

GENDER AND PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY IN NIGERIAN FOURTH REPUBLIC: THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT SYSTEM IN PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT: The study examines the impact of gender discrimination on participatory democracy in the local government system in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. This phenomenon no doubt, has continued to create intense academic discourse. The situation at the local government level is rather worrisome. The gap between male and females in both political participation and representation at the local level across the country is unimaginably high, notwithstanding the present democratic dispensation that came on board in 1999. Measures put in place to check-mate this abnormality are yet to yield the much-desired positive results. The study adopted a qualitative approach with data collected from secondary sources only. The specific objectives of the study are to determine the impact of gender discrimination on participatory democracy at the local government level in Nigeria; examine the factors that encourage gender inequality in participatory democracy at the local government level and determine why the measures put in place as panacea to the problem have failed. The glass ceiling theory was used to describe the phenomenon under investigation. The findings amongst others show that political participation at the local government system in Nigeria is lopsided in favour of the male gender to the detriment of the female folk whose interest in participating actively in grassroots politics by vying for elective positions has been greatly eroded. It was recommended amongst others that such negative tendencies like continuous intimidation, harassment, violence, threats, and money politics that have characterized the participatory democracy at the local level in the country should be stopped forthwith through improvement in our electoral laws and processes.

Keywords: Gender, Participatory Democracy, Local Government, Glass-Ceiling Theory, Gender Inequality, Gender Balance.

INTRODUCTION

The issue of gender discrimination has been widely accepted as a global phenomenon especially in political participation and representation. Every country, both developed and under-developed have a fair share of this problem in one time or the other in her political history. The female segment of the world's population Nigeria inclusive, has been greatly discriminated against or worse still, marginalised in matters of political participation particularly at the local government levels. According to Fatile, Adepoju, Esther and Ayeni (2017) the issue of discrimination against women in governance at any level is not simply an African or Nigerian phenomenon but a global one, except that the developed countries are fast moving towards gender equality and equity. In support, using United States of America, Nwaneri in *New Telegraph Newspaper*, Tuesday, November 10, 2020, asserts thus:

It was optimism in the camp of United States (U.S) Democrats, when then presidential nominee, Joe Biden (now president-elect) announced Californian senator, Kamala Harris as his running mate, after a month's long process that saw nearly a dozen prospective running mates vetted by his campaign organization. Besides making the 55-year-old Californian Senator the first Black woman and the first person of Indian decent to be nominated for national office by a major party and only the fourth woman in history to be chosen for one of their presidential tickets, the choice also fulfilled the former United States (U.S.) vice president's pledge to select a female running mate. Harris selection also lend racial diversity, gender parity and generational breath to Biden's Campaign.

The segregation against women in terms of participation and representation is universalistic and has a long historical standing dating back to ages. The practice of gender discrimination and sexism plays are evident in the most advanced democracies of the world including Europe and America Agbalajobi cited in (Omodia, Erunke & Shaibu (2013, p.96). The imperative of popular participation in democratic governance has engendered intense academic discourse on the political alienation of women across the globe including Nigeria. Based on relevant research study carried out, it has been realised that despite the increasing global agitations for gender equality, the situation in Nigeria following the demise of military rule in 1999 is nothing to write home about (Oni & Joshua, 2012).

Though, it has been evident that gender bias or inequality is not good for democratic sustainability of any given nation Nigeria inclusive, yet there has not been any agreement among scholars on the role of women in politics. Some argued that women are not equal partners with men in political leadership while others are of the opinion that women play very vital role in the societal developmental processes and as such should be given equal representation in the political development. Daniel and Faith (2013) assert that gender discrimination in governance is seen as detrimental to nation-building and development. In the views of Oni and Agbude cited in Daniel and Faith, (2013), sustainable democracy relies upon the equality and complementary participation of both male and female in the conduct of governmental affairs as basis for development of nations.

