

## **WOMEN IN THE POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT OF NIGERIA: THE GOODLUCK JONATHAN PRESIDENCY**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The contributions of women in the socio-political and economic development of women had often been sidelined or totally neglected in the history of Nigeria. It is time for continual advocacy of the role of woman in the transformation of the nation. Hitherto, the contributions of women in the economic, child rearing and management of the home has been documented in some areas of our nation. Only a few communities had projected the political contribution of women their societies in the pre-colonial and colonial period. The post independent period saw little documentation of the political contribution of women in Nigeria. However, the period 2011 – 2015 witness more women playing key roles in the political equation of the nation. The relevance of the womenfolk has never been more felt during the Jonathan administration. This no doubt could be attributed to the education and empowerment of women. This paper examines the contribution of women through the period to the Jonathan Presidency.*

**Keywords:** *women, Nigeria, Jonathan Presidency, political contribution*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Women participation in the development of their communities. No human society is complete without women. God did not stop creation until women came on board. When women are marginalized, sustainable development cannot be attained by any society. Women are meant to be acknowledged and appreciated. After all, they make up almost half of the world's population, and a whopping 49.1%, according to the World Bank statistics for 2014. Any society which neglects such a vast man-power potential cannot attain any meaningful development. From creation, women have been industrious and resourceful, engaging in various activities like *garrri* processing, soap production, palm-oil extraction, weaving, sewing and pottery making. They were also largely involved with farming activities. They performed all these tasks dutifully, together with their role of procreation, childcare and house-keeping. The role of women in the society cannot be over-emphasized. As a result, the United Nations Organization (UNO), up a commission

to improve the status of women in the educational, cultural, political, economic, and social spheres all over the world. This occurred in 1946. Development in the context of this work has to do with the transformation of the entire society through total mobilization of every member of the society, regardless of sex. It also demands a complete re-orientation of the mindset of every individual, both male and female. This kind of development is such that is opposed to any form of obstacle whether political, economic or sociological in the process of transformation. This premise is hinged on the fact that there shall be no meaningful development of any nation where development indices is gender stereo-typed. This is because for genuine national development to be attained there is need for both men and women to complement each other as each has specific role to play. Concept of development in this context is based on Anglo-American perspective which Afigbo (cited in Amucheazi, 2001) itemized into five components among which is eliminating inequality. It is the view of this paper that if gender equality treaties and covenants are effectively implemented in Nigerian national development will be easily idealized.

### **Women Status in Pre-colonial Era**

Education in the pre-colonial era was largely indigenous and informal. It followed the natural course of growth and development. It was the local knowledge that was unique to societal norms and traditions. Indigenous knowledge involved those experiences, practices, customs, insights and skills applied by the people of a particular traditional group to maintain their livelihood and to sustain their community. The type of education the individual receives in the traditional society is based on gender stereotype. A girl-child in the pre-colonial era as in the traditional setting today was expected to learn the skills that would make her mature into the role of a responsible adult woman. This simply means that gender role was pre-determined by the sex of a person. While female children were exposed to socially imposed responsibilities of motherhood and domesticity, to embrace the characteristics of motherhood which are rooted in the domestic functions reserved for her sex, her male counterparts were oriented and trained to perform the roles expected of men according to culture and tradition.

Despite the domestication of women's role in the pre-colonial era, women still had strong influences in political and economic spheres and other related areas. The virtues exhibited by some women Amazons like Queen Amina of Zaria, Moremi of Ife and Queen Kampa in Opobo Kingdom in pre-colonial society are attestations to this fact. From inference, we could safely assume that the elder women in the pre-colonial era, apart from training the younger ones on skills of child rearing and home management, also passed down the skills of economic and political development. Women all over the world, especially in Africa, during the pre-colonial era apart from their domestic role as mothers, made immense contributions in areas of farming, trade and distribution as well as the local craft and industry. Apart from this, women in the pre-colonial period also acquired certain political skills that enabled them to some extent carry out certain political functions which helped to shape pre-colonial political infrastructures.

