



**Full Length Research Article**

**GENDER REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN NIGERIAN LEADERSHIP AND DECISION-MAKING  
PROCESS: A DISCOURSE ANALYSIS**

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**ABSTRACT**

The Beijing Platform for Affirmative Action (1995) and the National Gender Policy (2007) agitate for redress in the gender imbalances in the political system of states development and recommend substantive equality of women in decision making process in the country. Despite this recommendation and the enormous campaign on women for change initiatives aimed at improving the participation of women in politics, the weak image representation of women in Nigerian society and the cultural attitudes in the country which hinder women participation in public life and politics have not given women enough level playing ground to actualise their dreams of active involvement in politics. With this, the dearth of women in politics in Nigeria has been a major cause of concern over the years. Though some improvements have been recorded so far in the political representation of women in Nigeria, the political landscape in the country demonstrates that women are still grossly under-represented in governance and decision making. While men take up large number of administrative and elective positions women are constantly left with fewer opportunities. This paper is an attempt at investigating the gender representation of women who constitute the majority of the voters' population during elections with regards to active political participation and representation in the Nigerian media.

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**INTRODUCTION**

Mainstreaming gender issues in the leadership set up of Africa has not been given enough attention. The general belief is that, there is still a lot to be done to encourage more women to participate in politics, most especially in a multicultural environment like Nigeria. Women, historically have been under-represented in politics, compared to men. The weak representation of women in politics impoverishes the development of democratic principles in public life and inhibits the economic development of a society (Adebimpe, 2011). The Beijing platform for affirmative action (1995) agitates for redress in the gender imbalances in the political system of states members and recommends the implementation of the affirmative action in order to empower women to participate more actively in national development. This policy provides for the empowerment of women at various levels, it calls for the elimination of practices that marginalize women especially in the area of decision making.

It is targeted at enabling women get special treatment to become part of decision making bodies, and to ensure that women have at least thirty percent representation in recruitment, promotion and appointment at all decision making levels to establish an increase in female participation and representation (Alli, 2011).

It encourages and strives to maintain equality in the distribution of economic resources in all ramifications. It is an attempt to promote equal opportunities to women and to increase the representation of women in every sector of the economy. Rice (2011) said that equality targets should lead to increase gender balance, and increased in gender balance in turn leads to many improvements, such as employee satisfaction, concomitantly and the productivity of the organization. The women folk in the society have been described as an integral part of nation building showing that women are important part necessary for sustainable development (Okwum, 2012). Little wonder the popular saying that to train a woman is to train a nation and that to empower a woman is to empower a nation. In the same vein, Umechukwu (2004), noted that women constitute over half of the world's population and contribute in vital ways to societal

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development generally. Despite all these positive attributes of women in the society, there is still not yet active participation of women and incorporation of women’s perspective at all decision-making. Beijing Women Report (2000) on women disenfranchisement and low participation in politics rightly stated:

That despite the long-standing recognition of the fundamental right of women and men to participate in political life, in practice the gap between de jure and de facto equality in the area of power and decision-making remains wide. Also, that women’s representation at the highest levels of national and international decision-making has not changed in the past five years since the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing. Women remain the minority in national parliaments, with an average of 13 percent worldwide in 1999, despite the fact that women comprise of the majority of the electorate in almost all countries.

From the foregoing, it is obvious that women have continued to be ‘voiceless’ at policy-making levels, since they cannot influence key decisions in social, economic and political areas that affect society as a whole and this increases their inabilities to participate as full citizens and equal partners in development. Okunna (1992) captures the situation aptly when she writes that:

A number of years after the United Nations Decade for Women ended in 1985 the realities of Nigerian life have continued to ensure that, even though women make up a large percentage of the population, their representation in national affairs has remained insignificant, particularly in the area politics.

Women participation and representation in elections at the national level is regrettably low despite all the policies and improvements targeted at achieving gender equality. The CEDAW report and INEC database, presents a comprehensive statistics of women participation and representation in the last four general elections in Nigeria. The table below indicates the number and percentage of women elected in the key decision-making positions at the national level:

**Table 1. Distribution of the overall regression in women’s representation in political decision-making positions in the 1999, 2003, 2007 and 2011 General Elections**

