

The Missing Link: Women's Representation and
Participation in Nigeria's Electoral Politics and
their Effects on Nigeria's Development.

Oluwabusayo Adu

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*“Who are the Nigerian women?
They are our mother, sisters, aunts,
wives, daughters, friends and
confidants. They are the building
block upon which the foundations
of happy homes and families are
built. The family, no doubt, is the
unit on which the communities are
built. And the nation itself is built
by communities. It follows,
therefore, that if the building block,
the mothers, are poor ignorant and
unmotivated, the nation is likely to
be poor, ignorant and unmotivated.
For, how can any nation rise above
the collective ignorance of its
mothers?”*

- Dora Obi Chizea (*Chizea, p. 10*)

INTRODUCTION

Chinua Achebe declares, “The trouble with Nigeria is simple and squarely a failure of leadership”.¹ Nigeria’s leadership problems can be dated as far back as 1960 when Nigeria obtained her independence. For instance, the first Republic fell apart under a coup attack, only two years after independence. For the next thirty years, Nigeria would suffer under the iron-fist rule of military rule. Achebe explains that Nigeria has people who have the potential to be leaders that will transform the dysfunctional political system of Nigeria. However, these individuals are unwilling “to rise to the responsibility, to the challenge of personal example which are the hallmarks of true leadership”.² Achebe gives Nigeria’s ex-president Murtala Muhammed who took power in July 1975 as an example of “the hallmark of true leadership”. Within the short period of time of Muhammed’s rule, Nigeria experienced a miracle; order was restored: congested traffic, which is one huge problem of daily living, cleared overnight, and civil servants reported to work on time and stayed at work.³ Before and after the death of Muhammed, Nigeria have not experienced such level of orderliness.

Nigerians are well aware of her leadership problem and they often have piles of complaints about their leaders. On my last visit to Nigeria last winter, I boarded a public bus going from Ado-Ekiti⁴ to Lagos. The passengers, who were mostly women and about two of whom were teachers, started to complain about Nigeria’s bad leadership, citing a governor, Ayo Fayose, who was recently evicted from office for money laundry.

Although the passengers did not openly disagree with the accusation, their conversation

¹ Achebe, Chinua (1983). *The Trouble with Nigeria*. P1.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ A small city-capital in the West

showed sympathy towards the ex-governor. They noted that Fayose made far more changes in Ado-Ekiti than any other governor had ever attempted to do. He gave Ado-Ekiti a social infrastructure that has been non-existing for many years. He built roads both in the middle of the city and those leading into neighborhoods. He installed street lights and build shopping complexes for market women so that the city streets will be kept clean. Fayose was said to have come out into the city in casual clothes on environmental Saturdays to help clean the streets.⁵ This is only to mention a few of the many changes that he made. After his allegations, he was impeached by the Ekiti state's House of Representative, arrested and sentenced to prison for about a month. The sad reality is, although no concrete evidence has been found against him, the historical corrupted habits of most Nigerian leaders makes it difficult to know who is to be trusted and who should not be trusted. The discussion went on for more than two and half hours and I waited in vain for solutions to be suggested. Then I remembered that I had experienced similar situation several times while living in Nigeria.⁶

Achebe warns against the danger in embedding such a topic into “daily routine of small talk” with no aim make changes.⁷ The invisibility and underrepresentation of Nigerian women in electoral politics is another problem that has become a mere center of daily conversation. The difference is that women's political underrepresentation has not even really found its way into the minds of many Nigerians. The patriarchal system in Nigeria has not allowed women's presence in politics to be viewed as significant and

⁵ Environmental Saturday is the last Saturday of every month separated to clean the streets for a couple of hours in most Nigeria states.

⁶ I lived in Ado-Ekiti and was schooling in Ibadan, about three hours drive. Every time that I was either coming from or to school, politics was discussed. However, it was almost always complaints about the corrupt politicians in Nigeria.

⁷ Achebe, Op. cit., p. 1

important by the average Nigerian. In recent years, there have been increasing efforts made by NGOs, women organizations and even some government officials to involve more Nigerian women in political activities. The problem, however, is that these organizations are only focusing on the human rights effects of women's political participation; they do not emphasize on the need for women to be involved in electoral politics. Dora Obi Chizea states that Nigerian women are Nigeria's "building blocks". If the "building blocks" continue to be absent from decision making positions, how is Nigeria's development to grow as expected? The process of political development in Nigeria needs the constructive and active input of Nigerian women in order for concrete growth to occur.

This paper is a study of the Aba women's war of 1929 and the Political activities of Women in the Western part of Nigeria from 1914 to 1947. The Aba women's protests and the women's association in Western Nigeria along with their accomplishments show that Nigerian women are not in any way inferior to their male counterparts in leadership and governing. An analysis between these two cases and the present political situation in Nigeria has helped me to conclude that Nigeria needs a change of leadership; the era of male governance needs to come to an end. From observing the condemnations that African leaders have received from international organizations such as the IMF, the World Bank, and the G7, Omoh Ojior concludes that "African men have ruined Africa, therefore, there might be a need to shift the political power base to the women".⁸ Halima Mohammed also makes similar declaration after a study of the political actions of women

⁸ Ojior, Tsatsaku Omoh (2002). African Women And Political Development: a case study of Etsako women in Edo State, Nigeria. Pp. 10. Bloomington, IN USA

in Nigeria – “it is clear that women, if and when given the chance, can play crucial roles and excel in them”.⁹

I have chosen to look at the cases of Aba women and the western women associations because each gives a picture of women exercising essential characteristics that make strong leader. These women fought for their rights and belief at a time when there was almost no support for women. They were bold, strong, and relentless, determined, and were not afraid to confront an authority that even Nigerian men were afraid of. Although these cases are quite dated Nigerian women today can learn from their history. In reference to cases of women’s demonstration of their political abilities Ijeoma Ogbonna states that “It has become a proven fact that women would excel in the male-dominated professions of politics if given the chance. Studies have shown that when women are in power, governance quality increases, corruption decreases and there will be better representation for the citizens.”¹⁰ There is a need for political reform in Nigeria, and with the performances of the few women who have been elected into office in the past ten years, it can be said that women will undertake the challenge successfully. Although it is unrealistic to anticipate a drastic change if more women were to be elected into

Geographically, this study covers the Southeastern and Southwestern regions of Nigeria. However to avoid confusion, the regions will be referred to as the East and the West respectively. Aba, where the women’s war took place, is located in the Eastern part of Nigeria in the Owerri Provinces. The physical environment of the Eastern region was both advantageous and disadvantageous. The great Niger River which runs across the

⁹ Mohammed, D. Halima (1985). Women in Nigeria History: Examples from Borno Empire, Nupeland and Igboland. In Women in Nigeria Today (pp. 50). Zed Books Ltd.

¹⁰ Ogbonna, Ijeoma (2007, December, 17). Women - Still Trailing Behind in Politics. *Daily Champion*, Retrieved April 14, 2008, from <http://allafrica.com/stories/200712170654.html>

fourteen-thousand-square-mile delta¹¹ and covers 7.5% of Africa¹² would later be used as means to penetrate the Igboland during the Atlantic trade. The trade attracted the British to the East which resulted into policies that triggered the Igbo women's reaction. Its [Igboland] forest created a communication barrier among the Igbo people. As a result they lived in isolated villages with each village controlling its affairs.¹³ Also, the complexity and variety of the Igbo language and culture is as a result of this barrier. At the same time, the advantages lied in the protection that these physical features provided for the Igbo. It was hard for any group to conquer and place a centralized government on the Igbo people because of their sparse settlement.¹⁴ Thus, they were able to protect themselves against enemies. However, they were unable to form strong governmental systems as it was the case in both Northern and Western Nigeria at the time.

The second case study covers the Egba people in the Western part of Nigeria. They are a group of Yorubas who live in Abeokuta, the capital of Ogun State.¹⁵ From 1877 to 1893, there were the Yoruba civil wars under which the Abeokuta Alake (the king) opposed the Ibadan Kingdom. After the war, the Alake signed an alliance with Sir Gilbert Carter, a British governor. From then on until 1914 Abeokuta was considered an independent providence and was recognized as the "Egba United Government".¹⁶ The British's interest in Egba was economically inspired. Egba was one of the important trade routes to Lagos, where merchandises were brought and shipped out.¹⁷ This alliance

¹¹ The road to aba, Harry Gailey.

¹² Food And Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. Irrigation potential in Africa: A basin approach <<http://www.fao.org/docrep/W4347E/w4347e0i.htm>>, March 26, 2008

¹³ Ibid, Harry Gailey

¹⁴ Ibid. p 12

¹⁵ Egba-Yewa Descendants Association Washington. <http://www.egbayewa.org/kingdoms.htm>, visited on 04/11/08

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Eades, J. S. (1980). The Yoruba Today. Pp. 28-34. London: Cambridge University Press.

would later lead to the oppression of Egba market women who would be led by Olufunmilayo Ransom-Kuti in fighting the administration.

Both of these cases took place under the colonial era, although the latter continued its activity into the post colonial era. In chapter 3, each case will be looked at more analytically. Although the main catalyst for women's reaction and protest was the unfair system of flat rate taxation, it will be clarified that the women in each situation took different approach in defending their cause. However the women in both cases demonstrated key elements of leadership which could be useful for Nigerian women today if they utilize them properly. Although the paper seem to favor the latter case more than the former, it is not intentional. It only shows that the western women's case is closer in time period. Also some of the associations that were formed are still politically active in Nigeria today.



Figure 1: SouthWestern Nigerian

CHAPTER 1

LITERATURE REVIEW

Women's marginalization, like many other problems in Nigeria, has a deep root in the system carved and imposed by colonialism. It began with the colonial occupation, starting with the fusion of the three regions (Yoruba in the southwest, the Igbo in the southeast, and the Hausa/Fulani in the North) to the Nigeria's independence and its governance, and then to the post-independent Nigeria. Geographically, there was no Nigeria as it exists today before the colonial era. Akinwumi Ogundira's summary of Nigeria's diversity provides an insight to understanding the complexity of Nigeria's many problems including that of women's marginalization.¹⁸ He explains that Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa with about 16 percent -African population. It accommodates more than two hundred ethnolinguistic groups with three major languages.

K. C. Anyanwu observes that "The public knows what it wants from the government but the government does not know the wishes of the public."¹⁹ The distance in the government – citizen relationship undoubtedly adversely affects women's progress in politics. This is because in spite of the increase awareness of women's marginalization, constructive suggestions are not being made. Although the government has made efforts to address the problem of women marginalization Nigerian, the efforts have been unsuccessful. Women's organizations such as the National Council of Women Societies (NCWS) and the Women in Nigeria (WIN) have been more effective in raising awareness among women across the country, educating them about their political, human,

¹⁸ Ogundiran, Akinwumi (2005). Themes and Directions in the History of Precolonial Nigeria. In Ogundiran (Ed.), *Precolonial Nigeria: Essays in Honor of Toyin Falola* (pp. 3-50). Africa World Press, Inc.

¹⁹ Anyanwu, K. C. (September, 1982). The Bases of Political Instability in Nigeria. *JSTOR: Journal of Black Studies*, Vol. 13, NO. 1, 101-117.

and economic rights. These organizations in addition to some NGOs have devoted much effort into studying the obstacles for women's participation in political sphere in Nigeria. These factors include high illiteracy rate, male dominated institutions, religious obstacles, lack of support, misrepresentation by the media and in literature, economic dependence and little or no presence in male dominated professions.

Scholars such as Nina Mba and Allen Van Judith have gone to great lengths to emphasize that women have not always been politically handicapped in Nigerian. The introduction of colonial administration after 1900 sentenced women into a political coma. Their previous political roles became invisible.²⁰ The colonial administration created a patriarchy government in which women were not allowed to hold any authoritative positions. Okonjo Kamene makes similar observation and also suggests that one of the major causes of the absence of women from mainstream politics in Nigeria today is the lack of recognition of the Nigerian women's political/leadership role in the history of the country.²¹ Women in the pre-colonial Nigeria occupied important roles in the traditional political life. In their different regions women were actively engaged in politics and held decision-making roles in the governmental institutions in their respective regions. However, the coming of Westernization destroyed their political positions and then marginalized them in the modern political institutions.

The Igbo people are located in the eastern part of Nigeria where the first women's war of 1929 took place. Judith Van Allen describes Igbo society before colonialism as a "system of diffuse authority, fluid and informal leadership, shared rights

²⁰ Mba, Nina (1982). *Nigerian Women Mobilized*. P. 38. California: Institute of International studies – University of California, Berkeley.

²¹ Kamene, Okonjo (1991). *Nigerian Women's participation in national politics: legitimacy and stability in an era*. Pp. 1

of enforcement, and a more or less stable balance of male and female power”.²² As a result, there was no particular individual who held an authoritative position above others. Van Allen argues that decision-making was not entitled to only one person and there was no obligation that subjected anyone to a certain command. The fluid nature of the society allowed Igbo women to hold political positions. Women were allowed in the Village meetings, which were mostly conducted by men, they were, however, not excluded from contributing.