Nigerian women during the pre-colonial era participated actively in politics. We have a good number of examples of the effective political participation of Nigerian women. Some are as follows: Among the Igbos, the institution of Umuada have definite rituals and political role to play in the village; Among other Ika Igbo women and Ossamari there was unique involvement in local politics; Among the Yorubas, women actively participated in politics, for instance, Moremi stepped into political warfare singlehandedly and saved her society and Idia king's mother was the first to have her own separate court with the same royal paraphernalia as the Oba, in Lagos and Abeokuta, Queen Kampa was economically powerful to the extent of controlling her own settlement in Kampa in Opobo Kingdom. In Bonny Kingdom, the exploits of Queen Karibasa (Kambasa) has not been forgotten (Jaja, 1999). Madam Tinubu showed power of the traditional Yoruba woman in the political life of her society prior to 1914. In Hausa land, there are records of women who held titles and offices like the Iya, Magajiya and Mardani. As title holders they held outstanding positions in the society like their male counterparts. (Ikejiani 2001: 21-22).

Judging from the above experiences, one could infer that even though the society stereotyped women's role to mere household keeping and childbearing, women in the pre-colonial period did not limit themselves to those stereotypes, rather they competed with their male counterparts in economic, social and political spheres. This is no doubt as a result of experiences acquired from their environment which was passed unto the younger women folk.

### **Women Status in Colonial Era**

Western education was similar to informal education based on the fact that it also allowed for gender-stereotyping. Western type of education was introduced for the purpose of preparing boys for available job opportunities within the system, such opportunities required recipients to live away from their homes. Ezeani (1998:100) posited that "the basic premise of the colonial gender ideology was therefore, the domestication of women. They were not to function in the public domain like the men". He further maintained that the purpose of education was to enable men acquire skills that help them to serve in public offices. This view was stated as follows: When western-type education was initially introduced, it was considered useful only because it prepared boys to be able to qualify for employment as clerks, interpreters, teachers, catechists, evangelists, stewards, cooks etc for government offices commercial houses and missionaries Girls were not considered fit for such employment opportunities. (Onwuka 2008: 53).

It is pertinent to point out that in the process of time, few educated men who were teachers, clerks and catechists who knew the value of western education in human development, encouraged their wives to go to school. In order to encourage girls' enrolment in schools some school proprietors and missionary schools initially allowed girls to attend school without paying fees, while some allowed them half of the fees paid by boys. Schools that were established for girls then, were just to prepare them to be good mothers, wives and not to be seen in public life.

As we have earlier mentioned, despite the stereotype role of women in the traditional society, women still compete with their male counterparts in all spheres of life. On the contrary, the western- education brought sharp dichotomy or contradiction in the women's role. This however, uplifted men in the social ladder and relegated women. This trend constituted a setback in the development of Nigeria. Development cannot be tied to a particular sex or measured separately with regard to the different sexes. No one sex is too important in the issue of development and no sex should be excluded. The virtues deposited in womenfolk at creation, if thoroughly nurtured will help in no small measure the development of the entire society.

Considering the innate ability of African women it could be safely assumed that the colonial master decided to disenfranchise them by denying them the right to education. During the colonial period, women were prevented from making their contributions to the development of their society. It is of note that economic and political suppression of women in the colonial era gave rise to Igbo women's protest in Eastern Nigeria in 1929. This situation however, is against Palmer and Almazi (1991) and Anugwom (2009) who maintained that, socio-economic improvement of nations can be achieved through the acquisition of education and broad empowerment of women. However, despite the obnoxious policies of the colonial administration women vehemently rejected the whole colonial order. The political and economic force of women in colonial time was described as thus:

*"These women employed their traditional organization...to mobilize all women in most part of Aba, Owerri and Opobo etc; in order to assert their rights politically as had been during the pre-colonial era".*

The active role played by Madam Tinubu, Mrs Ransome-Kuti and others in mobilizing women against taxation cannot be forgotten.