S/N	Position	1999			2003		2007		2011	
		No of Available Seats	No of Women Elected	% of Women Elected	No of Women Elected	% of Women elected	No of Women Elected	% of Women elected	No of Women Elected	% of Women Elected
1	Presidency	1	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
2	Senate	109	3	2.75%	4	3.7%	9	8.25%	7	6.42%
3	House of Representatives	360	12	3.33%	21	5.83%	23	6.38%	12	3.33%
4	Governorship	36	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
5	Deputy Governor	36	0	0%	2	5.6%	6	16.7%	1	0.28%
6	State House of Assembly	990	12	1.2%	38	3.84%	53	5.35%	18	1.82%
	Total	1532	27	7.28%	65	18.97%	91	36.68	38	11.85%

Source: The CEDAW Report, 2008 & INEC Database, 2011

A total 1532 seats were available and only 221 women were elected in all. The data presented in table 1 shows the total number of women elected in 1999, 2003, 2007 and 2011 general elections in Nigeria. Though some improvements have been recorded so far in the political representation of women in Nigeria, the political landscape in the countryIn the 2007

general elections, an increased number of Nigerian women defied the odds, entered into politics, aspired and contested for party’s primaries; many lost, yet a significant number compared to previous elections won the party’s primaries and contested for elective positions in the various political parties. In 1999 general elections, only 27 (7.28%) women were elected, in 2003 general elections, 65 (18.9%) were elected, in 2007 general elections, 91(36.68%) were elected and in 2011 general elections, 38 (11.85%) were elected. The total number of elected women in all positions amounted to 38 (2.5%) out of the 1532 available positions in 2011 general elections across all the political parties indicating that among the small number of female aspirants, only few emerged as candidates and fewer of them emerged as winners at the polls. There were 3306 candidates in 2011 general elections with men accounting for 3004 (90.9%) and women 302(9.1%). The 2011 general elections produced only a female deputy governor in the person of Mrs Adejoke Orellope Adefulire of Lagos State who contested under the platform of Action Congress of Nigeria (Olatunde, 2010).

Unfortunately, the number and percentage of women who were successful at the polls in 2011 was less than the figure in 2007. Whereas, the 2007 figure was higher than the figure in the 2003 general elections; and the figure in 2003 was higher than the figure in the 1999 general elections. In 1999, the overall number of women was 27 at 2%; in 2003, it was 65 at 4%; in 2007 it was 91 at 6%and in 2011, it was 38 at 2.4%. Consequently, the male won governorship elections with women as their deputies. In 1999, only Lagos State had an elected female deputy governor in the person of Mrs Kofoworola Akerele-Bucknor although she was later removed and replaced by Femi Pedro, a man as a result of party intrigues probably informed/influenced by patriarchy. In 2003 the number of deputy female governors increased to 2 (5.6%), in 2007 it increased to 6 (16.7%), in 2011, it decreased to 1 (0.25%) (Akudo, 2012). In the 2007 general elections, 9(8.25%) female candidates won the senatorial seats. This probably explains that even as at 2007, it is still not clear in the minds of Nigerians that the future visions of Africa especially Nigeria may not come to fulfilment if Nigerian women are not allowed to take or occupy their rightful place in

all spheres of life. It is important to note that this cannot be attained without Nigerian women actively participating in politics; given the opportunity to actualise the recommendation of the 35percent affirmative action stipulated by the United Nations and promised by the Nigerian government.

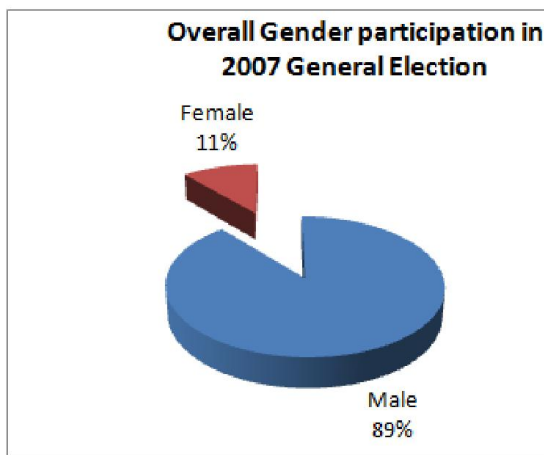


Figure 1.