Women held their own meeting called Mikiri.²³ Mikiri was held whenever there were issues to address – these issues were mostly those that directly addressed women needs. During Mikiri, women would bring issues such as problems with their husbands or with anyone in the society. More importantly, decisions concerning how market regulations and its progress were often made during the meeting. As Van Allen notes, prices of goods were set during this meeting and rules about market attendants were made with appropriate penalties for whoever breaks them.

Similarly, Mba gives examples of women in Yorubaland (the western part of Nigerian)²⁴ who ruled as kings between 16th and 17th century²⁵. These women held authoritative positions and possessed ruling powers as male kings. Examples of women *Obas* (kings) include Ooni Luwo of Ile-Ife who was known for her tyrannical reign and the *lobun* of Ondo, a “powerful woman chief who has equivalent power and received

²² Allen, Judith (1972). "Sitting on a Man": Colonialism and the Lost Political Institutions of Igbo Women. Pp. 171.

²³ Ibid. Pp. 169

²⁴ The center of discussion for the second case study in this paper.

²⁵ Ibid (Mba, 1982).

same treatment as the male king.²⁶ Other positions include the “*Ayaba* and *Oloris* (King’s wives), *Iyalodes* (Women’s leaders), *Iyalajes* (Market Women’s Leaders), *Yeye Obas* (King’s mother), and *Iyaoloshas* (Godess priests)” .²⁷ These positions were crucial to the function of daily life. The market women’s leaders, for example, were needed because trade (which was the primary profession of most women) sustained the community’s economy.²⁸ Furthermore, the market place was usually built around the king’s palace and meetings such as executive meetings and sessions to settle disputers happened at the market place.²⁹ Therefore, the market women’s leaders had the responsibility to keep order. Abdul-Mumin Sa’ad in describing the role of *Iyalodes*, quotes Awe Bolanle who presents the role of the *Iyalode* as “equal to all other chieftaincy offices... The *Iyalode*... was the voice of women and she represented their constituency upon regular³⁰ consultations with them... Often times, the power of the women’s constituency was determined by the political dynamism of the *Iyalode-in-Council*”. These Yoruba women held positions that gave them similar responsibilities as men and were recognized. The absence of their positions would have resulted into a developmental crisis for their society.

Although this paper does not cover women in the Northern region of Nigeria, I will cite further examples of female authority to buttress my argument. Very little information is available about the presence of women leadership in Hausa land,

²⁶ Falola, Toyin (1995). *Gender, Business, and Space Control: Yoruba Market Women and Power*. In House-Midamba, Bessie and Ekechi (Ed.), *African Market Women and Economic Power: The Role of Women in African Economic Development* (pp. 28). Greenwood Press, Westport, CT.

²⁷ Ajayi, Kunle (2007). *Gender Self-Endangering: The Sexist Issue in Nigerian Politics*.

²⁸ Ibid

²⁹ O. B. Olaoba (2005).

³⁰ Sa’ad, Abdul-Mumin (2001). *Traditional Institutions and the Violation of Women’s Human Rights in Africa: The Nigerian Case*. In Rwomire (Ed.), *African Women And Children: Crisis and Response* (pp. 75-80).

nevertheless, the legacy of Queen Amina of Zazzau has not been lost. Queen Amina reigned in A.D. 1576 and possessed equal access to authority as the men.³¹ As Ajayi records, she was influential in the political development of the emirate of Northern Nigeria.³² Amina developed her military skill at the age of 16 as a queen's daughter.³³ As history has it, she conquered many countries and built walls around them. This she did after the design of her own city of Zazzau. The system is used into the present as fortification in Hausa states.³⁴ "Sultan Muhammad Bello of Sokoto stated that, 'She made war upon these countries and overcame them entirely so that the people of Katsina paid tribute to her and the men of Kano [and]... also made war on cities of Bauchi till her kingdom reached to the sea in the south and the west.'" ³⁵ In spite that women have the least recognition in the North, the legend of Queen Amina cannot be hidden and it still lives on until today.

³¹ Ibid, Sa'ad.

³² Ajayi, op, cit.

³³ Black History Pages. <<http://blackhistorypages.net/pages/amina.php#top>>

³⁴ Ibid

³⁵ Ibid



Figure 2: Sculpture of a Yoruba queen found in Ile-Ife³⁶



Figure 3: Queen Amina of Zazzau³⁷

³⁶ Dashu, Max. The suppressed Histories Archives: Women in Global Perspectives.
<<http://www.suppressedhistories.net/catalog/politicalpower.html>>

³⁷ Rashidi, Runoko (November 06, 2002). The Global African Presence.
<<http://www.cwo.com/~lucumi/amina.html>>

OBSTACLES FACING WOMEN IN NIGERIA

In order to understand how an increase in the number of women in electoral politics can positively affect the political development of Nigeria, we must first take a look at those factors that have and are contributing to women's marginalization. Colonialism played a significant role in this aspect. As mentioned earlier, colonialism in Nigeria destroyed most of the already existing institutions from the home to the local politics. The British had misconceptions of the operating administrative system both Igbo and Yoruba lands. Kamene Okonjo describes the Western perspective of African societies as "the last retreat of barbarism and tyranny – a land where rulers oppressed and exploited their subjects, masters maltreated their slaves, and husbands controlled their wives".³⁸ As a result, Kamene concludes, Western scholars of the colonial period assumed that African women were more or less slaves since their positions were mostly limited to domestic life. Definitely, these scholars were mistaken.³⁹ Their biased conception of the African society blinded from seeing the existing political system in which women were assigned significant leadership roles.

Formal education was an institution introduced to Nigeria during colonialism – "The curricula emphasized religious instruction and clerical skills for boys and domestic science for girls".⁴⁰ Therefore, the doctrine of man as the superior who deserved education more than women greatly marginalized women from academic institutions. Although more women are now educated, many still believe that female education is not

³⁸ Kwame. op. cit, p.4

³⁹ Ibid

⁴⁰ Attoe, S. A. Effah (2002). Women in the Development of Nigeria Since pre-colonial Times. <http://www.onlinenigeria.com/links/adv.asp?blurb=150>

as important as male education (this is still in practice to a noticeable degree in Northern Nigeria).

Comfort Akomolafe emphasizes on the significance of education and it's implication on the status of women - "Education is the bedrock of women empowerment, be it formal or informal education", she declares.⁴¹ The "empowerment" of women is imperative especially in a society where the suppression of women's voice has become the norm. Akomolafe defines women empowerment as "the development of mental and physical capacity, power or skills in women for them to operate meaningfully in their social milieu, thereby experiencing a more favourably level of social recognition and subsequently enhance their economic status."⁴² Literacy feeds women empowerment, which in turn boosts women's confidence to participate more in politics. Okeke notes that formal education, especially higher education, has significant influence on women's social status as it places them in positions where they can get better and quicker access to male authorities.⁴³ Thus, education is very essential in the process of integrating a higher number of women into electoral politics.

Several efforts have been made to increase the level of adult literacy in Nigeria. Nevertheless, these efforts have been mostly exclusive with no specific focus on women education which, more than often, means that programs directed at improving level of adult literacy are for men and those women who are financially capable to get their education. For example, the National Policy on Education (NPE) of 1981 neglected

⁴¹ Akomolafe, o. Comfort (October 13, 2006). Open and distance learning as a mechanism for women empowerment in Nigeria. *The Fourth Pan Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning (PCF)*. Retrieved December 12, 2007 from <<http://pcf4.dec.uwi.edu/viewpaper.php?id=79&print=1>>

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Okeke, Phil E. (2000). Reconfiguring Tradition: Women's Rights and Social Status in Contemporary Nigeria. *Africa Today* 47 (1): 49-63.

women in its objectives which included providing “functional literacy education for adults who have never had the advantage of any formal education”, providing job trainings for workers in order to improve their skills, and providing them with the “necessary aesthetic, cultural, and civic education.”⁴⁴ These objectives were implemented with the preconception of women as subordinates. The priority went to male as they are believed to be more capable and skilled.

The Babangida regime created the Better Life for Rural Women (BLRW) in 1987. The BLRW, directed by the then first lady Maryam Babangida, aimed to (1) create awareness among women about their social, political, and economic rights and responsibilities, (2) bring women together in order to better understand their problems, and (3) to mobilize women to work towards concrete results and seek leadership role.⁴⁵ A similar program was implemented in 1994 by the following First Lady, Mrs. Abacha, called the Family Support Program (FSP). These programs ended with each of these regimes. The main problem as recognized by Avoseh is the fact that these programs are based on “male-controlled agenda”. Secondly, the programs have also become a political popularity contest among successful urban women in order to increase their status.

Although more women are getting education, the gap between the percentage of illiterate Northern and Southern women is still considerably wide. The difference between cultural practices in these two regions remains a major factor. Most females in the Northern Nigeria are discouraged from pursuing education. As Effah Attoe states, “parents prefer to send their sons to school, instead of their daughters whom they feel would eventually get married and thus get incorporated into another family. Thus, a

⁴⁴ Ibid (Avoseh, 1999).

⁴⁵ Ibid.

larger percentage of the girls remain uneducated and unexposed.”⁴⁶ The national female literacy level according to a UNICEF report in 2002 was 56% compared to 72% for male.⁴⁷ In the northern state of Sokoto, the gap between male and female literacy is more disturbing. Female literacy was only 15% compared to the 59% male literacy rate.⁴⁸ This numbers suggest that more efforts need to be invested into educating women.

Female education becomes even harder when almost all contemporary literature including historical documents are dominated by male voices. As Kunle Ajayi observes, existing documents were written by men who did not necessarily value the importance of women’s participation in political activities⁴⁹. This confirms that in spite of governmental policies such as the affirmative action, which reserves 15% of all elective positions for women, women still face serious confrontation when dare to go beyond their expected space. It also shows that such policies are, to a large extent, mere documentation; they are not actually practiced.

In addition to governmental efforts, certain women organizations such as the National Council of Women Societies (NCWS) and Women in Nigeria (WIN) to name a few, have been engaged in creating awareness among women on their political rights and educating them. The National Council of Women Societies (NCWS) was founded in 1958 as a federation of non partisan women’s organizations. Its objectives, with a focus on encouraging women to participate in politics, are:

“to promote the welfare, economic and social progress of women, with special emphasis on education and training; to awaken and encourage in women the realization of their responsibilities to the community; to ensure by every legal means that women are given opportunities to act as full

⁴⁶ Attoe, S. A. Effah (Nov. 29, 2007). Problems Militating against Women in Politics. Onlinenigerian.com.

⁴⁷ UNICEF (2002). Girls education in Nigeria.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid. (Ajayi, p 138)

responsible members of the community; to encourage the affiliation of all non-political women's organizations in Nigeria; and to foster cooperation with other national and international bodies with similar aims, and assisting women in towns and villages in their roles as homemakers and nation builders.”⁵⁰

NCWS encourages its members to organize their own awareness programs at local and national levels. Some of its activities include providing channels through which women’s options and ideas can be made known. It is also actively involved in developing leadership among the women.

During the third republic, the NCWS created the National Task Force Committee on Political Transition Program (TFCPTP) whose purpose was to “raise Political awareness of the Nigerian women in such a way that they will become interested in the promise of a new social and democratic order in 1992 and to become impartial moderators at the great debate”.⁵¹ Although the NCWS also worked with women in the rural area, its target was the women leaders. TFCPTP organized a four –day workshop from the 18th to the 21st of September, 1989. The purpose was to train women leaders on the “role of women in the political transition program”.⁵²

The idea was that training women leaders would be more productive and effective in raising women’s awareness about their rights, responsibilities and duties in the new republic. Dr. Dora Chizea, the Chairman of NCWS, acclaimed to Nigerian women their right to choices. The colonial legacy does not have to be an everlasting obstacle for women in Nigeria. With the beginning of the third republic, women are encouraged to realize their ability to make their own choices. Women are encouraged to vote for

⁵⁰ National Council of Women`s Societies (NCWS)

<<http://www.wiserearth.org/organization/view/a3ca728d8b96f47651904e55c1020e7a>>

⁵¹ Chizea, Dora Obi and Juliet Njoku (1991). Nigerian Women and the Challenges of Our time. Nigeria: Malthouse Press Limited.

⁵² Ibid.

officials that they believe well represent their interests and not those officials that bribe them with food or those that their husbands vote for.

Women in Nigeria (WIN) was formed in 1982 by university women who had taken a course titled “Women in Society” at the Ahmadu Bello University. The movement inclined toward Western feminist views. WIN tries to represent the voices of oppressed women in Nigeria and has been involved in sponsoring research and educating women.⁵³ WIN refutes the notion of women as subordinates, doing so by emphasizing on the fact that “gender is a social, not a biological, category”.⁵⁴ This notion thus aims to neutralize the categorization of women as a weaker gender.