### **Women Status in Post Colonial Era**

Education is seen as a powerful instrument through which national development can be attained (Federal 2004). Education in this sense has no gender or sex attachment. This is because the type of development referred to in this work requires the active participation of all members of the society, men and women alike. The task of nation building demands that all hands should be on deck in order to initiate ideas, make plans and participate in their actual implementation. For maximum contribution towards national development in technology and positive outcome, both men and women should be equally interested in science and arts subjects (Kano 1995). The both sexes (male and female) are highly relevant in national development. This is why "gender equality and women empowerment continue to be a central theme in global treaties, covenants and declarations because they are now acknowledged as important to people-centred development.

On seeing that education is one of the powerful instruments of empowering women with the knowledge and skills that would help them to participate actively in the development process, Nigeria became a signatory to the United Nations

1979 convention known as Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)). This convention has variously been described as the “Bible of women empowerment” and “Women’s International Bill of Rights”. Despite the effort of various governments to close the gap created by gender discrimination, there still exists wide gap between men and women in public life and in all sectors. A lot of traditional and cultural factors have been claimed to be limiting women educationally and economically among other opportunities. These cultural practices that constituted a lot of barriers to women educational opportunities are all embedded in political, economic and religious realities of the people (Ozigbohi 1998).

Judging from the situation narrated above it could be argued that at the pre-colonial stage women in their own circle were able to acquire knowledge and skills that helped them to compete with their male counterpart in all spheres of life. One can therefore argue that the decline in women education could be traced to the discriminatory policy in education and training given by the early Europeans (Boserup) The Nigerian women have done a lot to escape cultural prejudice and male chauvinism that inhibited their progress. The women most of the time, tend to work in groups to enable them overcome discrimination and marginalization by the men-folk. They pull their meagre resources together and are able to provide social services, infrastructure in their communities and thereby promote development and community solidarity.

Women form Non Governmental Organizations ( NGOs) to fight obnoxious economic policies that are against women such as political participation, legal status, child marriage and “osu” (caste) system. One of such important women groups is the National Council for Women Society (NCWS), made up of educated and influential women. Their objective is to assist women groups in the rural areas and equip them with basic education on how to be self reliant and thereby play important roles in their homes as mothers and contribute to nation building. The council set up scholarship schemes and skill acquisition centres for indigent girls of school age. They have done a lot to enable the present generation escape the unfortunate experience of their predecessors by setting up hostels for young girls to make school accessible to them. The NCWS saw education as a potent tool for the upliftment of women socio-economic status, thus the NCWS became the “spokesman” on matters affecting women in Nigeria. The women on their part have embraced the opportunity given by both Federal and state governments by attending adult education classes at the centres established by the government to learn how to read and write and acquire other skills.

Some women groups especially in the rural areas undertake and complete such projects as pipe borne water schemes, bore holes, and repair of toilets in their locality. It could be said without much contradiction that in the post colonial era the status of women have fairly improved. Women have strived to overcome discrimination through education. It is a common feature in Nigeria to see women in very highly placed positions. Some are medical doctors, pilots, pharmacists, architects, university dons of all ranks including professors, bankers, media women and even business tycoons. Nigerian women have indeed ventured into male dominated professions which include aviation, armed forces among others. In

fact in all spheres of life women are there working both in Nigeria and in many other countries contributing to socio-economic development. Access to education has gone a long way in making Nigerian women realize their potentials. In the informal sector of the economy, the rural women have made impact in food crop production, processing, distribution and animal husbandry.

### **Women in the Jonathan Presidency 2011 - 2015**

Even though Nigerian women have had a colourful history of achievements that could rival that of the men, female participation in governance has been far from satisfactory. Nigeria could be seen as a male-dominated, chauvinistic society, stifled by culture, tradition social rankings that make the Indian caste system look feeble. Women are still looked upon as second-class citizens, objects of desire or mere domestic helps. Social, economic, cultural and religious factors are largely responsible for women's marginalization in politics, particularly in the Muslim-dominated part of the country where politics is seen as a men's exclusive preserve.