According to Plato in Ucheaga, (1999) there is no administrative occupation which is peculiar to women as men, or man as man, natural capacities are similarly distributed in each sex and it is natural for women to take part in all occupations as well as men. In her assertion, Ucheaga (1999) noted that when Aristotle declared in his politics that men were more intelligent and superior than women and that it was the natural functions of the former to rule while the later should be subordinated, little did he know that he was laying a philosophical foundation for a male Chauvinistic society that has brought tremendous damage to the development potentials of women.

Since the return of Nigeria to democratic rule, there has been growing concern over the low representation of women in both elective and appointive positions in the country. Women are said to constitute over half of the population globally and are contributing in vital ways to societal development generally (James in New Telegraph Newspaper, Friday, August 18, 2023).

This study, therefore, aimed at establishing the nexus between gender discrimination and participatory democracy in the local government system in Nigeria with particular focus on Nigeria's Fourth Republic.

Statement of the Problem

The problem of gender discrimination in the participatory democracy in the local government system in Nigeria is no longer news. Since 1999, when Nigeria assumed the status of another democratic governance, equal participation in politics at the grassroots, has continued to be a major challenge facing the country's democratic sustainability because of the domination and discrimination by the male against the female. According to Elson, Rubbin and Bartle cited in Daniel and Faith, (2013) since the past three and half decades, agitations and movements towards gender relevance and equity in government of nations have gained momentum in the world order. Omodia, etal (2013) note that women even though are deeply involved in the highest level of decision making in Nigeria, their involvement in politics is superficial, grossly inadequate and lacks the moral justification for an effective representation.

In spite of the measures put in place to bring a lasting solution to this cankerworm, the problem has continued unabated. The women segment of our population are still discriminated against in the area of contesting for elective positions in the local government system, such as local government chairperson and councillorship positions.

Up till present, scholars are still saddled with the problem of ascertaining the actual factors that fan the embers of gender related issues in the participatory democracy at the local government system in Nigeria; the actual impact of this situation on the role of women in grassroots politics in Nigeria and why efforts to create gender equality and equity at the local government system in Nigeria have failed.

Objectives of the Study

The specific objectives of the study include:

1. To examine how gender influences participatory democracy in local government system in Nigeria.
2. To find out the factors that encourage gender inequality in participatory democracy in local government system in Nigeria.
3. To determine why measures that have been put in place to ensure gender equality in participatory democracy in local government system in Nigeria have failed.

Theoretical Clarifications

The Glass Ceiling theory is used to analyse gender discrimination and participatory democracy in the local government system in Nigeria. According to the proponent, Kant (1977) the structure of work organizations especially those with large workers, establish women in subordinate positions. This implies that such organisations put a glass-ceiling over women's opportunities. The work organization is described in three dimensions namely opportunity, power and proportions.

The work organisation in the context of the study is the local government system in Nigeria. The opportunity dimension means that people who have less opportunity tend to be low in self-esteem and aspiration while people with more opportunity are competitive and have greater self-esteem; power according to this theory is the capacity to mobilise resources in support of individual interest. People with low power tend to be authoritarian, subordinating, coercive, critical and are not well-linked. While people with high power tend to be non-directive, encouraging to subordinates, helpful and popular. The issue of proportions means that the small proportions tend to be highly visible, highly stressed and stereotyped while the large proportions invisibly fit in with the group, find networking and the acquisition of sponsors.

Consequently, the theory's opportunity dimension at the local government system in Nigeria explains the fact that women are not given the opportunity to exercise their full political rights such as occupying key political positions in the local government decision-making instead they are subjected to certain appointed positions where they would only act as figure heads while men who appointed them indirectly control them too in the positions, all within a patriarchal social structure.

The power dimension also indicates that Nigerian women are those with low power while men are those with high power at the local government system in Nigeria. During elections, men mobilise women, enticing them with diverse incentives in order to vote and never encouraged them as how to mobilize themselves to be serious contenders for elective posts and probably winners of the elective positions. The Nigerian women at the local government system in Nigeria fall within the small proportion of elected officials. They are not only limited by the patriarchal social order rather they are highly stereotyped and stressed with responsibilities. In the light of the above, glass-ceiling theory offers better explanation for this study.