In 1987/1988, WIN was appointed by the Babangida regime at the beginning of the Third Republic to present women’s perspectives.⁵⁵ In order to properly represent women in the different regions of the country, WIN divided the country into seven regions which allowed various women’s voices and ninety seven women organizations, five different languages and many more indigenous languages.⁵⁶ During this conference, WIN demanded for rights that would secure women’s place. these demands include:

*“the right to form political parties without property qualifications, the reservation of 50 percent of all seats in legislative and executive bodies for women, the right of workers to seek leave of absence to contest for elections,... the right for women to control their bodies, ... and the removal of prejudices against women in employment and parity of treatment in work places”.*⁵⁷

⁵³ Awe, Bolanle and Nina Mba. 1991

⁵⁴ Ibid, p. 860.

⁵⁵ The Babangida regime promised to include women issues in its discussions, although it was another false promise.

⁵⁶ Shettima, Ahmed Kole, (1995). Engendering Nigeria's Third Republic

⁵⁷ Ibid

Although these demands were presented to the government, they were soon neglected and forgotten. This act of neglect once again confirms that these policies are usually mere documentation.

Cultural constraints are another factor that affects the number of women in politics. What is now considered the traditional role of women in Nigeria, as in most African countries, is no more than a tradition that has been carved by the erroneous perceptions of Western missionaries and anthropologists, who denigrated the real traditional political status of women, which were also adopted by Nigeria's patrimonial society. Phil E. Okeke explains the rationale for this: "Nigerian women's status as mothers, wives, and queens, their roles in religious rituals and community decision making, and their work as traders and farmers embedded contradictions scarcely amenable to the European norm"⁵⁸. Okeke refers to this kind of tradition as a "stumbling block" to the progress of women in Nigeria.⁵⁹ He appeals to those women organizations that are in the course of fighting for women's right to make it a priority to eliminate the colonial definition of Nigerian women's traditional role. Women are still perceived as child bearers and house keepers whose responsibilities are limited more or less to the local level of governance (that is the few women who are allowed in any political activities).

The lack of support from fellow women for those women in office is another factor that contributes to the small number of women participation in electoral politics. More than often, the women in political power, the first lady for example, are quick to forget the other women as soon as they get in power. Those who are not in power seldom

⁵⁸ Okeke, P. E. (2000). Op. cit.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

encourage the one in authority and give almost no support to those aspiring to participate in the national governance. Ajayi suggests that although women have the advantage of higher demographic and electoral strength than men, they have not been able to gain political strength as their male counterpart because they do not vote for female candidates.”⁶⁰ This attitude has been psychologically instilled in the political culture. There is, thus, a pressing need to bring about a revolution that would create a different perspective in the minds of people.

In addition, religion also plays a significant role in marginalizing women politically. Northern Nigeria is overwhelmingly dominated by the Islamic religion which also serves as the basis for laws, rules and regulations, political, and traditional activities. In a study of Kano, one of the northern Nigerian states, Barbara J. Callaway notes that Kano City, the capital city of Kano and 99percent Muslim, is recognized as “a seat of Islamic learning” in the twentieth century.⁶¹ Northern politics and the Islam religion are intensely intertwined. Religious leaders are, thus, also involved in politics and are in positions to make and implement laws. The Qur’an, which has limitations women’s presence in the public, serves as the basis for political laws and regulations many times. Consequently, women’s interests are usually not held as important.

Callaway examines the status of Northern women under the First and Second Republics in Nigeria. Although the Nigerian government after the 1960 independence did not grant women all over the country the right to vote, regional governments in both the West (Yorubas) and the East (Igbos) passed laws that extended the right to vote to women. However, this practice was discouraged in the North by the Northern Peoples

⁶⁰ Ibid. Ajayi, 137.

⁶¹ Callaway, J. Barbara. Pp. 379 “Women and Political participation in Kano City”

Congress (NPC)⁶². Women were later allowed to participate as wing of the NPC party, but only as entertainers. According to Callaway, these women were mostly members known as Karuwai.⁶³ These women were present only to entertain during NPC gatherings.

Women's position under the second Republic, as it is today, did not change much, albeit there were a few women appointed to positions such as the commissioners of home affairs, trade and industry, and health, one woman appointed the permanent secretary of education and one woman was appointed into each of the ten "parastatal boards".⁶⁴ Although at this time, the women in these positions were not viewed as sexual symbols as they were during the first Republic, they lacked proper education that rendered ineffective in their roles.⁶⁵

The South, unlike the North, is more accommodating to female education. This puts Southern women at a greater advantage in participating in politics. In addition, the women in the South have more fluidity in their movements in the public. They are active in the market place, which gives them a greater economic power than their Northern mates.⁶⁶ This also puts them at a better chance of participating in their local governments.

SAMPLE OF WOMEN MOBILIZATIONS

Professor Jerry Gena, the Chairman of Directorate for Social Mobilization (MAMSER), recognized and reminded Nigerian women of the importance of mobilizing

⁶² Ibid, Callaway Pp. 382. The NPC was the party in power in the North during the First Republic. Its legislature was intensely based on Islamic concepts.

⁶³ According to Callaway, Karuwai means 'prostitute' (from an interview she conducted on May 14, 1983).

⁶⁴ Ibid, (Callaway, p. 387)

⁶⁵ Callaway, P. 388

⁶⁶ Helen Chapin Metz, 1991

as a vehicle of transformation. The end of colonization in Nigeria is one conspicuous example of the effect of mobilization. As she notes, “mass mobilization is an essential component in the rapid transformation of a nation which has embarked on progress...It’s [Nigeria] survival and development requires the mobilization of the people and the institutionalization of democracy of the masses and their interest”.⁶⁷ The Third Republic came with the introduction of democracy. Democracy, unlike the military government, is supposed to provide every citizen with equal rights and participation in the government either directly or indirectly. Women are therefore, encouraged seize the opportunities offered by the new republic and make their voices heard.

WOMEN AND ELECTION

The marginalization of Nigerian women from mainstream politics is largely due to their limited participation in the election process. When one considers the fact that Nigerian women account for 60% of its population, it is hard to believe the level of women’s under-representation in the country’s politics.⁶⁸ The gender audit provided by Abiola Akiyode-Afolabi and ‘Lanre Arogundade based on the 2003 election shows that although the number of women in national politics has increased since independence, there is still a considerably huge gap between the number of man and women in these positions. The following table shows the comparison between women representation in 1999 and 2003 election:

⁶⁷ Ibid. Chizea, 19

⁶⁸ Ibid. Ajayi

S/N	Position	No. of available Seats	No. of women Elected & % of Total in 1999	No. of women Elected & % of Total in 2003
1	Presidency	1	- 0%	- 0%
2	Senate	109	3 2.75%	3 2.75%
3	House of Representatives	360	12 3.33%	21 5.83%
4	Governorship	36	- 0%	- 0%
5	State Houses of Assembly	990	12 1.21%	38 3.84%

Table 1: Comparison of women representaion in 1999 and 2003 Election⁶⁹

The above data shows that women are still immensely under-represented. It shows both the gap between men and women representation in electoral politics and the slow grow rate of women's presence in national politics.

CONCLUSION: WHAT NOW?

It has been conveyed in the previous part of this paper that colonial institution in Nigeria contributed immensely to the destruction of institutions that recognized women's decision making abilities and implemented a one-gender governmental system that fails to recognize women. Unfortunately, the system did not disappear with the end of colonialization. Although women have managed to gain voice to a certain degree in the third republic" (a period that has experienced an effort to democratize the Nigerian government), their concerns are still be neglected and they are still excluded from national politics to a large extend. Akiyode-Afolabi declares, "The cause of democracy will be better served if these concerns are taken into consideration"⁷⁰. The principles of democracy such as gender equality and equal rights have to be implemented and practiced. The obstacles that have been examined have to be addressed more closely and sincerely. Along with that, organizations that are for the cause of women's political rights

⁶⁹ Akiyode-Afolabi, Abiola and 'Lanre Arogundade, December 2003

⁷⁰ Shettima, kole (Dec., 1995).

have to engage in objectives with wider vision. In other words, they need to advance from focusing on involving women on the local level of politics to the national level. Although women can affect development at any level of political participation, they will be more effective if occupying a national position where influential decisions are being made. It is therefore imperative to advocate the important significance that women's equal representation and participation in national politics would have on the development of Nigeria. Also, women should not be the only targets for these organizations; men also need to become more liberal minded about the role of women in politics. There needs to be a shift from the "women versus men" mind set. If only women are educated on this issue then the battle is only half won.

Furthermore, in a country where culture and politics are so much intertwined, the traditional roles of women – child bearer, care giver etc – have become acceptable as a political role or responsibility. Most women have created limitations for themselves based on the nature of their biological responsibility. Mrs. E.I. Oyedepo, a staff at the Lagos State Teaching Service Commission, calls to women in Nigeria to "realize that they are not as hopeless as they want the world to believe".⁷¹ This is not to ignore the various other factors that are not in favor of women's political activities. It is to let them know that they might be the ones bearing children; nevertheless, their roles outside the domestic arena should not be defined through the male perspective. In order for the male dominated government and the nation as a whole to recognize women as equal in all areas, women have to be ready to prove themselves as able. For instance, most young college ladies would not study courses such as engineering, architecture, law because

⁷¹ Chizea, Pp. 23

they are perceived as male professions. It is then a taboo to consider these professions because females fear appearing as not feminine.⁷²

It is imperative to educate women on their rights and the importance of their participation in election. However, it is more crucial to address the psychological reception of cultures that might not appear to be harmful but that are indeed oppressing the efforts of women's strive in Nigeria.

It is the 21st century, when will Nigerian women be seen as capable enough to handle formal political positions? There are enough number of women commissioners and assistants. It is high time for women to be in the fore front. Women organizations, in spite of their efforts, are settling for the minimum. They are mostly concerned with teaching women about their social rights. What about their civic rights? The closest a Nigerian woman can get to presidency is to be the First Lady. Although it is crucial to build women's power from the grassroots level, it is equally important to create a greater mind set in every woman in Nigeria. Greater mind set in this context refers to going beyond human rights issues and getting involved in formal political institutions. Efforts to empower women will not be as productive until women start to occupy those governmental positions that are currently dominated by men. Likewise, the progressive development of the country is largely dependent on the involvement of women in electoral politics. Therefore, need to create a larger space for women in politics, bother locally and nationally, is an urgent one.

In the following chapters, an in-depth observation of women mobilization in the Eastern and Western regions of Nigeria is presented. The purpose of these case studies is to establish the argument that Nigeria's political development is growing at a slow rate,

⁷² Ibid (Chizea).

because women are missing from most of the decision-making posts, while also considering the factors and efforts that have been previously examined.

CHAPTER 2

RESEARCH DESIGN

HYPOTHESIS FORMULATION

Gender inequality is a global problem. Several researches have been done to examine and to understand the causes and consequences of this problem. As Martha Nussbaum observed, women are marginalized for several reasons which are true in many culture and regions of the world. They are less likely to be educated or professional. They often face discrimination at the work force and have unequal coverage under the law.⁷³ Nussbaum then proceed to argue that there is a strong tie between human inequality and poverty and that this relationship results to an “acute failure of central human capabilities”.⁷⁴ She explains capability as what or who people “are actually able to be or do”.⁷⁵ This is an important concept to this thesis because the level or degree of human capability has critical impact on the political development of a nation. Women marginalization leads to a decrease in the overall human capability in Nigeria which in turn has been negatively affecting its political development. In the book by Chizea Obi and Juliet Njoku, *Nigerian Women and the Challenges of our time*, Chizea refers to Nigerian women as the “building blocks” of the nation.⁷⁶ The question to ask, which she implies, is where is the future of a nation’s political development if its building blocks are not given equal opportunities to actively participate in influential decision making processes. It is therefore my argument that the political development of Nigeria is

⁷³ Nussbaum C. Martha (2000). *Women and Human Development: the capabilities approach*. Cambridge University press. US. P. 1

⁷⁴ Ibid, p. 3

⁷⁵ Ibid, p. 12

⁷⁶ Chizea, Dora Obi and Juliet Njoku (1991). *Nigerian Women and the Challenges of our time*. Nigeria: Malthouse press Limited. P 10

strongly connected to the degree to which women are allowed in its electoral politics. If more women are allowed in Nigeria's electoral politics, there will be a change in the political development of the country. Many developing countries like Nigeria have created an invisible wall above women, limiting them to a certain level of authority. Although this is a global problem, it is prevailing in developing countries. Unequal gender political participation cuts back on national input of ideas which does not allow for a holistic national representation of its population.

FOCUS

For the purpose of this paper, the focus will be on the relationship between women's active participation in politics (decision making positions) and human development in Nigeria. Some of the questions that will be addressed included (1) how will the increase in the number of women in electoral politics transform Nigerian politics? (2) why is it important for women to be involved in electoral politics as opposed to local politics or organized (grassroots) politics? And (3) what are some of the obstacles facing women in their approach today?