In a bid to implement the 35% affirmative action provided for in Nigeria's National Gender Policy, gender activists and civil society organizations such as the National Coalition on Affirmative Action have organized programmes on advocacy, training and research on affirmative action to encourage female political participation. set an unprecedented record in governance, by implementing a feminine gender-friendly policy. Since the inception of the Jonathan administration, there has obviously been a paradigm shift to favour the active participation of more women in key government positions. To fully appreciate the magnitude of this positive development made under President Goodluck Jonathan, we only need to compare the levels of women participation in governance before his administration and now. The implementation of Jonathan's Gender Policy has also resulted in an increase in women's representation in Government from 10% in 2011 to over 33% 2013, with the appointment of 13 female Ministers out of 42, representing 31% and 4 Special Advisers out of 18, representing 23%. These appointments have set the stage for the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) target number three on Gender Equity and Women Empowerment.

Outside politics, two micro-credit schemes have been set up to assist women: (1) the Women Fund for Economic Empowerment (WOFEE), in collaboration with the Bank of Agriculture and the State Governments and (2) the Business Development Fund for Women (BUDFOW), in collaboration with the Bank of Industry. The two schemes are revolving facilities with an interest rate of 10%. In addition to these efforts, 77 skill acquisition centres have been constructed and equipped across the country to increase income generation, through job creation, for women, especially at the grassroots level. A recent research, conducted and published in a book, titled *Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, Champion for Women*, shows that Nigeria was 23<sup>rd</sup> out of 188 countries studied, in terms of women mobilization, appointment into positions, participation in governance and women empowerment.

President Jonathan's passionate drive to transform the lives of Nigerian women and improve their welfare and opportunities is tied to his marriage to a

remarkable woman, Dame Patience Jonathan, who is endowed with some of the greatest human attributes and who is a natural mobilizer of women. The President has, in his private and public life, benefitted immensely from his wife's virtues. It is generally acknowledged, for instance, that it was Dame Jonathan's mobilization efforts that secured Jonathan the massive votes of Nigerian women during the 2011 Presidential election.

The 2011 experience was enough for Jonathan to consolidate his faith in the qualities of Nigerian women. He did not entertain any doubt whatsoever about their character, capacity and competence in playing any role in the land, whether political, technical or administrative. That is the reason behind Jonathan's Policy of Gender Equality and why, as some Nigerians would say "the President has surrounded himself with women and entrusted them with some of the most critical and sensitive positions."

The good thing is that Jonathan's confidence in Nigerian women has not been misplaced. Some of his administration's greatest achievements, since he came into office, have been in Ministries, Parastatals and Departments manned by women. For example, since the inception of the Jonathan administration, the national economy has been strong and steady. A recent forecast by the IMF has it that the Nigerian economy will grow by an average of 7.3% in 2014, which is an improvement on the 6.7% average of 2013. The person who has been working hard to ensure this resilience of the national economy is a woman, Dr. Okonjo-Iweala, the Coordinating Minister for the Economy and Minister of Finance. Another success story of the Jonathan administration is the Aviation Sector, which has been remarkably transformed all over the country. Again, this monumental feat was achieved by yet another woman, Mrs. Stella Oduah, former Minister of Aviation. Nigerian women, serving in various other capacities, have not been less successful in performance.

Several news media around the globe have carried reports on the increasing level of women empowerment in Nigeria; this is to the president's credit. Under this administration, women in Nigeria have achieved an impressive level of participation in our socio-economic life. Even more encouraging is that this achievement has extended towards politics as well. More and more women are getting involved in politics these days. We have more women aspiring for public office and even more women actively forming a remarkable body of the electorate. More women lobbyists and activists are springing up too; giving expression to the needs of the people, but that is just an aside.

On the side of governance, the federal government, under the leadership of Mr. President ensured that entrenched in his Transformation Agenda is a National Gender Policy in which women empowerment in politics forms a crucial constituent. The government has so far ensured that there is growing awareness among women on the possibilities that lie ahead of them in active participation in politics and governance. To further encourage women to actively get involved, a Political Trust Fund has been established to support women aspiring for political position.

President Jonathan is a leader who has such implicit faith in Nigerian women; and Nigerian women have delivered. With the execution of his Gender Policy, we

have witnessed an increase in women's representation in government from 10% in 2011 to 35% in 2013. He has employed three female Justices in the Supreme Court; 16 female heads of ministries; nine female special advisers; 12 female permanent secretaries, 26 female heads of federal government parastatals; 29 female federal commissioners; 16 female heads of federal tertiary institutions; four female representatives in international multi-lateral organizations and 12 female ambassadors and high commissioners. This is commendable indeed.

