

Strengthening Policy Implementation: A Look at Women's Political Participation in Decision Making in Nigeria

EDOBOR, Emily Aimiulimhe

Department of Sociology, Faculty of Social Sciences, Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma Edo State
Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This paper situates itself on Nigerian women and their contributions to the political process of decision making and policy implementation since the beginning of the fourth republic. Drawing from the participation of women in political decision making from the elections of 2003, 2007, 2011 and 2015, it is obvious that Nigerian women at all levels are politically active but unfortunately, this does not reflect in the number of women voted into elective offices. The result being that, it falls far below the expected required standard of 30% United Nations benchmark for affirmative action and 35% affirmative action of the National Gender Policy 2006 in Nigeria. With this observation therefore, it is obvious that there are still impediments in the process of women's participation in politics despite the level of mobilisation from various quarters. This paper intends to ascertain if the absence of women in positions of decision making affects policy formation and implementation and also to find out if women's political participation in decision making can strengthen policy implementation. This paper relied on secondary data collected from the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), for the years under review and concludes that for there to be a strengthened policy making and policy implementation in the Nigerian society, women have to be at the centre of political decision and policy making/implementation process.

Keywords: women, political participation, decision making, policy implementation, policy making

INTRODUCTION

The subject of women's political participation has been an issue of much academic and social discourse among scholars and social commentators alike (Tamale 2000, Sibonokuhle and Sani 2013). It has also been acknowledged that the level of women's political participation in positions of decision making can facilitate their being involved in policy making and policy implementation that is fraught with a myriad of issues which include our culture of patriarchy, religion, poverty, funding among many others (Luka 2011). Women form the bulk of political party supporters and they participate actively in the political process making them more than 60% of voters in any election held in Nigeria. In fact in Nigeria, women's political roles have contributed immensely to shaping of the Nigerian political process, not only in democratic governance, but also in pre-colonial era as observed by Esidene and Abdul (2013).

With this input, the expectation is that women would have attained a very high degree of political presence in elective positions but unfortunately it has not been so. Instead a yawning gap exists where they should have been, the 35% affirmative action policy notwithstanding. The factors above have in one way or the other created a vacuum which has led to dearth of the political will to enact humane policies. The question therefore is does the absence of women in positions of decision making affect policy formation and implementation? Can women's political participation in decision making strengthen policy implementation? These and others are the questions this study intends to unravel.

WOMEN POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND DECISION MAKING: A REVIEW

Nigeria's present democratic process started in 1999 and since then, we have had an unbroken chain of

transition from one democratic government to another. In spite of our new-found stability in democratic governance, women though have held some positions in government but these positions are far apart. Most of the elective and even appointive positions are male dominated. This is as a result of the political space being highly androcentric (*men's exclusive club*) in nature making it difficult for women to fully participate in politics (Tripp, 1999). This has created a situation where women find it almost impossible to go in; leading to the inability of the nation to adequately harness their potentials for socio-economic development of the nation. The former United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan clearly stated that 'no government can claim to be democratic until women are guaranteed the right to equal representation' (Donli 2009).

This equal representation is lacking in all spheres of our political life. Although, the written constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria makes provision for equality and equal representation of all irrespective of gender, this is not the case in reality (Agbebaku, 2012). The constitutional provision notwithstanding, women find it a herculean task surmounting the barriers placed on them by society. These barriers as Achunine (2004) enumerated are lack of access to mentors/sponsors; lack of educational potentials and qualification; job conflict with women's natural role as homemakers; stereotypes on women; role of association/organisation; composition of selection committees and lack of self-confidence and self-esteem, on the part of women because of the dependent socialisation process which they were and are still exposed to.