My sources of information include literature works, interview and observation, research papers, report papers from these women organizations (if obtainable), and newspapers.

CASES

The cases are based on the political activities of women in the Eastern and Western part of Nigerian. From the eastern part comes the Aba war or as it is sometimes called the women's war of 1929. The women staged a protest against a tax policy

introduced by the British administration. They demanded that the tax be abolished since they were not even receiving any compensation from the government.

The second case covers the Egba people in the Western part of Nigeria. The western women were also agitated by forced taxation from which they received to benefit. Unlike the Aba women, however the Egba women, led by Olufunmilayo Ransom-Kuti formed the Abeokuta Ladies Club (ALC), which evolved into the Abeokuta Women's Union (AWU) and later gave birth to Nigerian Women's Union (NWU). Each association created showed the expansion of interest.

CONCLUSION

Where should we go from here? After gathering data and consulting various sources, this paper should be able to confirm that there is indeed a strong relationship between the political development of a country and the degree to which women are allowed in its politics. But the main solution that my hypothesis seeks is providing means to bridge the gender political inequality, and most importantly is to provide or at least anticipate ways that will be effective in permanently establishing women's presence in Nigeria's politics.

CHAPTER 3

CASE STUDIES

INTRODUCTION

Since independence, Sub-Saharan African countries have been struggling in the section of political development. Political scholars have made the effort to understand the nature of political development in third world countries, particularly in Africa. They have made several suggestions, which many African governments have applied. Sadly, Africa remains politically ill even as many of its countries move towards democracy as a possible remedy. Subjected to colonial rule for many years, most African countries lost their indigenous system of government. This is not to wholly blame colonialism for Africa's political set back of today. Nevertheless, the introduction of Western system of government offset the nature of government (politics) in this region of the world. Today, Africa faces problems in political development and the problem of equal gender political participation. It is the purpose of this research to emphasize that equal gender political participation is directly related and essential to the process of political development using the cases of the Aba war and that of the women's political activities in Western Nigeria. However, it is necessary to give brief analysis of the terms: politics, development, and gender equality in order to better understand the relationship between women in politics and political development.

Many African countries, Nigeria as an example, obtained their independence in 1960s. Independence at the time meant freedom (especially, freedom to self-govern). However, there has been debate as to if these countries did in fact obtain freedom as. If they are not free, then by whom are they enslaved? What then is the connection between independence, development and freedom? For them, independence meant freedom and

freedom should lead to development. However, today it is not the case. African countries are still behind in the area of development. Again, are we really free?

Amartya Sen explains:

*Development requires the removal of major sources of unfreedom: poverty as well as tyranny, poor economic opportunities as well as systematic social deprivation, neglect of public facilities as well as intolerance or overactivity of repressive states.*⁷⁷

The concern of this research is the “systematic social deprivation” and “intolerance or overactivity of repressive state” parts of the above statement. Development of any type, which in this case is political, in a society should concern itself with the well being and the freedom of the people of such society. When a population of a country is deprived of their rights to participate in the decision making process of such country, they are being systematically deprived of their social rights as well as their political rights. Likewise, a state that will allow such injustice to happen is a repressive state. Social deprivation and repressive states are both agents of both unfreedom and factors that contribute to lack of development.

Ronald Skeldon, a professor at the University of Sussex in development studies, gives two important dimensions of development:

*Development is a dynamic process of improvement, which implies a change, an evolution, growth and advancement. Development as a phenomenon suggests that people are able to control their future and can improve their condition in the world (living conditions, capacity to feed, education level, life length, etc.) through process towards something better.*⁷⁸

In the above quote, Skeldon first presents a general definition of development that can be broadly applied to all areas of study. Development should involve physical change and advancement in the way that a system runs. The political development of most African

⁷⁷ Sen, Amartya (1999). *Development as Freedom*. New York: Anchor Books.

⁷⁸ Ronald Skeldon, 1997

countries are questionable today because there is little or no change from the way they were some fifty years ago. Instead, they appear to be degenerating. The second part of Skeldon's definition of development gives the indicators of a developed country: "people are able to control their future and can improve their condition in the world (living conditions, capacity to feed, education level, life length, etc.) through process towards something better". This indicates that the measurement of development of a country is beyond its level of wealth. For example, a rich country that deprives its people of their political rights is not developed even if it is economically well off. Development is allowing all citizens equal political opportunities and rights despite of their gender, economic, academic or religious background. As Amartya Sen argues, "development has to be more concerned with enhancing the lives we lead and the freedoms we enjoy. Expanding the freedoms that we have reason to value not only makes our lives richer and more unfettered, but also allows us to be fuller social person, exercising our own volitions and interacting with – and influencing – the world in which we live".⁷⁹ There is no development without the freedom of the people. Neither can there be development if the political power to make decisions that affect the whole population is given only to a particular gender group. Thus, development has not taken place until the people of a country have equal access to the necessary services and conditions that will allow them to lead the kind of live they desire. The way to achieve such development, however, is having the freedom to choose and also eradicating those factors that stand in the way of living in true freedom.

Nine years before Sen wrote his book *Development as Freedom*, the United Nations opened its human development report by stating that "people are the real wealth

⁷⁹ Sen, op. cit, p. 4-15

of a nation. The basic objective of development is to create an enabling environment for people to enjoy long, healthy, and creative lives”.⁸⁰ When a nation cannot provide its inhabitants with basic health care, education, or employment, the people are living a life of “unfreedom” and development cannot take place until these “unfreedoms” have been eradicated.⁸¹ Depriving citizens of his political liberty is one crucial weapon of “unfreedom” that adversely affects the development of a country and that calls for immediate action.⁸² This research is set out to present unequal gender representation in the political activities (specifically, national politics) of a country as part of the “unfreedom” that do not allow for proper development.

POLITICS AND DEVELOPMENT

To address what is meant by politic in the context of my observations, it is imperative to note that the politics practiced in Nigeria today is not exactly of Africa. The “African politic” as we know it today is a problem that has been affecting the general development of the region. At the introduction of Western political system, the people’s former systems of governance were changed and women in particular were relegated to the backstage.⁸³ Today, Nigeria strives to be like the Western states.⁸⁴ Nigeria’s Presidential system of government is nothing but the imitation of the United States’ governmental system: it is comprised of the Executive, the Legislative, and the Judiciary branch, with the Legislative branch composed of the Senate and the House of Representative.⁸⁵ Although following in the footsteps of the United States might lead to

⁸⁰ UN, 1990

⁸¹ Sen, *op. cit.*, p. 3

⁸² *Ibid*, 16-17

⁸³ Omoh Tsatsaku Ojior, pg 13-14

⁸⁴ *Ibid*

⁸⁵ <http://www.nigeriaembassyusa.org/nppf.shtml>, March 14, 2008

political developmental breakthrough in Nigeria, it could become problematic, however, because Nigeria has a complete different cultural practices from the US. In 1997, Yoweri Museveni said:

*He is tired of the 'shallowness' of Western thinking that demands that Uganda instantly model its politics on the U.S. 'Unless you say all the societies in the whole world are uniform, then you cannot say their political management must be uniform.'*⁸⁶

Yoweri, who although adopted the capitalist system, remained “at heart a socialist who would prefer a more egalitarian system”.⁸⁷ As Nigerian leaders ambition to accomplish in 50 years a system that took United States some hundred years to establish, they must keep in mind that the past Nigeria’s societal and cultural structure is very different from that of the US or any Western state. Dynamic leaders who know how to accommodate both old and the new without much gap are needed for the political development of Nigeria.

The problem with adopting a foreign system has been evident in Nigeria since the first leaders were unable to maintain a civilian government more that the first six years of independence. After the independence of 1960, Nigeria was run under a parliamentary system until it was overthrown in 1966 by the Military government which succeeded in running the country for about thirty more years.⁸⁸ In spite of Nigeria’s effort to become a democratic state, its founding governmental system has established a male dominated government. As a result, it will be impossible to establish a democratic government in Nigeria until politics stops to be a male affair. Democracy is not a magic remedy for development; its effectiveness depends on how it is applied and utilized.⁸⁹

⁸⁶ <http://www.time.com/time/printout/0,8816,986916,00.html> March 15, 2008

⁸⁷ *ibid*

⁸⁸ *Ibid*

⁸⁹ Sen, *op. cit.*, p.154

For the purpose of this research, Politics is interpreted as an activity in which every individual has equal rights and participation. Nnamdi Azikiwe, the man referred to as the “Zik of Africa” and the founding father of Nigeria’s Nationalism explains politics as follows:

The African [Nigerian] philosophy of politics and government is both pragmatic and idealistic. Its pragmatism may be explained in the concept that food, shelter, and clothing constitute the necessities of life which every individual must share one with another. Its political idealism is based on the idea that in addition to the material necessities of life, a spiritual outlook on the rights of man also is an essential element to the corporate existence of the State. Call it what you may ... yet, the African State does not reckon greatness, on material values alone/ rather, it seeks to safeguard the citizens, so that the security of the many not be usurped and transgressed by the few.⁹⁰

Nigerian politics, as anticipated by its founding father, is to equally accommodate all without discrimination of any kind. However, the under-representation of Nigerian women in politics has proved the Zik’s vision as just a mere dream. Nigeria women have been experiencing major discrimination in political affairs since the country’s independence. Sen speaks of political freedom as an intrinsic factor in the process of development. He also advocates the importance of individual’s participation in the political decisions of a nation. Withholding the freedom to participate “must be seen as repressive”.⁹¹ As social beings, it is the right of every individual to be able to make his or her views and opinions known without any fear. Citizens, in spite of who they are should be able to “draw attention forcefully to general needs, and to demand appropriate public action”.⁹² In addition, they should be involved actively in the decision-making process. The opportunity to do so is essential to political development.

⁹⁰ Cited by Omoh Tsatsaku Ojior from Nnamdi Azikiwe, *Liberia in World politics*, London: arthor H. Stockwell, Ltd., 1934, 226

⁹¹ Sen, p 16

⁹² sen, 150

WOMEN AND DEVELOPMENT/ GENDER EQUALITY

My purpose, on the other hand, is to emphasize that it is high time for both women and men in Nigeria to realize that politics is not a man's game. It is an activity in which anyone, either a man or a woman, can effectively participate. This is not just on the local level but as well as on the national level. The political contribution of women towards development should not be limited to acting as agents of social change. They are capable as well as their male counterpart to be both national and international political leaders. Nigeria has come a long way in the way that politics is run and there have been significant developments such as the transition from military to democratic government. However, the place of Nigerian women in electoral politics, which is an important aspect of political development, is still significantly empty. Thus, an increase in the number of women in electoral positions. The two cases observed in this paper confirm that women are capable to enact change that will positively affect the development of Nigeria and they are ready if they are given the chance to attain decision-making positions.

In the context of this research, participation in decision making process is in reference to the active involvement of Nigerian women in places of high political authority. This is an important issue that requires immediate action not only because it will improve the development rate of Nigeria, Nigerian women's political powerlessness does not stop at political issues only. Political powerlessness of Nigerian women also affects their economic, academic, and social states. In spite of several cases of women's political activities in Nigeria, the bitter truth is that the role of Nigerian women has always been "both insignificant and subordinate to the men's, in terms of real leadership

and decision-making positions”.⁹³ However, it should not been so, considering the fact that as a signatory to the 1946 convention of the United Nations on protecting political rights of women, Nigeria is obligated to provide equal gender rights. Apparently, Nigeria has not been able to prove itself as a country that operates on policies. As mentioned earlier, policies are made in Nigeria mostly for the sake of documentation.

Having examined the relationship between politics, development, freedom and gender equality, we can now take a look at the historical political activities of Igbo and Yoruba women. The Aba war took place during the colonial rule, creating a new perspective of women in British politics and the Western women political activities took place towards the end of colonialism and into the fight for independence. The two cases are to re-establish the notion that Nigerian women are not inferior and are capable of holding leadership positions on the national level.

⁹³ Ojiaka, Chigoziri. Gender issues and political development in Nigeria”. 2003 p 1

THE WOMAN'S WAR

INTRODUCTION

As explained earlier, the Ibo society prior to the colonial occupation was in a way independent of each other and of the other parts of the Nigerian. Consequently, its political system was not as strong as the remaining two regions – North and West by the colonial rulers. Judith Van Allen described the Igbo society before colonialism as a “system of diffuse authority, fluid and informal leadership, shared rights of enforcement, and a more or less stable balance of male and female power”.⁹⁴ Both women and men had parallel but unequal authority. The positions of women were complementary but at the same as important as the men. Although men held positions as the chiefs of the villages, they did not interfere with women's affairs. Women were elected to be in control of their own affairs. The women leaders were therefore regarded with similar regards as the male because they held equivalent authority as that the men amidst their women folk. As a result, there was no particular individual who held an authoritative position above others. Van Allen clarifies that decision-making was not entitled to only one person and there was no obligation that subjected anyone to a certain command. The most apparent criteria for leadership in the Igbo society were good communication skill (ability to use proverbs which showed one's level of wisdom) and wealth. Women's participation in decision making meetings, which were mostly conducted by men, was not prohibited as long as they engage in discussions that interest the people.

