.3%, (f) senators, 3 out of 109 – 2.75%, (g) Presidency-none. According to Medeleine Albright, Every country deserves to have the best possible leaders and that means that women have to be given a chance to compete. If they are never allowed to compete in the electoral process then the countries are really robbing themselves of a great deal of talent”. It is generally believed that equitable participation of women in politics and government is essential to building and sustaining democracy. Former President, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo took the bull by the horn when upon assumption of office as well as in his second term, he appointed nine women in his cabinet.

Though, the number was below the 35% benchmark stipulated at the Beijing women’s conference, it was indeed, a good beginning as the likes of Dr. Ngozi Okonjo- Iweala, Professor Joy Ogwu, Dr. Oby Ezekwesili and Dr. Kema Chikwe showed that they were indeed made of steeler stuff. They distinguished themselves in their chosen profession, made great impact in their respective portfolios. Unfortunately, however, his immediate successor, late President Umaru Musa Yar’Adua had only seven female ministers including Prof. Dora Akunyili, Mrs Diezani Alison-Madueke, Prof. Adenike Grange in his cabinet. Again, this number of women so appointed violates the Beijing’s 35% agreement. Ironically, some of them had a brief stay as the then President in 2008 reshuffled his cabinet. However, the battle for women in government predates the administration of President Goodluck Jonathan, but his liberal dispositions toward involving women in government in both elective and appointive positions have become quite evident.

As at today, the number of female appointees in the cabinet represents well over 31 per cent of the 42-member cabinet. The new cabinet led by Dr. Ngozi Okonjo Iweala, Minister of Finance was trusted with the responsibility of overseeing other ministries. Other female members of the cabinet are Mrs Diezani Alison-Madueke – Petroleum Resources, Prof. Ruqayyatu Rufai (formerly in Education), Mrs. Stella Odua Ogiemwonyi (Formerly in Aviation), Mrs Hadiza Ibrahim Mailata (Environment), Mrs Omobola Johnson Olubusola (Communication Technology), Ms Ama Pepple (Lands and Housing), Mrs Sarah Renge Ochekepe (Water Resources), Hajiya Zainab Maina (Women Affairs and Social Development) and Hajiya Zainab Ibrahim Kuchi (Minister of State, Niger Delta Affairs). Others include, Prof. Viola Onwuliri (Minister of State Foreign Affairs), Erelu Olusola Obada (Minister of State, Defence). Also another woman appointed into a very strategic position is the Attorney-General and Minister of Justice of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Hon Justice Aloma Maryam Mukhtar, (GCON) who is the first female (Chief) Justice of Nigeria appointed by the present administration.

According to Lisa Denney, with only nine women senators representing 54 million women in Nigeria, international support should focus on the broader political cycle and the numerous obstacles to women's political participation, rather than on the election of women. President Goodluck Jonathan appointed 33% of cabinet positions to women (up from 10% in the last government), including the ministerial portfolios of finance and education. This is in keeping with Nigeria's commitments to gender equality, encapsulated in the National gender policy, which sets the benchmark for women's seat in parliament at 35% higher than the international standard. Yet this achievement is precisely so remarkable because of the engaging challenges women in Nigeria face in becoming politically active from bottom-up through elections (Denney, 2011).

### **Women and Educational Pursuit**

The great philosopher, Plato postulated that,

Anyone who can produce the perfect blend of the physical and intellectual sides of education and apply them to the training of character is producing music and harmony of far more importance than any mere musician's tuning of strings (Plato, 1955: 176).

Scholars have also reiterated Plato's belief that nature and nurture exerted equal influences on the development of human beings. In his own time, Plato did not find any difference between the sexes in talents and skills, thus condemning the secondary status accorded to women in the society.