After the 2007 general election, statistics reveal that Nigeria has about 11% of women political office holders against 89% of men. (Statistical analysis adopted from the 1st memorial lecture in honour of Prof Jadesola Akande OFR, by Gov, Babatunde Fashola, 2009: Olatunde, 2010). This obviously indicates that women are yet to be properly represented in political offices in Nigeria, the low number of women elected into political offices in Nigeria's 1999, 2003, 2007 and 2011 elections reflected the slow pace of change and even regression in the country's legislative, political and social systems. This also shows that despite several efforts made by women locally and internationally (thirty- percent affirmative action) to improve the situation of women in politics, very little progress has been made as women are still excluded from the mainstream and this invariably affects the country's development. Bessie, (2009) writes that, "to promote sustainable development, there is the need for citizens (males and females) to participate in the economy, policy and social development of the society." I agree with her because it is very important for women and men, alike to contribute to the development of the nation through active participation in the socio-economic and political development of the nation. Furthermore, in 2011 general elections, no female President, Vice-President and Governor emerged in Nigeria.

From the foregoing, it appears that there is nothing in the Constitution, which excludes the participation of women in politics in Nigeria, yet Nigerian women remain largely underrepresented in politics as compared to their male counterparts. The number of women who contested for elective positions generally in these elections analysed were significantly low. With these in mind, it is likely that women participation and representation in politics and governance in Nigeria is still poor, that a great deal of inequality still exists. The ratio of women to men in governance is still insignificant and women are more or less not present in decision-making bodies and they are not properly represented in the Nigerian political arena. However the questions remain- have the thirty percent affirmative action been successful implemented? And has it empowered women participation in politics?

### Thirty Percent Affirmative Action: Implementation and Success

Women's participation both in politics and governance predates the Beijing's conference. Even before the Beijing

Conference of 1995, women had been active in governance in developed nations. Confidence in their turf, they have left indelible footprint in their times. In the developed nations, women President and Ministers have emerged (Vanguard, 2012). These women perform creditably well in their various positions. Even in Africa, some women leaders have emerged and known for their good governance. The ever female President in Africa Dr. Ellen Johnson-Serleaf of Liberia made a name in history through rebuilding of the war ravaged country. In spite of being disadvantaged by gender, a number of Nigerian women have made their marks in different fields. Nevertheless, some barriers still stand as bulwark in the participation of women politics: both elective and appointive positions. The profiles of the Nigerian women show their continuing disadvantage position in comparison to their male counterpart. Majority of them are afflicted by gender discrimination and marginalization from major economic activities. Okoye (2000) makes a relevant point when he bemoans that this economic disempowerment of Nigerian women hit women most and result in their very limited involvement in economic activities compared to their male counterparts. Okoye further laments that this economic disempowerment in which women is subjected to have made it difficult for them to extricate themselves from the cleavages of male dominated world.

### Thirty Percent Affirmative Action: The Nigerian Case

In Nigeria, just as elsewhere in the world, women inclusion in government has gone beyond a campaign issue to implementation. As in other democracies of the world, successive governments in Nigeria have been engaged in the sustained campaign for greater and effective women participation in politics, which have predated the thirty percent affirmative action that came into existence in 1995. In the attainment of the said target, the Federal Government National Gender Policy and other programmes were used. Prior to the present civilian administration, previous military governments had several programmes in place to empower women politically. For instance, the Federal Government on June 13, 1985 signed and ratified the convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women (Okwum, 2012). The Nigerian political parties are not left out in pursues of gender equality; they claim to have adopted measures that will ensure women's participation in decision-making through their Party Manifestoes. These manifestoes indicate various plans by the political parties in ensuring that a minimum of 30% representation for women is attained within the party system especially in decision making positions. The table below shows the various plans of three major political parties in Nigeria devised to encourage women participation in politics:

### Implementation of Thirty Percent Affirmative Action in Nigerian

#### The Government of General Ibrahim Babangida

The consideration of thirty percent affirmative action received recognition during the Babangida Regime. In furtherance to the thirty percent affirmative action, the government of General Ibrahim Babangida through the late first lady, Mrs. Maryam Babangida began to initiate policies and programmes aimed at improving the lives of women. The top of all the programmes and policies was the Better Life for Rural

Women. Mrs. Babangida later initiated the establishment of National Commission for women. Unfortunately, upon all her efforts for the attainment of the thirty percent affirmative action, no significant result was recorded. To use Omenugha (2011) words, those women leaders do not have set goals and thus they fail to articulate some goals, what happens therefore is that while they make genuine efforts to effect some changes in the lives of people, they however drift aimlessly like a floating stick. She (Omenugha) further notes that the first lady syndrome is an effort in Nigeria and in needy, but how many of them can genuinely boast of strategies to achieve them. It not surprising that programmes such as Better life for rural women' has been principally criticised for lack of management know how, not benefiting the majority of rural women. Because too, women leaders lack the collective vision, there is often lack of continuity especially when the husbands leave office and another 'first lady' comes in.