Despite the various conventions, conferences and agreements at the Beijing platform for Action, on the need to uplift and upgrade the status of women politically by applying the Affirmative Action of thirty percent (30%) the situation remains unchanged. Rather we find men deliberating, taking decisions and making policies on women's issue even when they do not understand how the shoe pinches. This has led to non-implementation of such policies and most often huge amounts of money and energy are expounded and wasted. For there to be a well-articulated policy making and policy implementation system, the United Nations demanded that there be an 'increased representation of women at decision making levels' Donli (2009), so that women's input in decision making and especially those that affect them would be incorporated into the decision/policy making as well as policy implementation process. It is believed that when women begin to be more involved in the policy and decision making for a, policies which would empower and positively uplift women and the society at large would begin to take root. This would strengthen policy implementation as well as solving the problem of parity. It is therefore important that to recognize that parity is an important tool in strengthening policy implementation. For instance, some nations that have achieved a level of parity for women around the world such as Sweden which has attained 50% participation of women in decision making in public sector Kenya 30%, Gambia 21% and Uganda 29.6% (Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), 2015). Have been able to do this through a deliberate policy and commitment of their governments to implement the international agreements signed by them (Tamale 2000, Onsongo 2009 and Kolawole, Abubakar, Owonibi and Adebayo 2012). It is also significant to note that Rwanda with about 50% women in their parliament has been able to implement policies that have led to rapid development of the nation in spite of having been ravaged by a war that devastated the socio-economic fabric of the society some years back. (Sibonokuhle, and Sani, 2013). Empirical evidence in these nations mentioned above indicate a tacit and deliberate measure taken by the governments to strengthen their policies and implementation by not leaving any stone unturned. Bringing all hands on deck to enhance the quality of life of their people.

The scenario in Nigeria is different because as a nation in spite the governments agreement on paper with the publication of the National Gender Policy in 2006, no significant efforts have been made for more women to be part of the decision making process. This is not encouraging despite the fact that women form almost half the total population of the nation (NPC, 2006). It is pertinent to note that the constitutional review of 2014, termed national conference which was inaugurated on the 6th of April 2014, had a total of

492 delegates including women. Although, the number and percentage of women to men delegates of 61 women, 12.4% and 431 men, 87.6% (www.nigerianationalconference2014.org) is not a proportionate number when compared to the population figure of women to men in Nigeria, this is a huge improvement on previous conferences such as the constitutional review of 1979 which had 49 delegates all male (Eguavoen and Ebalu 2007). Despite this improvement, it is a significant fact from the records of the National Conference that while each of the 36 states of the federation sent 3 delegates each, 34 states each had a female delegate while Edo and Delta states sent an all-male delegate (see table 1).

On her part, the Nigerian government in 2000 prepared a policy document known as the National Women's Policy in which the 30 percent United Nations minimum representation for women in politics and decision making was highlighted as one of the objectives. In spite of this, the elections held in 2003 did not show any consideration of the policy for women even within the political parties as all the political parties fielded men as their candidates for most positions. As such, the 2003 elections had very few women in elective positions. For example, women occupied 4 seats of the 109 seats that were available in the Senate, and 21 seats out of 360 seats available in the House of Representatives. At the state level it was not different as there was no female governor in any of the 36 states of the federation. The States Houses of Assemblies had 40 women as against 950 men, the local government areas which would seem to be where women would have held sway had only 15 women as chairpersons of the available 774 seats. Women councillors were 267 of the available 6368 seats (Okoronkwo-Chukwu, 2013). It was as a result of this, that the Women Rights Advancement and Protection Alternative (WRAPA) an NGO sought audience with President Olusegun Obasanjo complaining of the non- implementation of the 30 percent affirmative action. While sympathizing with the plight of women, he advised that women should work towards a constitutional amendment to facilitate 15% representation for women as the 30% international benchmark is too ambitious for the moment' WRAPA (2003). This according to Kolawole, et al (2012), 'probably explains why there was little or no effort on the part of government to implement the international agreements and instruments signed by Nigeria. By 2006, the National Women's Policy was replaced by the National Gender Policy in the forward to the National Gender Policy, the Minister of Women Affairs and Social Development, Mrs I.M. Ciroma, wrote that,

"Nigeria as a member of the United Nations signed and ratified the various relevant international instruments, treaties and conventions without reservation. These instruments have always emphasized that member nations put in place all necessary mechanisms needed to eliminate gender discriminations, ensure equality and human dignity to all, men and women. Yet there persists discrimination in national and state statutes, customary and religious laws. We all know that in Nigeria, traditions, customs sexual stereotyping of social roles and cultural prejudice continue to militate against enjoyment of rights and full participation of women on an equal basis with men in national development. The National Gender Policy, which supersedes and replaces the erstwhile National Policy on Women, would help to eliminate all such barriers" (FMWA, 2006).