The Igbo society had a complex political system. The diversity and wide spread of the people did not allow for a central governing system. Although a patrilineal system, it

⁹⁴ Allen, Judith. 171.

was informal and operated in a democratic fashion.⁹⁵ The democratic nature of the political system did not allow any sort of authoritarianism. Van Allen describes the political system as follows:

In this society, political power is diffuse, and leadership was fluid and informal. Community decision were made and disputes settled in a variety of gatherings – village-wide assemblies, women’s meetings, age grades, secret and title societies... Decisions were made by discussions until mutual agreement was reached. Any adult present who had something to say on the matter under discussion was entitled to speak – as long as he or she said something that others considered worth listening to; as the Igbo say, “A case forbids no one”.⁹⁶

In village meetings, for example, anyone had the right to contribute. However, there was sex differentiation in political responsibilities.⁹⁷ This is because activities that are core to the Igbo society such as farming and trading were divided in terms of gender. As a result and because of the patrilineal set-up of the society, women could not be the head of a family or of a lineage. Nevertheless, women leaders were recognized and they were consulted for advice and their input in decision-making process.⁹⁸

In the hinterland, the system was divided into different levels with family serving as the core of it, extended family holding the lowest political authority and the town or village groups possessing the strongest political power.⁹⁹ In the family system, which consists of the father, mother and their children, ancestry was patrilineal.¹⁰⁰ The father served as the authority voice and the spiritual leader. The extended family, which has the lowest political function, was composed of about twenty of more family who lived in a

⁹⁵ Bolanle Awe (1992)

⁹⁶ Mohammed, D. Halima. “Women in Nigerian History: Examples from Borno Empire, Nupeland and Igboland” in *Women in Nigeria Today*. Quote adapted from Judith Van Allen, *Aba Riots or the Igbo Woman’s War? Ideology Stratification and the Invisibility of Women* in Hafkin and Bay, (eds),

⁹⁷ Ibid, (1992), p 75

⁹⁸ Gailey 22

⁹⁹ Gailey22-24

¹⁰⁰ Ibid 22

walled-in area. The head, who was also the political leader, was called an Okpala.¹⁰¹ The Okapala along with other title holders held the responsibility of decision making. Women were also involved in this process, but they had to hold their separate meetings.

The village was the strongest political unit¹⁰² and the village assembly was the main political institution in the Igbo society¹⁰³. It was usually composed of a number of localized patrilineage called the umunna.¹⁰⁴ Each umunna, which was consisted of a number of extended family, chose their leaders who were headed by the oldest man. When there were any minor problems with an umunna, the head of that section would deal with it.¹⁰⁵ Only in situations of major problems were they taken to the council of all the umunnas or the village assembly. Anyone either male or female whose opinion was considered worthwhile was given the right to talk during the assembly.¹⁰⁶ “Proverbs, parable and metaphor” were roots of political discourse.¹⁰⁷ Since every Igbo was raised with the tradition of proverbs, parables and metaphor, politics could be understood and practiced by anyone, meaning that could not have been excluded.

The political status of women was not as high and that of the men. Although there were no constitutions or policies that explicitly excluding women’s political participation, they were rarely called upon to talk in village assembly.¹⁰⁸ This was not because women were viewed as weaker or politically incapable. The nature of the Igbo culture gave men a head start so that women were almost always holding the second positions. Leaders thus were elected based on individuals’ achievements, physical strength and most

¹⁰¹ Ibid

¹⁰² Gailey, 23

¹⁰³ Van, Judith Allen (1972)

¹⁰⁴ Ibid

¹⁰⁵ Mba, 27

¹⁰⁶ Ibid Van (1972)

¹⁰⁷ ibid

¹⁰⁸ Ibid p168

importantly, verbal wisdom. Leaders had to be verbally creative. Leadership was merited and not ascribed.¹⁰⁹ As it will be discovered in the case of the Women's War, anyone, either female or male, could attain a high level of political authority.

The women associations:

As mentioned earlier, the village assembly concerned itself only with issues that applied to all while the men dealt with problems that applied to them. Thus, women also had associations that handled problems facing women. These associations created bonds among women from different villages and would help strengthen their protest during the Women's War.

There were two main women's associations: the association of the wives of the village and the women's titles societies.¹¹⁰ Each Igbo society had its women's organizations and was independent of the other. Because of the democratic nature of the Igbo politics, leaders were elected informally.¹¹¹ A spokeswoman, usually an old woman, was chosen to represent the women's organization. Her role was only to represent and not to rule over the others. She would be the one to take their concerns to the village assembly. Although they operated in a loose, informal manner, "the village wives' associations provided a very effective, clear-cut, and authoritative organization in which all the wives were involved".¹¹² One prominent way that these associations convey the women's concerns to the male community was through a process called "sitting on a man".¹¹³ This process involved going to the house of the offender (a male) and staying there from morning into the night. The women would ridicule the man and call his

¹⁰⁹ Ibid

¹¹⁰ Mba, 27

¹¹¹ Ibid 28

¹¹² ibid

¹¹³ Ibid 29

manhood into question by dancing and “singing scurrilous songs which detailed the women’s grievances against him”.¹¹⁴ This action would go on until the man came out to repent and promise to mend his ways. Many times, “sitting on a man” would result into a measure of punishment for the man from the village council. Other ways of getting their voice across to the men was through boycotts and strikes. When a man offended his wife either by beating her or not treating her well, the women could threaten to leave the village in mass or to not cook for the men. Mba explains that in spite of the simplicity of these actions, they were taken seriously by the men. The male thus responded by giving the women their requests.¹¹⁵

Women held their own meeting called Mikiri.¹¹⁶ Mikiri was held whenever there were issues to address – these issues were mostly those that directly addressed women needs. During this meeting, women would bring issues such as problem with their husbands or issues dealing with market activities. More importantly, decisions concerning how markets progress and regulations were often made during Mikiri. As Allen notes, prices of goods were set during this meeting and rules about market attendants were made with appropriate penalties for whoever breaks them. These meetings “provided women with a forum in which to develop their political talents, and a means for protecting their interests as traders, farmers, wives, and mothers through collective action – against individual women, individual men, and men as a group.”¹¹⁷

With the British declaration of Southern Nigeria as a protectorate in 1900, they were able to penetrate the Igbo society. Acting out of ignorance of the Igbo society, the

¹¹⁴ Van Allen (1972) p170

¹¹⁵ Mba in Awe p.76

¹¹⁶ Ibid. Pp. 169

¹¹⁷ Mahammed, D Halima in Women in Nigeria Today. P49

British tried to introduce the ideas of “native administration” which was derived from their experience with the Northern leaders.¹¹⁸ They were not successful however, considering the fluid and informal nature of leadership, “shared rights of enforcement, and a more or less stable balance of male and female power” that governed the Igbo society.¹¹⁹ The Igboland was finally divided into Native Court Areas under the supervision of some British District Officers.¹²⁰ The creation of the new administration marked the falling apart of the Igbo political structure. Creating Native Courts and choosing representatives among the people were against the democratic and informal ruling customs because it placed an authority over the people.

In 1889, Major Claude MacDonald, a British officer sent to oversee the economic situation in the Igboland of Oil Rivers, created the Native Councils.¹²¹ Although they lacked any real legislative and judicial powers, the Native Councils helped the British to stay influential in the society. Small courts, through which traditional laws were enforced, served as channels of information and influence for the Native Courts. Each small court had a president, Vice-president and four members and it had jurisdiction in civil matters that involved cases of debt of about £25 and about £50 for inheritance.¹²² Above all the different levels of authority was the High Commissioner, who had the power to withdraw “the right of any Native Courts to function or to remove any member from the court”.¹²³ Warrant Chiefs were chosen among the Igbo men as representatives of the British government. They were responsible for imposing the British rules and

¹¹⁸ Van allen 171 (1972)

¹¹⁹ Ibid

¹²⁰ ibid

¹²¹ Gailey, 53

¹²² Ibid 57

¹²³ Ibid, 57

regulations. More specifically, the Warrant Chiefs were obliged to make sure that orders from a political officer were respected and carried out.¹²⁴ The new system was a violation of the Igbo concept.¹²⁵ As a result, the Igbo people were not submissive.

Under the new system, the traditional leaders lost of juridical powers. Women were even more victimized. There were no female officers chosen until after the woman's war.¹²⁶ Mba explains that "these new positions were open only to men who had some education or some wealth or who could make themselves conspicuous".¹²⁷ Unlike the previous system, women received no recognition in political affairs. Instead of women making decisions on issues that concerned them, the Warrant Chiefs were in charge. In addition, the women's associations were not allowed nor were they allowed to take any punitive actions such as "sitting on the man", boycotting or strike.¹²⁸ Mba reports an Igbo woman's statement as reported in the Aba Commission of Inquiry Notes or Evidence: "We don't want chiefs... [I]nstead of coming home to consult women, they generally agree with the District Officer straight away".¹²⁹

Although women's political power was greatly undermined, it was enhanced at the same time during colonialism.¹³⁰ The unsuitable situation of women under the colonial rule gave them the courage to speak out, which secured a level of power for Nigerian women. Although this advantage was not immediately evident (i.e, it did not grant women an immediate result), it will later pave way for them in the political sphere as it will be discussed later on in the political activities women in Western Nigeria. When

¹²⁴ Ibid, 64

¹²⁵ Ibid, allen 172

¹²⁶ Mba, 41

¹²⁷ Ibid, mba

¹²⁸ Ibid, mba 42

¹²⁹ Ibid mba 42

¹³⁰ Mba, p67

women take their complaints to the Chiefs, they usually not treated in a satisfactory manner.¹³¹ The Aba Commission of Inquiry Notes of Evidence states a woman's complaints concerning dowries and divorce: "the chiefs in whose houses cases of divorce are settled don't treat us properly. Generally speaking, the former husbands of the wife whose divorce cases are taken to the chiefs' houses for settlement won't get back their dowries because the chiefs keep them".¹³² In spite of the destruction of the women's associations, they were still able to mobilize. Since they were unable to communicate their wants and needs under the new political institution, the women felt victimized and could only find organized protest as the means to get through the system.

THE WAR

By 1929, the British have successfully established their presence in the East. Not only has the British banned the gathering of women, they also denied the women of their traditional rights. The British through Native Councils then proceeded to enforce laws and policies both men and women. This act agitated the women because the new government was not benefiting them in any ways.

The woman's war began in November of 1929 when the rumor of taxation on women spread. Taxation was introduced to the Eastern region in 1927 at a time of economic instability.¹³³ The intrusion of the British had opened up the Igbo economy to both regional and international market, which made it vulnerable to the fluctuating international market at the time. With the end of World War one and the world head for

¹³¹ Ibid pg 42

¹³² Mba, 42 from Aba Commission of Inquiry Notes Evidence. 1930. Lagos.

¹³³ Mba from Bolanle Awe p. 78

another war, the international market was not doing good.¹³⁴ The women greatly felt the consequence because now that their market was governed by the British, their income was not as direct as before. During this time, the price of palm oil, which was the main produce, fell sharply and both middlemen and women had to pay higher levy on some imported materials “because the administration had raised the excise duty” on these articles.¹³⁵ In addition, it was reported by some women that the officers were mistreating them due to the new political system. Some officers were reported to have taking women’s properties and were obtaining wives without paying the full bride-wealth.¹³⁶

In the pre-colonial Igbo society, the market was the main source of income for the women. Mba explains the effect of colonial occupation on women’s economic power:

*The introduction of cassava, of coinage currency, and the expanded market for palm produce had resulted in many more women...being involved as middlewomen in the palm oil and kernel trade with the foreign companies. They then purchased imported goods such as cloth, tobacco, cigarettes and spirits and took them back to the villages to sell.*¹³⁷

Although this meant a higher standard of living for the women involved, it also made them vulnerable financially. This means that a price drop on the international market also would affect the local market. Since everything was now under the British control, there was no more alternative means of income. Mba mentions that in addition to the price drops, other changes such as the produce inspection that was introduced in 1928 all combined to agitate the women.¹³⁸

There were no guidelines given as to how to enforce the new system, but District Officers were given the authority to assign taxation as they see fit. As a result, the tax

¹³⁴ This is a connection that I concluded based on the time period of the woman’s war. WWI ended in 1918 and WWI began in 1937 in Asia. The introduction of the taxation system was between 1927 and 1933.

¹³⁵ Ifeka-Moller, Caroline. *Female Militancy and Colonial Revolt: the women’s war of 1929, Eastern Nigeria*. In Ardener, Shirley (ed) *Perceiving women*. 1975 p131

¹³⁶ Ibid Caroline

¹³⁷ Ibid Mba, 78

¹³⁸ ibid

figures varied between £12 and £14, an estimation based on the knowledge that a household's annual income was about £64.¹³⁹ Women's movements in Nigeria such as the Aba women's riot were not anti-government. They were, however against governmental policies that pose threats to the well being of women. This was especially the case during the colonial occupation in Nigeria.