### **The Government of General Sani Abacha**

The succeeding administration of Sani Abacha later consolidated the foundation of National Commission for Women through the Family Support Programme (FSP) through the first lady Mrs. Mariam Abacha. The aim of this programme was to empower women, allow their voices to be heard and be able to compete at equal footing with the men. This first lady phenomenon has opened doors for women that had previously been closed. This could be called dynamic in political space; there has been dynamic in political space that seems appropriate and used by the wives of men in power but this instead of being used for the interests of women focus on the self-aggrandisement. Alas, the achievement of thirty percent affirmative action still remains a challenge in Nigeria.

### **The Government of Olusegun Obasanjo**

The government of former President, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo in 2006 received approval of the Federal Executive Council for the implementation of the National Gender Policy on thirty percent affirmative action and later upon assumption of office as well as in his second term, appointed a number of women into the Federal Executive Council. They are: Dr. Ngozi Okonjo Iweala (Minister), Dr. Oby Ezekwesili (Budgeting), Chief (Mrs) Titilayo Ajanaku (Special Adviser to the President on Women Affairs), Late Prof. Dora Akunyili (NAFDAC Director-General), Dr. (Mrs) Kema Chikwe (Minister of Transport), Mrs. Dupe Adelaja (Minister of State Defence), Dr. (Mrs) Bekky Ketebugwe (Minister of State, Ministry of Solid Minerals), Dr. (Mrs) Amina Ndalolo (Minister of State, Federal Ministry of Health), Mrs. Pauline Tallen (Minister of State, Federal Ministry of Science and Technology) and Hajia Aishatu Ismaila (Minister of Women Affairs).

From the foregoing, it is evident that this number of women in President Olusegun Obasanjo's regime was below the thirty percent benchmark stipulated by the Beijing women's conference and that it is an indication that only very few Nigerian women have participated and emerged in Nigeria's political landscape, in spite of the pioneering efforts of women like Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti and Margaret Ekpo since the 1950s. Today, the number of women in top jobs is still nearly insignificant not minding the giant strides and great impact most of these women made to distinguish themselves in their

respective portfolios. Nigeria is a patriarchal society; male dominance is reflected in the political and governing institutions in the country. The former President Obasanjo was of this view, he reiterated that the socio-cultural context of Nigeria was not in defence of women's participation in governance; that women should work towards a constitutional amendment to facilitate 15% representation for women as, according to him, the 30% international benchmark is too ambitious for the moment (WRAPA Newsletter, 2003).

### **The Government of Umaru Musa Yar'Adua**

The immediate successor to President Olusegun Obasanjo unfortunately had only seven female ministers in his cabinet. Notable among them are: Late Prof. Dora Akunyili (Information and Orientation), Mrs. Diezani Alison-Madueke and Prof. Adenike Grange. Again, instead of the number of women in political appointees to be increased it decreased. This shows that under representation of women in politics still exists even as the country advances and changes its government; it is a political deficit and failure to redress this undermines the legitimacy of the contemporary democratic principles. And also the number of women in this represented both in upper and lower house in this administration violated the Beijing's thirty percent affirmative action agreement.

### **The Government of Goodluck Jonathan**

The President Goodluck Jonathan Administration has gone a long way in giving effective representation to women in political and public office appointments. President Goodluck appointed more women into cabinet positions than his predecessors both military and civilian in Nigeria's 50 years of independence. This government scored high marks on the empowerment of women compared to the previous regimes analysed in this research. It was recalled that in conscious effort to realise the gender affirmative action, during the campaign period of President Goodluck at Jos, Plateau State in 2011, he pledged to uphold the thirty-five percent affirmative action plan in his appointments if elected into office. The liberal dispositions toward the President Goodluck involving women in government in both elective and appointive positions have become quite evident. The battle for women empowerment predates his administration. It was reported the first lady, Dame Patience Jonathan in her bid to give enormous support to the achievement of Beijing affirmative action, sought the implementation of 50% per cent affirmative action in the country (Okwum, 2012).