John Stuart Mill believes that if women were properly educated, it would not only brighten their dull and impoverished lives, but also enhance society in general. He understood the important point that *equal opportunities in education* meant opportunities in employment. It is a known fact that education brings benefits to the educated in the forms of access to information and more economic and political influence. Education can make women gain more authority in the home and greater control over resources as a prelude to having more say in family decisions. In Nigeria, there are whole disparities between the education that boys and girls receive. Many girls do not have access to adequate education till certain age. Recently, the female adult literacy rate (ages 15 and above) for the country was 59.4%, in comparison with the male adult literacy rate of 74.4% (World Bank report, 2010). It is the differences in education that have led to this gap in literacy. According to the Central Bank of Nigeria report, the gender gap in literacy rates at the rural level between boys and girls was 18.3 percent in favor of the boys overall. However, in the age group 6–9 years (primary school ages) it was only 3.9 percent in favor of boys. (CBN report, 2000). This indicates that there is a gender dimension to educational attainment and development in Nigeria. According to the Examination Council of Nigeria (1994) there are still other problems, such as high drop-out rates of female students, poor performance, reluctance on the part of female students to enroll in science based courses and poor classroom participation. Across various geo-political delineations in Nigeria, a greater percentage of school-age girls are needlessly out-of-school, compared with the ratio applicable to boys of same age grouping. (Adeniran, 2007).

### **Reasons for the Disparity**

There are various cultural and socio-economic issues that prevent women from having adequate access to education. In the first instance, an average illiterate parent in Nigeria believes that girls are “export products”, a property of the man. Therefore training a girl is a waste because it means preparing her for her future husband whom they believe will be a total loss for the parents. But Marshall has argued that,

No act of possession can ever be exercised on a person; it is as unjust to possess a woman exclusively as it is to possess slaves; all human beings are born free and with equal rights; let us never forget that, consequently no sex can have a legitimate right to the exclusive possession of another and no sex or class can possess the other exclusively ( Marshall 1992:148).

Obasi, identified a host of constraints with 'Nigerian tradition' being named as top on the list. The 'Nigerian tradition' was explained as a tradition that attaches higher value to a man than a woman, whose place is believed to be the kitchen (Obasi, 1997). A study by the University of Ibadan linked the imbalance in boys' and girls' participation in schooling to the long-held belief in male superiority and female subordination (Uwakwe, et al 2008). This situation was further aggravated by patriarchal practices which gave girls no traditional rights to succession. Therefore, the same patriarchal practices encouraged preference to be given to the education of a boy rather than a girl. The decline in economic activities since the early 1980s has made education a luxury to many Nigerians, especially those in rural areas. Because some Nigerian parents are known to invest in children according to sex, birth order or natural endowments, girls and boys are not exact substitutes (Adeniran et al, 2007).

The position of women in education in post colonial Nigeria has not improved much. At the beginning of colonialism and Christianity, rigid ideals about gender perceptions were imposed on the African mind. Thereafter, the woman's role has come to be limited to sexual and commercial labour; satisfying the sexual needs of men, working in the fields, carrying loads, tending babies and preparing food ( Hammond et al, 1992). The disempowering colonial 'ideology of domesticity' as espoused by the practice of 'housewifification' provided the springboard for women's educational imbalance in parts of Africa (Gaidzwanwa, 1992). As such, the overall human development in Nigeria is being hindered by this unevenness in educational accessibility across gender categories (Abdulahi, 2000). The Nigerian society (both historical and contemporary) has been dotted with peculiar cultural practices that are potently hurtful to women's emancipation, such as early/forced marriage, wife-inheritance and widowhood practices.

### **Women in the Workplace**

So many issues concerning inequality between co-workers especially women exist in the workplace. Women have been in the work force for so many years. Issues that usually lead to discrimination among women in business usually include her ability to rise in the ranking system. Ever wonder why millions of companies worldwide only have men as presidents or CEOs? This is probably because of the fact that there are invisible barriers that hinder women's abilities to rise in ranks. Initially, women were only found at home doing chores and leaving the money making to the men. After many years of women empowerment, women's rights have

been changed for the better. As society becomes more adept of the fact that women are capable of everything, sexual discrimination of women in business is gradually decreasing. In fact, millions of women are starting and governing their own businesses. This clearly contradicts the image of women as victims fraught against workplace discrimination.