Thus Objective 5, of the policy document increased affirmative action for women to 35% in order to bridge gender gaps in political representation in both elective and appointive posts at all levels by 2015. The change of name had little impact on the elections of the following year. The elections of 2007 witnessed some improvements in the number of women elected into the Senate. For instance, of the 109 seats in the Senate women won 9, out of the 360 seats at the House of Representatives, 27 were secured by women. At the State Houses of Assemblies, 57 of the 990 seats were won by women, while 27 were elected as local government chairpersons. There was a setback in the number of councillors elected as women won 235 seats of the 6368 available seats compared to the seats won in 2003. Irabor, (2011) and Okoronkwo-Chukwu, 2013). This decline continued during the elections of 2011 wherein most of the seats gained were lost to the extent that at the local government level, there was no female chairperson, same for councillors, though states which had elections in later years had some women chairpersons and councillors. The general elections conducted in 2015 did not fare well.(see table 2 and chart 1 for details).

THE CONCEPT OF POLICY

We cannot discuss the strengthening of policy implementation without having a clearer understanding of the concept of policy. The word policy is not an easy concept to define as it connotes different meanings to different people. Notwithstanding these difficulties, The Black Law Dictionary (2005) defines policy as “the general principles by which a government is guided by its management of public affairs”. “Policy is a course or principle of action, adopted or proposed by a government, party, business or individual”. Policy could also be a law, regulation, procedure, administrative action, incentive or voluntary practice of government and other institutions. A policy could therefore be said to be a goal, vision, mission, strategy, process, guidelines, or a course of action of an individual, business, organisation or government. Policies are of various kinds. They could either be good or bad. Suffice to say that there are features which are common to all good policy. A good policy takes into cognisance issues of principles, because it is an authoritative statement made by a person or body with the power to do so. This means that policy statements are made by a person empowered by law to do so.

The above implies that, policies are made by people who are saddled with the power to and authoritative to proclaim such. In this instance we regard a policy as a course of action by an organisation or government which if adhered to could lead to national development. Thus The Nigerian National Gender Policy of 2006, is a policy document which stipulates the principles and cause of action to be taken by the Nigerian government to set in motion goals that would align the various international treaties and conventions she is a party to as a member of the United Nation, to stop all forms of discriminations against women based on their gender and the full and equal participation of women in national development which can only be fully achieved by their active participation in politics and the decision making.

Table 1: State Delegates Including Federal Capital Territory (Abuja) to 2014 National Conference

S/N	State	Number of Delegates	
		Male	Female
1	Abia	2	1
2	Adamawa	2	1
3	Akwaibom	2	1
4	Anambra	2	1
5	Bauchi	2	1
6	Bayelsa	2	1
7	Benue	2	1
8	Borno	2	1
9	Cross River	2	1
10	Delta	3	–
11	Ebonyi	2	1
12	Edo	3	–
13	Ekiti	2	1
14	Enugu	2	1
15	Gombe	2	1
16	Imo	2	1

17	Jigawa	2	1
18	Kaduna	2	1
19	Kano	2	1
20	Katsina	2	1
21	Kebbi	2	1
22	Kogi	2	1
23	Kwara	2	1
24	Lagos	2	1
25	Nasarawa	2	1
26	Niger	2	1
27	Ogun	2	1
28	Ondo	2	1
29	Osun	2	1
30	Oyo	2	1
31	Plateau	2	1
32	Rivers	2	1
33	Sokoto	2	1
34	Taraba	2	1
35	Yobe	2	1
36	Zamfara	2	1
37	FCT	1	–
	Total	75	34

Source: www.nigerianationalconference2014.org

Table 1 above shows the total number of delegates each State in Nigeria sent to represent them at the Nigerian National Conference held in 2014 to deliberate on important national issues and how to move the Nigerian State forward. This Conference came at a period when the nation was facing a plethora of agitations and ethnic violence all around. States were mandated to send three representatives each without specifying the gender. Unfortunately, while almost all the States sent two male and one female (none of the States deemed it fit to send two female), two States; Delta and Edo sent an all-male contingent to the conference. This fuelled a lot of agitations by most women groups. The Federation of Women Lawyers were especially irked by Governments silence on the matter and called the governments of these States out, in a public outcry. Given the fact that a Gender Policy was already in place, one would have expected the Federal Government to have intervened, but it did not as those in government at that level chose to play the ostrich.