Under the old system, taxation was understood as "a people's contribution to the running of their society" and this was carried out in terms of "Obligations to perform services and contribute goods".¹⁴⁰ The British system of taxation was compulsory and given at a fixed rate. It thus allowed them to have a stronger control of market prices, allowing them to change the prices of goods as they thought best.¹⁴¹ Women were particularly frustrated under the new law because many of them were responsible to pay their own taxes, their husband's and their children's regardless of age. They also saw the taxation and counting of both them and their children as a threat "to their fertility and to the lives of their children."¹⁴² Enyidia of Oloko, one of the women that testified demanded"

*What have we women done to warrant our being taxed? We women are like trees which bear fruit. You should tell us the reason why we who bear seeds should be counted.*¹⁴³

Afigbo explains that in indigenous communities such as the Igbo society, women saw the connection between them and a seed bearing tree – "just as one cannot, in the interest of human beings joke with the survival of fruit-bearing trees, one could not play with the

¹³⁹ Gailey, p 93

¹⁴⁰ Mba (1982), 44

¹⁴¹ Ibid

¹⁴² Ibid p45

¹⁴³ Mba from Awe p. 78

fate of women”.¹⁴⁴ This belief was confirmed in the reaction of another woman when she protested saying “are you still counting ... last year my son’s wife who was pregnant died? What am I to count? I have been mourning the death of that woman!”¹⁴⁵ The explanation goes that the woman saw a connecting between the first count and the death of her daughter-in-law. Definitely the taxing system was not going to be effective and not voluntarily accepted by the women.

Men were first to be taxed. In 1925, the Igbo men were counted during census and taxed afterwards even though the British administration had said that there was going to be no taxing.¹⁴⁶ The fear that they would be taxed during when the Assistant District Officer decided to have another census in 1929 raised fear among women, which made them to prepare to attack in any case of confrontation. Gailey explains that the Igbo women were did not know how to philosophically process the new changes and the effects they were having on the women’s economy:

*They could only observe that within a year certain factors had combined to reduce the amount of money that they had. Taxation, lower prices for raw material, higher prices for luxury items, and new rules for selling produce could all be viewed as stemming from a conspiracy of the Europeans to impoverish them.*¹⁴⁷

Women began contacting each other and planning a secrete meeting when they heard the rumor of possible taxing. Their plan was catalyzed when Nwanyeruwa, a woman of Oloko village, was assaulted by Emeruwa.¹⁴⁸ Emeruwa, a mission teacher was sent by Okugo, a warrant chief who had been instructed to do the counting by a District

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, quote adopted from A.E. Afigbo, *The Warrant Chiefs* (Longman: London, 1972)

¹⁴⁵ Ibid p 79

¹⁴⁶ Allen, *Sitting on a Man* 173

¹⁴⁷ Gailey, 100

¹⁴⁸ Ibid P. 108

Officer, because he [Okugo] had made himself unpopular through his corruption.¹⁴⁹ Immediately, Nwanyeruwa sent a message to a group of women who had already been meeting concerning the fear of taxation. Messages were then sent to women in other villages, who all came to Oloko village to “sit on” Emeruwa. A number of women were injured while Emeruwa’s servants tried to force them out of his compound.¹⁵⁰ The women’s victory started by making sure that Okugo, the warrant chief, was prosecuted. Okugo was imprisoned for assaulting the women and on December 22 the District Officer “gave the women Okugo’s cap of office”.¹⁵¹ The Report of the Aba Commission of Inquiry states that by December 1929, ten native courts were destroyed, a number of others damaged, houses of native court personnel were attacked, factories were looted and fifty-five women were killed.¹⁵² The protest did not die down until early 1930 when the women received satisfying response from the administration.

RESULTS OF THE WAR

Although some accounts have claimed that the women’s protest was inspired by economic reasons, it is the purpose of this paper to emphasize on its political implications for Nigerian women. The women were not upset mainly because of the tax and the condition of the market at the time. Instead, they discontent with the British policies and with a government that had robbed them of all their administrative powers. In addition, they were not represented in any administration nor were their interests considered. They were also aggravated by the way in which the warrant Chiefs carried out their duties.¹⁵³

¹⁴⁹ Mba (1982), p. 76

¹⁵⁰ Mba (1982), p 77

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ifeka-Moller, Caroline. *Female Militancy and Colonial Revolt: the women’s war of 1929, Eastern Nigeria*. In Ardener, Shirley (ed) *Perceiving women*. 1975 p131

Although it was recognized at the end of the protest that taxing men would not be stopped, the women settled after they had confirmed that they would not be taxed.¹⁵⁴ One of the most important achievements was the recognition for the need to incorporate women's interests in deciding who gets elected into the administration especially at the local level. Therefore, the courts were re-organized with consideration for women's recommendation.¹⁵⁵ The women were able to bring cases of alleged corrupt Warrant officers who were tried in courts and some found guilty and punished.¹⁵⁶

Some reforms were also implemented due to the women's grievances. One of them was the re-organization of courts so that it not only listened to women's request, but it was conducted to follow the form of the traditional village assembly.¹⁵⁷ The difference was the British influence, which had destroyed the democratic and informal system of the Igbo government. As a result, not anyone could take part in the decision-making processes; participation was no longer based on whoever wished to participate. All participation was given to members of the court who were 99% male and rich.¹⁵⁸ Women, therefore, were unable to participate because they lacked the resources.

Nevertheless, the Women's war changed the political status of Igbo women, granting them more authority and recognition in the Igbo society. The British administration was shocked at the women's ability to organize such successful protest. One of the members of the Aba Commission of Inquiry, Graham Paul, commented on the confidence of the women who came to testify:

¹⁵⁴ Mba in Awe p 80

¹⁵⁵ *ibid*

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 87

¹⁵⁷ Van allen

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid*

*No one listening to the evidence given before us could have failed to be impressed by the intelligence, the power of exposition, the directness and the mother-with which some of the leaders exhibited in setting forth their grievances and the lessons to be learnt from their demonstration should be taken to heart.*¹⁵⁹

This statement confirmed the effect of that the women's protest had on the way in which they were perceived and judged by the British government. In 1930, a woman by name of Chinwe, one of the spokeswomen during the protest, was chosen by the District Officer of Enugu as one of the members of a native court, making her one woman out of thirteen men and the first woman to ever hold such position.¹⁶⁰

From the Woman's war, one cannot ignore the glaring fact that Nigerian women are more than capable to handle political affairs at any level just as good as men if not even better Nigerian women are more than capable to handle political affairs at any level just as good as men if not even better. The women's protest was not the first attempt at confronting the tax policy. Since the introduction of the policy, both men and women had expressed their disapproval. The men, however, retreated at the confrontation of the British. The women, on the other hand, remained strong and stepped forward even amidst intimidations. Women's organized protest did not stop with this war. As it will be seen in the next chapter with the Western women, the Aba Women's war encouraged women from other regions of Nigeria to press even further. It is thus apparent that women are not inferior to men in any way not even in political affairs. The main problem is that they are not being given the opportunity to exercise their decision-making skills.

The war was a major landmark in the history of colonialism and political development in Nigeria. Although the women's war was not the first attempt in Nigeria

¹⁵⁹ Mba (1982). Adopted from Report of the Commission of Inquiry. 1930. Lagos

¹⁶⁰ Mba (1982). P83

to protest against colonial policy, its success had more effect on the way that Nigerians were perceived. The effects were not, however, immediately manifested. Since the beginning to colonial occupation in Nigeria up until the women's war, women had totally lost all forms of political power. The 1929 movement thus created awareness of the women's capacity in the British community in Nigeria and at the same time, a level of confidence was created amidst Nigerians to challenge the colonial government. This confidence, which eventually led to the 1960 independence, would gradually mature over the next thirty years.

THE EGBA WOMEN'S ASSOCIATIONS

In 1914, the Sole Native Authority (SNA) was established in the Western region of Nigeria by the British government.¹⁶¹ It had similar responsibility as the warrant chief system of the Eastern region. The SNA was separated from the former traditional system in such a way that the Kings were no longer selected by native officers or council. As a result all other ruling positions including both men's and women's were eradicated. Under the new system, men were able to apply for new positions in the SNA, however, women's positions were totally removed. Yoruba women's pre-colonial political authority was completely.¹⁶² Just like the Igbo women, Yoruba women had their place in the political setting of their society. As explained earlier, there were examples of female rulers in Yorubaland who possessed equal authority and held the same ruling power as the male kings. However, after the establishment of SNA in 1914, these women lost all opportunities to obtain any level of leadership. Not only were they not allowed becoming leaders, they were also excluded from any decision-making meetings including those that directly affected them such as marriage regulations.¹⁶³

As in the case of the Aba women, the Egba women were able to rise up against the oppressive institution through their solidarity. In spite of having lost their political power, the women did not lose their power to organize, which they used to their cause. The primary cause of the Egba women's movement is forced taxation as in the case of the Aba women's war. The Egba women's case differs from that of the Aba women, however, in that their political activities and their effects transcended the colonial period. Although their fight began with opposing the policy of forced taxation, they proceeded to

¹⁶¹ Mba, (1982). 39

¹⁶² Ibid., at 135

¹⁶³ Ibid.

creating political organizations whose purposes were to directly address the interest of women in Nigeria. Some of the organizations created then are still active in Nigeria until today. The problem is, however, they have not expanded their area of target to accurately deal with the political issues that are facing Nigerian women today. They are still focusing on areas such as women illiteracy and women empowerment through human rights. It is essential for women to be educated and be aware of their rights. However, there are other areas that demand equal, if not stronger, attention. This is not to say that these organizations do not advocate women's participation in electoral politics. Women need to be encouraged to go beyond just fighting for their rights and be physically involve in institutions where they can have better chance at enacting their desired changes.

In her time, Mrs. Kuti barely had a political figure that she followed, yet she fought for women's rights amidst all oppositions. As women fighting against the administration in a male-dominated society, Mrs. Kuti was labeled as "aggressive", which was "a common appellation for women whose forceful personalities lay outside the bounds of acceptable 'female' behavior".¹⁶⁴ She derived inspiration from personnel such as Madam Tinubu¹⁶⁵, Kwame Nkrumah (an independence fighter and first president of Ghana), Mohandas Gandhi, and A. B. I. Olorun-Nimbe (the first mayor of Lagos).¹⁶⁶ Her interests started with advocating the interests of market women and then she expanded these interests when she was elected into the National Council of Nigerians and Cameroons (NCNC) and started to press for more women to be elected into power.

¹⁶⁴ Johnson-Odim, Cheryl and Mba, Nina (1997). *For Women and the Nation: Funmilayo Ransom-Kuti*. Pp.39. Library of Congress Cataloging –in-Publication Data.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, at 6. A business woman who sold arms to warriors during war. Her wealth gained her political power with which she was able to secure herself.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, at 39

Funmilayo's background and marriage were significant contributors to developing her political interests and activities. After completing her primary education she continued to pursue her secondary education, becoming one of the first females to attend the Abeokuta Grammar School in 1914.¹⁶⁷ She taught at the same school until 1919 after which traveled to England to further her education. Both her local education and foreign affiliations helped shape her views on nationalism and women's position in the society. As a Christian, she was devoted to civil service, caring for her community and the people around her. Although she was not a minister herself, her marriage to Reverend Ransome-Kuti in 1925 made her responsible towards her community. In contrast to the male-dominated family structure of their time, the Kutis' family had no distinction between the wife and the husband.¹⁶⁸ In fact, they refused to keel or prostrate for anyone nor did they condone any one doing the same to them.¹⁶⁹

Mr. Kuti's interest in women's education was also encouraging. He was very concerned about women's treatment and also advocated for co-education.¹⁷⁰ Although he was a minister, he spent more time outside the church getting politically involved. A year after their wedding, Mr. Kuti succeeded in forming the Association of Headmasters of Ijebu Schools (AHIS).¹⁷¹ Although the initial objective of AHIS was to unify primary and secondary school headmasters (principals) who were then divided due to difference in salary, the association later expanded its interest to include social and political issues. For example, the association held a campaign against the colonial education policy in

167 Mba, Nina (1982). *Nigerian Women Mobilized*. Pp. 143. California: Institute of International studies - University of California, Berkeley.

168 Johnson-Odim, Cheryl and Mba, Nina, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.* This is a way of showing respect to elders or titled persons in Yorubaland; the women kneel and men prostrate.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.* p. 43

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.* p.45

Nigeria and demanded for improved working conditions for teachers.¹⁷² She was particularly against colonialism and Western education and she would later be a major player in the fight for Nigeria's independence. Because of their shared interest, Mrs. Kuti received the support of her husband and was not forced to follow in the footsteps of him; she had her own path, interests and responsibilities in the public. Johnson-Odim and Mba quote the observation of a *West Africa* magazine reporter describing Mrs. Kuti as possessing an "air of authority and the look of one whose decision was final... a woman who has to be assessed on her won merits and not as a shadowy reflection of her husband...Emancipation of women has indeed com to the Ransome-Kuti household."¹⁷³ Her independent personality undoubtedly gave the associations she would later form firm foundations.