Nigerian women have excelled in certain fields where they have contributed immensely to National development. Like in business especially in the bulking, transportation, exchange and distribution of food stuff. According to Mabogunje (1991), all over Nigeria, especially in the Southern parts, periodic markets are held every fourth, fifth or eight day where food stuffs from farm are brought by rural women and sold to the urban women. So regular and efficient has this process been that most urban Nigerians are not even aware of how foodstuff ends up in their kitchens. Women mostly explore most of the interior and remote areas where these food are produced, transport them to the cities where they sell it and make their money. From these proceeds, most families feed on it. The same unobtrusive efficiency characterizes women's participation in the trade on imported food items and beverages. Women have also been prominent in Nigeria in the processing and public preparation of food items generally. In various crafts and cottage industries and in the provision of various services such as hair dressing, laundry, restaurants and running of public drinking places, women have equally excelled (Mabogunje, 1991).

Many women co-operative societies and unions have been formed and registered. These co-operatives are mostly multipurpose societies that engage in various activities. For instance, those in farming areas engage in things like garri processing, fish smoking, hiring of tractors for extensive farming etc. some engage in skill acquisition programmes like tie and dye, serving, knitting, bead making, hairdressing and many other skills. Research has also shown that many women now own private schools in Nigeria. Most private nursery, primary and secondary schools around are operated and owned by women. These women operate it very efficiently and excellently too. In the field of academics, we now have many women Professors and Doctors teaching in various fields and professions in many universities across the nation.

### **The Cultural Role of Women**

Culture varies widely with respect to the roles they assign to different sexes. While one job may be regarded as a man's job in one society, it may be regarded as women's job in another. This division is with the exception of child bearing. Child bearing is one constant factor that determines the division of labour in pre-industrial societies.

In the olden days, women's presence at social gatherings was either nonexistent or very restricted. In modern times, women are appearing at all levels in offices. In areas like Banking, Medicine, radio broadcasting, and television houses and in professions like teaching, engineering, environmental design, law, pharmacy, and even veterinary medicine and as pilots. Statutory and Islamic law provides for women's capacity to inherit assets following the husband's death. In practice this is often time overridden by local customary laws on succession. Widows are most times subjected to severe social, cultural and economic sanctions. These may

involve both physical and psychological violence. Under customary law, a woman and her children are the chattels of a man who is the head of the family saddled with the responsibilities to provide for them. The concept of co-ownership is rare in Nigerian culture; the presumption is that all the properties belong to the man, even where the women contribute financially and in kind to the acquisition of the property. The plight of a widow is made worse by the humiliating widowhood rites, which include requesting a woman to drink from the water, used in bathing the corpse of her husband especially when it is suspected that she has a hand in the death of her husband. In many cases, widows are also expected to go into confinement for weeks to prove their innocence from any possibility of complicity in their husband's death. Some widows are beaten for not wailing enough for the death of their husband. The above examples are common in the Eastern part of Nigeria.

### **Conclusion**

Women, even though constrained, are the main custodian of social, cultural and rudimental values of a society. But in spite of the imposed constraints on the Nigerian women, there is overwhelming evidence from what have been discussed in this work that they are formidable productive force in our society and a store of credible human resources which are required for national development. They can dictate the pace and direction of the economy and the society with their numerical strength and intelligence if given the opportunity. Affirmative action aims at remedying these discriminatory practices or compensating past discriminatory practices or forestalling institution of any discriminatory agenda. It also encourages and strives to maintain equality in the distribution of economic resources in all ramifications. Women, therefore, must be alert to advocate such legislations as rights issue do not come so easy especially when it is gender related. At times there may be need for a revolution or rebellion. The men folk must also view humanity in the totality of equality of men and women for any meaningful sustainable development to be achieved.

Today, in comparison to men, women are under-represented in governments around the world. However, women are increasingly being elected to head National and Sub-National governments. More than 20 countries currently have a woman as the Head of State/Government, and the global participation of women in national parliaments is just about 20%. A number of countries are exploring measures that may increase women's participation in government at all levels, from local to national. I am pleased that Nigeria is one of those countries.

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