She sought this alongside other conditions that through effective legislation will enhance the living conditions of Nigeria women such as: Enhanced Basic Education for Girls, Stoppage of Early Marriage. The Need to Change Inheritance Law, Managing Widowhood (Alli, 2011). The first lady initiated her pet project, Women for Change Initiative aims at giving more prominent roles to women in this administration. This project according to the first lady is to give more room for women's involvement in decision-making at every levels of government bearing in mind that the government has a role to play in the emancipation of female Nigerians from political mediocre, stagnancy of political backwardness and social subordination. Akudo (2012) supporting this advice that the Nigerian government should encourage maximum support

and participation of women in decision-making and the development of the nation by tackling the major trait responsible for low women participation in Nigerian politics such as the marginalization by the political parties in the nomination of women in the ministerial list of their states in 2011. The realisation of 35% affirmative action of president Goodluck may be a tall dream since the reality on ground did not show any seriousness from the government at all tiers and the political parties on the fulfilment of the 35% affirmation of women participation in active government. For instance, a governor submitting a list of ministers, must ensure that his list have 35per cent representation of women or else the list will be rejected; for political parties, they must have 35per cent women representation when presenting candidates for nomination or else they won't be allowed to fill their candidates. Taiwo (2010) notes that even if the issue of 35per cent affirmative action is discussed from now till eternity, that nothing will be achieve unless the women are properly represented in the legislature.

Taiwo further said that the only way out is to give equal representation of both men and women in politics, change our custom and tradition to women being visible in politics in Nigeria to avoid the country's political space for women shrinking as Nigerian democracy advances. This last election in 2011 is a mirror that allows for a critical assessment of the number of women in power in Nigeria. The data from INEC data base shows that in 2011 general elections, 909 out of 10037 (9%) candidates for all elective positions were women while 9128 out 10037 (91%) candidates for all elective positions were men (Deji, 2011). These positions include the Presidency, governorships and parliamentary seats showing that very few women in the country occupy leadership positions and participate equitably with their male counterparts in decision-making; this implies that the positions occupy by women in parliaments in Nigeria are lower than the benchmarks set by the Beijing platform on 30 percent affirmative action. From every indication, there is low level of women participation in politics, administration and government in Nigeria. Akudo, (2012) supports that there is marginalization of women in the country's political representation that women are low represented in politics and decision making, yet they form half of the country's population.

Akudo further said that women voices should be heard at any decision-making levels in government since traditionally, men and women are created to live and work together for their betterment, and for the progress of their society therefore, for any society to survive, both men and women alike, have roles to play as members of the society in view of the fact that the development of any society demands the effort and commitment of every member. President Goodluck Jonathan appointed 13 women out of the 41 cabinet members so far into his cabinet representing 31% of the affirmative action. These women are: Dr. Ngozi Okonjo Iweala (Minister of Finance and Coordinating Minister for the Economy), Mrs. Diezeani Alison-Madueke (Petroleum Resources), Prof. Ruqayyatu Rufia (Education), Hajia Zainab Maina (Women Affairs and Social Development), Prof. Stella Odua-Ogiemwonyi (Aviation), Mrs. Omobola Johnson Olubusola (Information and Communication Technology), Ms Ama Pepple (Lands and Housing), Mrs. Sarah Renge Ochekepe (Water Resources),

Hajiya Zainab Ibrahim Kuchi (Minister of State, Niger Delta Affairs), Prof. Vila Onwaliri (Minister of State Foreign Affairs), Erelu Olusola Obada (Minister of State, Defence), Mrs. Hadiza Mailafiya (Environment), Olajumoke Akinjide (FCT). (Vanguard Special Report: 2012, Nigerian Ministerial List 2011). These women and others show mastery of leadership and were applauded at different times. The number of women appointed in President Goodluck's administration improved significantly when compared to the previous administrations showing that if women should be given such opportunities in other positions and sectors of the economy, that the achievement of thirty percent affirmative action will not be farfetched. This will ensure active participation of women in all ramifications (Edem, 2000).

## Conclusion

This research work is a modest attempt to investigate what happens at the moment as regards the thirty percent affirmation, its empowerment to the women and the level of implementation in some countries. At the end, it was noted that though some countries have high level implementation of the policy, but in Nigeria today, only at the ministerial position at the Federal level have women been given voices, but in other areas of public life, appointments of women to key positions are still grossly low and women are underrepresented. The appointment of women to other public bodies and institutions, including to international organisations is still quite low. The general observation is that although efforts have been made and are still being made to give more women political opportunities, the ratio of women to men in governance is still insignificant, women are more or less not present in decision-making bodies and they are not properly represented in the political arena. Despite the Affirmative Action, available statistics reveal that from 1999-2009; the state of women participation and representation in politics and governance in Nigeria is still poor, that a great deal of inequality still exists.

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