Addressing such situation as the above, could be one of the reasons why the United Nations came up with the concepts of gender mainstreaming and affirmative action.

AFFIRMATIVE ACTION

The term affirmative action is a policy or program that seeks to redress past discriminations through active measures to ensure equal opportunity as in education and employment, American Heritage Dictionary

(online). It also means taking concrete steps not only to eliminate discrimination but to redress the effect of past discrimination. With the underlining motive being the principle of equal opportunities which hold that all persons have equal access to self-development, Gale Encyclopaedia of Small Business (online). The term affirmative action according to Sowell (2004) could also refer to group preferences, quotas, positive discrimination as found in Britain and India, standardisation in Srilanka, sons of the soil in Malaysia and Indonesia, while in Nigeria, federal character (Ugoh and Ukpere 2012). It thus means that the concept is not as new as many of us would want to believe, only that it is operated in different forms and in all these nations cited above, women were not part of the marginalised or groups who have suffered past discriminations in spite of all forms of discriminations the woman has suffered over the centuries. It is because of this seemingly oversight of these nations of the world on the plight of women that made women who converged at the fourth summit on women in Beijing, China in 1995 to assert that for there to be an elimination of all forms of discriminations against women, there is need for affirmative action to particularly have women as the target population. In doing this, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) 1995 *Human Development Report*, recommended 30 per cent minimum threshold in decision-making for women. This was done with the belief that, when women begin to be more in policy and decision making for a, policies which would empower and positively uplift women and other disadvantaged groups in the society, would be strengthened and implemented.

STRENGTHENING POLICY IMPLEMENTATION: THROUGH WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN ELECTIVE POSITION IMPLICATION FOR POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

In this aspect of the discourse, we will be using table 3 below to do an assessment of women's political participation in elective positions and the implication for policy making and implementation. The table revealed the total figure for the elections of 2003, 2007, 2011 and 2015 into the states and national houses of assembly for the aforementioned year. From the table, it has been observed that the total number of women elected into these houses which are the hallmark of the decision making and policy formulation process in the states and country at large, as compared to that of men could be said to be insignificant. This invariably will have a telling effect on the type of policies made and passed into law and also on the way the implementation process is carried out. For instance the outcome of the bill titled Gender Equal Opportunities, Abuse and Administrative 2012, sponsored by Senator Helen Esuene (female) at the Seventh National Assembly which ended in 2015, never passed the second reading in 2013 (NASS). It is of note that many developmental plans have been implemented only on paper and this has contributed to the ever increasing spate of abandoned projects and nonchalant attitude among many 'policy implementers'.

Table 2: Aspirants & Elected Women and Men for 2015 Elections

Election Year	2015				
	Office	Available seats	No. of Female Aspirants	No. of Women Elected	No. of Male Aspirants
President	1	1	–	13	1
Senate	109	130	8	621	101
House of Reps.	360	263	13	1492	347
Total	470	394	21	2126	459