The Jonathan administration has also recorded a number of "firsts". Under his tenure, we have witnessed Nigeria's first female Rear Admiral- Itunu Hotonou. We have also recorded the first female Air force pilot- Blessing Liman. It is also of note that the Nigerian Defence Academy began admitting females for the first time since its inception, during the Jonathan administration. Undoubtedly, President Jonathan is genuinely interested in development of the average Nigerian society through the empowerment and emancipation of the women-folk.

### **An Overview of Women in National Development**

This paper recognizes the collaborative effort of both sexes on developmental issues. We should be mindful that the development of any human society is determined by the effort and commitment of its members irrespective of age, sex or class. In the development process everyone is carried along. Contributions of women to national development all over the world and Africa in particular are a global reality. In the pre-colonial era, women were not only equipped with the skill of child rearing and home management but were equally equipped with political, social, economic skills which they acquired through intuition and oral tradition. In line with the above view Mannahein and Stewart (cited in Ojeh, 2007: 28) noted that "women helped significantly to shape the mental and attitudinal infrastructures of a pre-colonial past". In view of the natural potentials, influence, numerical strength and indispensability of women in every society, we can deduce that women need adequate formal education to enable them face challenges of changing global economy. In the same vein Onwuka (2008:57) maintained that "educated women are crucial in the development of any nation. Uneducated women are not only a hell on earth, but a real inhibitor of progress.

The importance of women in development has been articulated in the human rights document edited by Ezeilo (2008: 324) as in the following lines:

*"The empowerment and autonomy of women and the improvement of their political, social, economic and health status is essential for the achievement of sustainable development". Similar to this is a statement incorporated in Women Advocates Research and Documentation Centre (WARDC 2003: 38) which stated that "without the active participation of women and incorporation of women's perspectives in all levels of decision-making, the goals of equality development and peace cannot be achieved".*

From the above statements, we can deduce that exclusion of women in any development indices would be highly detrimental to progress and development.



## CONCLUSION

Women have been noted to have potentials that are necessary for development. However, they are still denied certain rights due to some psychological, sociological, cultural and traditional factors. The Jonathan administration has worked assiduously to correct the lopsidedness caused by insufficient participation of women in political development. Tremendous improvement in women involvement in some sectors has occurred under President Jonathan's administration but the change must be sustained, in order to ensure a vibrant society.

To encourage women to contribute to national development requires certain policies, special laws and creative programmes that will free them from certain legal impediments to their participation in public life. Having considered women as potential tools in developmental processes, and the impact they have created through traditional education, it is essential for any government to create enabling conditions and a conducive environment that will ensure the participation of women in all spheres of the society, including politics. President Jonathan has succeeded where other governments have failed. His achievements in recognizing the role of women and encouraging their active participation in governance has surpassed that of any other administration in Nigeria.

Not only have they participated, they have been largely successful in their fields. The current Minister of Finance and Coordinating Minister of the Economy, Dr Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala has been listed by Forbes as one of the most influential people in the world, and one of the unsung heroes. Her counterpart in the Ministry of Petroleum, Mrs Diezani Allison-Madueke is the first ever female president of OPEC.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

**In view of all this, the following recommendations are made;**

- All tiers of government should actively support and empower the women.
- Emphasis should be placed on girl-child education.
- Waivers should be in place for women in male-dominated areas like business and politics.
- Federal, state and local governments should work hand in hand to support the effective implementation of women programmes and policies in the country.
- Where necessary, the legislative arm of government should work towards passing more woman-friendly bills.
- Educated women should work hard to ensure that they raise social awareness of large number of women in the rural areas, through effective programmes that are educative, (indigenous knowledge system) and mass communication as these will help to improve their self confidence.

- Women forums whether in the city or rural areas should be effectively utilized as 'classroom' to educate the illiterate ones among them on skills, knowledge and values that will help them to improve their social, economic and political life style.

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