She was also a woman who dared to defile the conventional ways of doing things. For instance, she is known to be the first woman in Nigeria to drive a car.¹⁷⁴ As a member of the Nigerian Union of Teachers (NUT), Mrs. Kuti was very outspoken and she made sure her voice was heard. NUT was formed in 1931 by the combination of AHIS and Lagos Union of Teachers (LUT), created in 1925 by Mr. Kuti's close friend Rev. Canon J.O. Lucas.¹⁷⁵ In 1949, Mrs. Kuti became one of the three representatives of NUT on the Central Board of Education of Nigeria, whose responsibility was to develop plan for female students to be technically educated.¹⁷⁶ Johnson-Odim and Mba record

¹⁷² Akinwumi, Olu Elijah (2002). Ransome-Kuti, Israel Oludotun: 1891 to 1955. Dictionary of African Christian Biography, Retrieved April 14, 2008, from http://www.dacb.org/stories/nigeria/ramsme-kuti_israel.html

¹⁷³ Johnson-Odim, Cheryl and Mba, Nina, op. cit., p. 42.

¹⁷⁴ Ogbonna, Ijeoma (17 December 2007). Nigeria: Women - Still Trailing Behind in Politics. *Daily Champion (Lagos)*, Retrieved april 14, 2008, from <http://allafrica.com/stories/200712170654.html>

¹⁷⁵ Nigerian Union of Nigeria (NUT). Retrieved April 14, 2008, from <http://www.nutnigeria.org/aboutus.html>

¹⁷⁶ Johnson-Odim, Cheryl and Mba, Nina, op. cit., p. 46.

that she would often check NUT's minutes carefully in order to make sure that her views were accurately noted.¹⁷⁷ They also record that her main concern was for women to receive equal educational monetary allowance as men. In 1952, it was noted the Mrs. Kuti urged NUT to ensure an increase of women attendance in their annual conference.¹⁷⁸

THE ASSOCIATIONS AND THEIR ACTIVITIES

ABEOKUTA LADIES' CLUB

Before the formation of the Abeokuta Ladies' Club (ALC), Mrs. Kuti's leadership had been demonstrated in her formation of clubs that addressed the immediate needs of women in her community. In 1923, two years before her marriage, she created a ladies' club, which consisted of girls and teachers from her school where she was a head teacher. The club was initially interested in teaching the women handicraft and social etiquette.¹⁷⁹ When she moved to Abeokuta in after her wedding, she founded a similar club in 1932.¹⁸⁰ The club retained similar aim as the earlier one, but with a difference in that its programs were opened to both females and males – “They organized teenagers of both sexes and held picnics, athletic games, and lectures for their entertainment and education”.¹⁸¹

Membership in the Ladies' club was exclusive in its early years.¹⁸² Those who became members were suggested at meetings and were invited upon the approval of all

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid. reference adopted from Smyke and Storer, *Nigerian Union of Teachers*, 159.

¹⁷⁹ Johnson-Odim, Cheryl and Mba, Nina, op. cit., p. 64.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Allman, Jean Marie (2004). *Fashioning Africa : power and the politics of dress*. Pp. 38. Bloomington : Indiana University Press.

members. In 1944, a friend of Mrs. Kuti introduced her to a market woman who had always desired to learn how to read. The market woman also informed Mrs. Kuti of a friend of hers who would hold hymn book upside down in church because of illiteracy.¹⁸³ As a result, ALC expanded its membership to include market women on March 1944, when it was officially launched. At its first meeting in March 15, 1945, Mrs. Kuti was named the president and the alake, Ademola II, who would later be the center of target of the women's protest, was named the patron.¹⁸⁴

The presence of market women brought to the attention of the ALC members the problems that these women were face especially the unjust treatment and policies that they are subjected to under the colonial administration. In Abeokuta, the alake was the authority that represented the colonial government at the time. The late 1930s and early 1940s were hard years for markets women in Nigeria. These women were hit hard with the economic effect of World War II.¹⁸⁵ Rice farmers and sellers suffered the most under the harsh condition. Rice farmers in Abeokuta, for example, were given a fixed measure of rice to be produced – thirteen thousand tons of rice at the rate of £13 per ton with no opportunity to export unless granted permission.¹⁸⁶ The restriction led to smuggling in of rice, which was then sold at cheaper price on the black markets.

ALC came at the right time for market women. At the time of the war, there was also an increase in the demand for rice from the military force in Lagos. The increased demand was hurtful for the market women because there was no benefit, since the military was not paying the cost. Stories of military and the police force seizing bags of

¹⁸³ Johnson-Odim, Cheryl and Mba, Nina, op. cit., p. 64.

¹⁸⁴ Allman, Jean Marie, op. cit., p.37

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 39

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

rice from market women without payment became rampant towards the end of the war. In 1945, the market women brought the complaint of government confiscating their rice to the ALC meetings. The women also mentioned “conditional sales”.¹⁸⁷ Women sellers were forced to buy items (in addition to their primary goods – rice) that were slow on the market for them to resell. As a result, their economic situation worsened. Johnson-Odim and Mba also made mention of the women’s complaint about how the policemen, private subcontractors, and some representatives of the alake would pay them less than the official market price only to sell the items at a higher price to the government.¹⁸⁸ They did this justifying their action by the food quota.

After hearing the complaints, Mrs. Kuti went to the Assistant District Officer (ADO), who told her that she could not sell rice in Abeokuta until the eighteen hundred tons of rice demanded for Lagos by the government had been met.¹⁸⁹ On September 25, 1945 The ALC took action on September 25, 1945 sending three members and three members of NUT to the ADO. They demanded that the confiscation of rice be stopped, but still no changes were made. Their next step was to approach the Resident. This action was also to no avail. From there, they lobbied the Egba Native Authority Council (ENA) based on the same complaint and demand on October 29, 1945. When the Council presented the case to the Alake, he refused to address it giving the reason that the control of rice sale was given by the British government.¹⁹⁰ However, after further investigation, Mrs. Kuti found out that the Alake had refused to address the case because he was also involved. He was directing the confiscated rice to his stores for sale and

¹⁸⁷ Johnson-Odim, Cheryl and Mba, Nina, *op. cit.*, p. 66.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁹ Mba, Nina (1982) *op. cit.*, p. 144

¹⁹⁰ Mba, Nina (1982). *Ibid.*, p. 144

keeping the profit.¹⁹¹ Finally on the 29th of October 1945, the market women with the help of the ALC won their fight. In continuation of their campaign, they took a more public approach by going to the press, *Daily Service*.¹⁹² The newspaper published their concern which ended with this sentence: “We the members of the ALC, on behalf of all Egba women, appeal to the press of Nigeria to help bring the seriousness of the position to the attention of the authorities before it is too late.”¹⁹³ This final step caught the attention of the government and the confiscation of rice was aborted six days after the press publication.

THE ABEOKUTA WOMEN’S UNION

Following the victory of 1945, the ALC expanded its interests and became a more political association. There were still other pressing issues facing women in Abeokuta such as the flat rate of taxation. Although the Aba women’s war had succeeded in stopping the unfair taxation of women in the East, the Western women were still faced by the situation. Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch described the women’s discontent:

*They became more and more impatient not only with the ill-treatment to make them pay that they endured but also with the fact that, despite the obligations imposed on them, they had neither the right to vote nor any representation – merely the right to complain of having been beaten and bullied.*¹⁹⁴

With the women feeling this way their aim was upgraded from just focusing on “alleviation of hardship to the elimination of the causes of hardship”.¹⁹⁵ Thus in 1946, the ALC was changed into the Abeokuta Women’s Union (AWU), adopting the motto,

¹⁹¹ Johnson, Cheryl (1982). Grass Roots Organizing: Women in Anticolonial Activity in Southwestern Nigeria. JSTOR: *African Studies Review*. Vol. 25, No. 2/3, pp. 149. Africa Studies Association.

¹⁹² Mba, Nina (1982) op. cit. p. 144

¹⁹³ Okome, Mojubaolu Olufunke (2000). Bringing Government Closer to the People: Women, the State, and the Travails of Decentralizing the Nigerian Federation. *The Scholar*. Fordham University: Department of African & African American Studies. <http://www.geocities.com/ojogbon/women4.html>

¹⁹⁴ Coquery-Vidrovitch, Catherine. (1997). *African women: a modern history*. Pp. 171. Boulder, Colo: Westview Press.

¹⁹⁵ Mba, Nina (1982) op. cit., p 145

“Unity, Cooperation, Selfless Service, and Democracy”.¹⁹⁶ The objectives and aims of AWU reflected its new interest:

- i. To defend, protect, preserve and promote the social, economic, cultural and political rights and interests of the women in Egbaland.*
- ii. To encourage mass education among the women through teaching its members to read and write.*
- iii. To cooperate with all organizations seeking and fighting genuinely and selflessly for the economic and political freedom and independence of the people.*¹⁹⁷

These objectives also reflect the observation and interests of Mrs. Kutu. She argued that under the indirect rule of the colonial system through the SNA with the alake as its representative in Abeokuta, women had suffered economically, socially and politically.¹⁹⁸ In addition, she maintained that women were not only deprived of their rights to have a say in the government, they were also forced to pay tax, which they could not afford and for which they were not compensated in any ways. She then concluded that the only way to see changes in the way women were being treated was to “organized them to gain political power to demand suffrage, participation in government, and, if necessary, changes in the system”.¹⁹⁹ This kind of mindset was definitely needed especially at a time when Nigeria was moving towards nationalism. It also marked a huge development from the Aba women’s approach.

By the mid 1940s, women were still being unfairly taxed and they became impatient with the system. In June, 1946, the AWU started a campaign with the slogan “to taxation without representation”.²⁰⁰ Since 1918 when taxation was imposed upon the citizens of Egbaland, females had been forced to pay tax starting from the age of fifteen,

¹⁹⁶ Johnson, Cheryl (1982) op. cit., p. 149

¹⁹⁷ Allman, Jean Marie, op. cit., p.41

¹⁹⁸ Dibua, J. I. (2006). *Modernization and the crisis of development in Africa: the Nigerian experience*. Interdisciplinary research series in ethnic, gender and class relations. Pp. 69. Aldershot, England: Ashgate.

¹⁹⁹ Mba, Nina (1982), op. cit., p. 146.

²⁰⁰ Coquery-Vidrovitch, Catherine, op. cit., p.171

which was considered the marriageable age, while males were not demanded to pay until they turned eighteen.²⁰¹ The methods by which women were forced to pay tax were even more oppressing. Women were often chased, beaten, their houses were searched, and girls were often stripped by officials, claiming that they it was a way to asses the girl's ages.²⁰² The campaign began by petitioning the alaka to stop these methods and the abuse of women. Instead of granting their request, the alake increased tax rate in October of the same year.

AWU did not relent on its demands. Instead, it intensified its campaign using various means that were at its disposal. They engaged in more use of the press. Some members, including Mrs. Kuti herself refused to pay taxes.²⁰³ Furthermore, AWU used constructed method to prove their case. It employed a certified accountant to review the books of SNA Treasury and to prepare a report of its expenditure.²⁰⁴ The result yielded that there was an unnecessary expenditure of £24,706, which if it had been spent wisely, women would not have had to pay tax and the administration would still not have lost money.²⁰⁵ AWU criticized the SNA for careless spending mentioning that “loan to other countries at the time we are in great need of capital for local industries ... is part of maladministration”.²⁰⁶ They proposed that the administration eliminate “redundant personnel”, increase taxes on Syrians and European firms, and that the government should invest in local industries.²⁰⁷ While focusing on removing the methods at which women were being taxed, the AWU also pushed for “the removal of Ademola as alake,

²⁰¹ Johnson, Cheryl (1982) op. cit., p. 150.

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ Coquery-Vidrovitch, Catherine, op. cit., p.171

²⁰⁴ Mba, Nina (1982), op. cit., p. 148.

²⁰⁵ Mba, Nina (1982), Ibid. p. 148.

²⁰⁶ Johnson-Odim, Cheryl and Mba, Nina, op. cit., p. 73.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

the abolition of the SNA system, and the representation/participation of women in a reformed system of administration”.²⁰⁸ The AWU made sure to keep accounts of its every action and also the complaints that it had against the administration and the alake. By 1947, the AWU had published a document titled the “A.W.U.’s Grievances”. The document contained AWU’s content with the alake an the SNA’s lack of concern for women. Some of the allegations against the alake included sexual relations with women who had left their husbands to take refuge at the palace whom he charged fees for their maintenance and leasing lands that did not belong to him to foreign firms which cheated proper landowners of their revenues.²⁰⁹ Some of the allegations against the SNA included lack of proper sanitation, medical, and educational facilities for women. AWU charged that as of 1936, the SNA in Abeokuta spent only 0.52 percent of its income on education and as of 1947, there was only on school supported by the SNA.²¹⁰

The women’s struggle continued. On the night of November 29 AWU held its first demonstration outside of the alake’s palace until the morning of November 30th with more that ten thousand women.²¹¹ The solidarity among this huge number of women with a strong executive body which was made off a president, vice-president, a secretary, a treasurer, representatives from the main market associations and from the four sections of Abeokuta. During the protest, the women used songs to ridicule alake and to expressed the sense of their own power:

²⁰⁸ Mba, Nina (1982), *op. cit.*, p. 149.