Source: INEC 2015

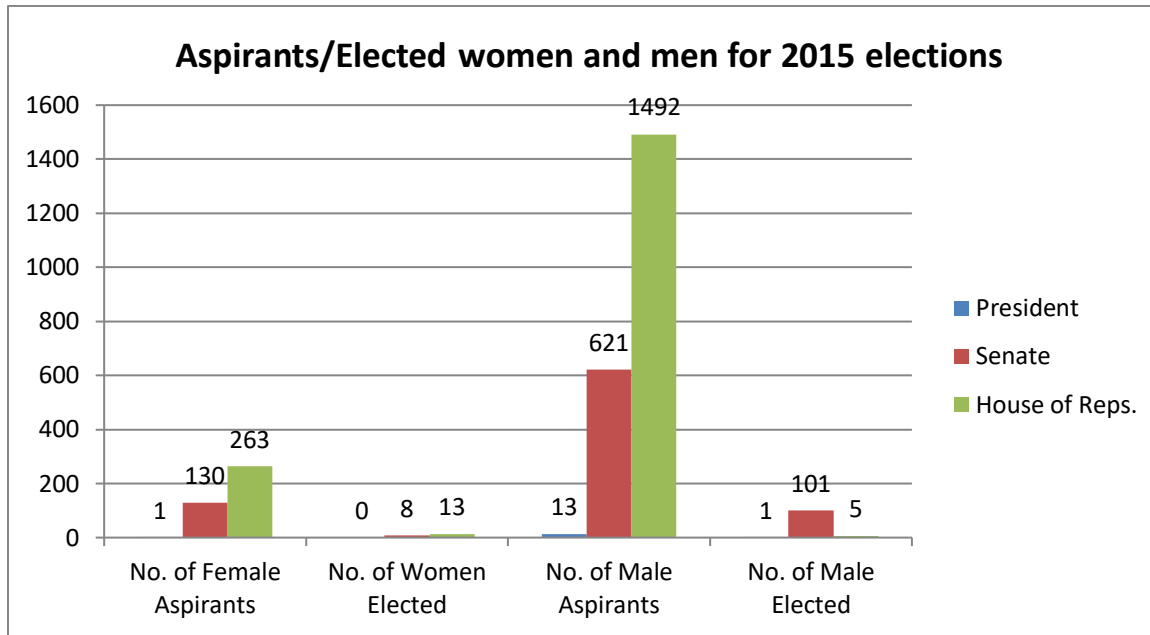


Figure 1: Aspirants and Elected women and men in 2015 Elections

The table and chart above shows the various offices of decision making in government such as the President, the House of Assembly which includes both the Senate and House of Representatives; the number seats available the number of aspirants by gender and the total number of those elected by gender. For the position of President no woman vied for it. While for both Senate and House or Representatives respectively had only eight and thirteen women elected. Although 130 and 263 contested for the positions in Senate and the House of Representatives.

Table 3: Elected Officials for 2003, 2007, 2011 and 2015

Election Year	2003			2007			2011			2015		
	Available seats	No of Women Elected	No of Men Elected	Available seats	No of Women Elected	No of Men Elected	Available seats	No of Women Elected	No of Men Elected	Available seats	No of Women Elected	No of Men Elected
Senate	109	4	105	109	9	100	109	8	101	109	8	101
House of Reps.	360	21	339	360	27	333	360	24	336	360	13	347
State House of Assembly	990	40	950	990	57	933	990	68	922	919	46	873
Total		65	1394		93	1366		100	1359		67	1321

Sources: Okoronkwo-Chukwu, (2011), NASS, (2012) & INEC, (2015)

The table above gives us a clearer view of women’s inability to fully assess and pursue such policies that would be beneficial to all. Although women do not constitute a significant percentage in the decision-making process and governance, those who have occupied political and decision-making positions since the new democratic dispensation starting from 1999, have demonstrated sterling leadership qualities and outstanding track records of achievements (Chiejina 2011). Making their male counterparts sit up. The reason for this success has been attributed to the fact that women are hardworking, dedicated, patient, can

endure, are tolerant, very thorough, honest and transparent (Tashi 2000). These qualities are very important if we must strengthen the policy making and implementation process in the society.

Studies have reaffirmed that the involvement of women in political life significantly enriches policy and decision-making (Olufade 2013). This has been the position of Nigerian women ‘who have through their insights, experiences, approaches and point of view facilitated political debates substantially from their male counterparts’ (Mohammed 2000). This is aptly captured by Norris (1996), who explained that “a ‘critical mass’ of women (that is over 30% of a given group) can wield significant influence in political decision-making, changing both the outcome and the process itself”. Norris’s percentage figure can be faulted in the case of Nigeria it has been observed that in spite of the nation not having attained the United Nations quota for affirmative action, Irabor (2011), Nigerian women in politics and government have changed the political landscape to a very large extent. Although, not until the ‘critical mass’ as expressed by Norris (1996) is achieved would the impact of women be felt.

METHODOLOGY

This paper reviewed women’s positions in decision making and how their presence can strengthen policy making and implementation, by using secondary data sourced from the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) for the various election years 2003, 2007, 2011 and 2015 elections. Thus the argument and discussions are based on these materials.

CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusively therefore, for there to be a strengthening of policy implementation in the Nigerian society it is important that women be giving the encouragement as well as the enabling environment to participate in and be voted into elective office. This paper therefore recommends that for there to be a strengthened policy making and policy implementation process in the Nigerian society, women have to be at the centre of political decision and policy making/implementation processes.

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