²⁰⁹ Johnson-Odim, Cheryl and Mba, Nina, *op. cit.*, p. 74.

²¹⁰ *Ibid*

²¹¹ Coquery-Vidrovitch, Catherine, *op. cit.*, p.171

Idowu [Alake], for a long time you have used your penis as a mark of authority that you are our husband. Today we shall reverse the order and use our vagina to play the role of husband on [sic] you...

*O you men, vagina's head will seek vengeance.*²¹²

This is such a powerful song especially at a time when the society was run by men to a large extent and women had a specific manner in which they were expected to behave. By singing songs like this, AWU and its women broke the gender boundary which gave them self empowerment and were able to gain more support. After the protest, the women were promised that the taxation would be suspended and the final decision would be made known to them in three days. Instead, more assaults were committed and more arrests were made. This action incited another protest from the women. The second protest, which lasted from December 8 to 10, followed the pattern of the first.²¹³ The women, again over ten thousand of them, stayed outside the palace refusing to leave until all those who had been arrested were released. They left the palace premises upon the release of the arrested women on November 10, 1947. In the meantime, the AWU continued to send letters to major newspapers and sending their petitions to the British administration. By the January of 1949, the AWU could claim victory. On January 3rd, the alake abdicated from the throne.²¹⁴ Also, the SNA system was changed and four women were granted positions in the new system of administration. Although other forces such as the Ogboni had also contributed to these changes, the women of AWU were undoubtedly key catalysts of the changes.

²¹² Johnson-Odim, Cheryl and Mba, Nina, op. cit., p. 83.

²¹³ Johnson, Cheryl (1982) op. cit., p. 153.

²¹⁴ Johnson-Odim, Cheryl and Mba, Nina, op. cit., p. 88.

The struggle for AWU continues into the post colonial Nigeria. In 1952 at a meeting, the Abeokuta Urban District Council²¹⁵ planned to bill women for water at the rate of 3shillings per annum per women was imposed because the council did not have enough money to extend and improve water supply.²¹⁶ The AWU again protested in 1959. Finally, in 1960, the government eradicated the water rates for women.²¹⁷

CONCLUSION

One can definitely see a development in the Western women's associations from the case of the women's war. A couple of factors such as education, connection and support gave the western associations a leverage that the Eastern women did not have during their protest. However, the most important factor is the vision for results that transcends the present time and problems. Although the AWU started as the ALC, a ladies' club that only attended to helping women develop their social etiquette, its interests and mission kept expanding. As a matter of fact, it gave birth to another women's union in May, 1949 – the Nigerian Women's Union (NWU).²¹⁸ NWU was a national association of Nigerian women all over the country both educated and uneducated. Its objectives embodied the objectives of the AWU with a broader outlook. One of its main goals remained the fight for women's representation in office and the opportunity for them to choose their own representatives.

Conclusion

²¹⁵ There were no women representatives at the meeting. Although some of the present male members objected, suggesting that they wait until the women representatives were consulted, their suggestions were shunned.

²¹⁶ Mba, Nina (1982) op. cit., p. 161.

²¹⁷ Ibid. at p.163.

²¹⁸ Ibid. at p.166

What made a huge difference between the two cases studied in this paper is leadership. In the case of the Aba women, there was no particular individual that assumed the role of a leader. Although, the women were led by Mrs. Margaret Ekpo, she was more of a representative than a leader. In the west, on the other hand, Mrs. Kuti assumed the position of a leader and took it upon herself to steer the women's associations in the way towards their victory. Without the use of any weapon, the western women were able to accomplish more results. They gained both national and international reputation and received national and international support likewise.

Organization is also very important. All the protests and campaign of both the Aba war and the AWU were very well organized. However, AWU was able to gain more ground as an established organization as opposed to just a group of women. At every stage of obstacles, AWU approached with appropriate measures, using means that would yield results. Its tactics which included presenting cases in court, protesting, writing to prominent newspapers, approaching the British administration, lobby the Abeokuta council, documenting their actions and victories, and presenting constructive suggestions all contributed to success of AWU's cause.

Lastly, education and commitment are extremely essential if changes are to be seen. Although not all the members of AWU were educated, most of its executive members were. Either it is accepted or not, there is a glaring difference between the organization of educated individuals and that of uneducated ones. Mrs. Kuti as an educated individual and who was the leader of AWU for instance, had the advantage of being well informed. She was well informed of how Western women lived as opposed to the way Nigerian women were being treated. She also had a good knowledge of the

freedom fighters of her time such as Kwame of Ghana and Gandhi of India. She was well aware of how these leaders fought the systems that were oppressing them. Also she undoubtedly studied their persistence, determination and commitment to their cause. Mrs. Kuti possessed all these characteristics, which she taught to the women in her associations. In spite of being jailed several times, she came out each time only to continue the fight for which she had been jailed.

All of these factors, which will be further explained in the next chapter, are all essential for women in Nigeria today, if they want to see changes in the male dominated government. The fact that Nigeria now has more women representation in government than it ever did in history cannot be denied. However, when the numbers of these women are compared to the number of men in electoral offices, it is distinctly clear that there is still a huge gender gap. One of the most important weapons needed is vision. Today Nigerian women's vision must go beyond participation or representation in local governments or political organizations. Just as one of AWU's objectives, Nigerian women today much engage in the process of eliminating hardship instead of just alleviating them. This can be done more effectively when they are elected into positions implement women's interests into the government's agenda and be sure that they are attended to.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

This study is to draw attention to the connection between equal gender political participation and political development. The cases observed in this research confirm the capability of Nigerian women to hold political leadership roles and to engage in decision-making activities that could effect the nation's development, they have never been given "real leadership and decision-making positions" until recently when very few number of women are given positions on the federal level.²¹⁹ But, it is imperative for the Nigerian women of today to realize that the women in this study were able to make more change in Nigeria in spite of limitations in economy, education, and politics. It is then, a challenge for the women of our time. There are more opportunities and resources for women of today then there were for those of the past. Although, the nature of gender inequality in Nigeria might still remain very much the same, women have more support now if they want to be fully integrated into Nigerian political sphere at all levels – local, state and federal – if they truly desire it.

What then are the kind of changes the might occur, which will increase the political development of Nigeria if more women were to engage in electoral politics? It is of course not realistic to think that once the governance is turned over to women things will automatically change. However, the male domination of past 48 independent years of Nigeria has shown that there is a need for a political reform. This reform is not, however, a call for all male figure to vacate their offices; it is a call for equal and indiscriminate

²¹⁹ Ojiaka, Chigoziri. Gender issues and political development in Nigeria". 2003 p 1

gender representation in government. If Nigeria can make this transformation, then it can boast of a true political development.

Although an increase in the percentage of women in electoral politics might not result to a drastic change, just to be able to have that equal representation would say a lot about how far Nigeria has accomplished. Furthermore, there are examples in recent years of the changes that women can bring if allowed in decision-making positions. First example is Professor Dora Akunyili, who became the director of Nigeria's food and drugs administration (Nafdac) in 2001. Upon resuming office, about 80% drugs in Nigeria's pharmacies and hospitals were counterfeit.²²⁰ As of 2005, the percentage of counterfeit drugs in Nigeria has greatly decreased by 50%.²²¹ Although she is continuously threatened by gang members whose businesses are being damaged by her activities, she fearlessly stands with even more determination and devotion to her job. Another example is Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, left her World Bank's position as the Managing Director for Africa, Asia, Europe and Central Asia in 2000 to serve Nigeria becoming the Minister of External Affairs/Finance. During her short time in office Mrs. Okonjo-Eweala was able to help Nigeria increase its reserves from \$7 billion to \$20 billion with a 6 percent growth in the GDP, and a decrease in inflation rate from 23 percent to 9.5 percent in 2004.²²² In addition, she was successful in reducing Nigeria's \$30 billion Paris Club debt by \$18 billion.²²³ She was also threatened during her time in office. As can be seen in the example of these two women, women are and will make constructive changes if allowed

²²⁰ Osborne, Simon (2005 December Friday, 9). Dr Dora, the scourge of Nigeria's drug fakers, is honoured. *The Independent*, Retrieved April 14, 2008, from <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/africa/dr-dora-the-scourge-of-nigerias-drug-fakers-is-honoured-518700.html>

²²¹ International Archive, (2005). Fighting counterfeit drugs in Nigerian hospitals. *BBC Radio: Women's hour*, from http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/womanshour/2005_49_fri_03.shtml

²²² MIT Alumni Association (2005). <http://alum.mit.edu/ne/noteworthy/news-features/iweala.html>

²²³ Forbes (2006). http://www.forbes.com/lists/2006/11/06women_Ngozi--Okonjo-Iweala_H2RN.html

in decision-making positions. It is imperative to note that the changes made by these two women had never been accomplished by any individual (who were males) that had previously occupied their positions.

What these women share in common with the women in two case studies in this paper are determination and devotion. It is the nature of women to be more passionate in taking good care of whatever is put in their care. Also, it is important to note that women would less likely to engage in corrupt acts because as mothers, they share more interests with everyone, that is to say that women's interests are at stake in any area of social, economic, political or religious affairs. In the case of force taxation for instance, despite the fact that both women and men were affected, men made limited effort in seeing to elimination of the policy. Women, on the other hand, fought relentlessly until their request was granted.

Possible Solutions

As Nigeria makes the effort to completely become a democratic nation, women's participation in decision-making processes has to be simultaneously implemented into the system. Gender inequality does not do democracy any justice.²²⁴ The participation of women in Nigeria's politics is still stalling and the country's development is being affected. In order for a change to take place, those factors delaying women from political participation must be addressed. Also, some reforms need to be made, policies need to be changed and some need to be revised.

²²⁴ Ojiaka, Chigoziri (Ed.) (2003). *Gender Issues and Political Development in Nigeria*. Pp. 4. Published by Gender Rights Initiative. Lagos, Nigeria .

In 1999, the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria was amended. However, it did not change the adjectives used to address individuals. For instance, section 40 states that:

*“Every person shall be entitled to assemble freely and associate with other person, and in particular, he may for or belong to any political party, trade union, or any other association for the protection of his interest”.*²²⁵

“He” is continuously used in the constitution in reference to both male and female.

Although this is not a major issue, it shows that even under a democratic government which tried to open more positions for women, the woman gender is not completely incorporated at every level.

A more important policy is the Affirmative action/policy. In assuming office in 1999, President Obasanjo decreed that every national political Party should reserve 15% of all elective positions in the part for women.²²⁶ Although 15% is a small percentage when compared to the other 75% seats that opened to men, some parties are still not following the policy. It is therefore, important for the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to make sure that this policy is respected and that any party that does not follow it should be disqualified. In addition, the government should begin to consider expanding the percentage from 15% to higher percent.

Lastly, there needs to be a cease in sexual discrimination. Although the constitution does not discriminate against women, male politicians are still not all welcoming women into the government. For this to happen, Nigeria must have a concrete set of principles that must be respected and followed by every citizen regardless of his or

²²⁵ Ibid. p 20

²²⁶ Nwankwo, Obiageli (2005). Gender Inequality and Political Rights: Proceedings of a national tribunal on the Violation of Political Rights of Women in Nigeria. Pp. 15. Enugu, Nigeria: Fourth Dimension Publishing Co., Ltd.

her position. In her testimony, Mrs. Nkoyo Toyo, an activist and a former candidate for House of Representatives in Cross River state rebukes Nigeria's lack of principles and rules – “if a system is not driven by rules”, she says, “ has no system structure, violations become the norm”²²⁷ She also mentions women not wanted as candidates because of their sex. Such behavior must be eradicated from Nigeria's politics.

As I waited on those women in the bus to discuss probable means through which Nigerian leadership (corruption) problems can be eliminated, so has Nigeria been waiting for that individual or a group of individuals who will lead her into becoming a developed and well respected country. I am thus proposing that those individuals are women, beginning with educated urban women since they are at a better advantage because they have more of the resources needed. This proposition might be flagged as unrealistic and presumptuous, however, its validity cannot be known until the platform is given over to women. Historically men have been given enough time to run the show, which have been mostly unproductive. In this century, where there is a gradual shift of power from men to women, there will be no patriarchal system that would be able to stop women who possess the leadership characteristics Mrs. Margaret Ekpo and Mrs. Kuti, Who are fearless and who are not afraid to go against all odds.

²²⁷ Ibid., p. 23.

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