Clarification of Concepts: for the purpose of clarity, the concepts of gender, participatory democracy and local government are explained for proper understanding within this context.

- 1) **Local Government:** This is the level of government that is nearest to the rural people. According to Ayoade cited in Njoku (2009, p.2) Local government is the third tier of government deliberately created to bring government to the grassroots population, as well as give its members a sense of involvement in the political process that controls their daily lives.
- 2) **Gender:** This is the condition that describes the quality or attribute of being male or female. It has been viewed as the socially constructed attributes, opportunities and relationships associated with being male and female and which determines what is expected, allowed and valued in a woman or a man in a given context Wayten & Henderson cited in Oni & Joshua, (2012). To be academically meaningful gender is better understood as a product of the way a particular society views and analysis the relationship between male and female (Olu & Temitayo, 2014).
- 3) **Participatory Democracy:** This is viewed as the involvement of the citizens in the political activities of their country. According to Academic's Dictionary of Political Science, (2006, P.226) participatory democracy involves the deliberate, systematic mobilisation of constituent groups around issues and problems of common concern, the organisation of forums for the expression of alternative implementation of decision on majority rule.
- 4) **Political Participation:** According to Academic's Dictionary of Political Science, political participation is an activity by individuals or groups intended to influence those

who govern or how they do so. Agbor (2005, P.63 – 64) adumbrates that political participation is any kind of individual or collective political action intended to influence or affect public policy or the conduct of public affairs. He went on to stress that as one identifies himself as a member of a political system, he begins to interact with other members of the system, react to certain occurrences in the system, expect some roles to play and exhibit certain actions which intend to or influence the operational mechanics of the political system. Some participate actively and at the top level, while some participate minimally or insignificantly and some are not just involved or interested.

Gender Discrimination and Participatory Democracy in the Local Government System in Nigeria

Discrimination against women goes back to many centuries – since, with the disintegration of the primitive community and the establishment of private property and the division of society into classes, men attained economic, and political supremacy, and with it, social predominance (Igboeche, 2017).

The dominance of male in the nation’s politics and low involvement of women in the election participation and their appointment into positions of authority have created the politics of “near-exclusion” of women in favour of their male counterpart (Daniel and Faith 2012). They further noted that in spite of the large number of females in the ages of 20 and above, women are still been marginalised in the political process even under the democratic dispensation, particularly in the area of standing for elections to be voted for and appointment into positions of authority. Women are been sidelined in the political scheme of things in Nigeria and this state of affairs spells a dangerous omen for the Nigerian system which is now literally dominated and controlled by men (Omodia, et al., 2013). Politically, Nigerian women are negligible and undermined force with little political involvement (Omonubi—McDonnell cited in Fatile, Adepoju, Esther & Ayeni, 2017).

Women in Nigeria have always been active economically, the extent and significance of their activism has not always been rewarded by commensurate degrees of political power vis-à-vis men. Over the years, women in Nigeria have been relegated to the background on issues of overall development, especially in democratic leadership. This is borne out of the sentimental attachment in feminine gender (Allah-Mensah cited in Fatile, et al., 2017).

Suffice it to say that gender considerations have greatly influenced the rate of participatory democracy in the local government system in Nigeria. According to Adeleke (2014), local government, being the nearest to the grass-roots (or rural dwellers) has been described as the basic type of political arena where participatory democracy, characteristic of good governance can be achieved. But at this level of governance, women are considerably marginalised; instead, they enjoy mere tokenism at the higher level of governance and political arena where they are appointed then elected into positions such that the society is denied the advantage of their full potential as they are made to play a second fiddle to their male counterparts.

Women participation in Nigeria politics at the grass-roots level is an issue of great concern because women have been relegated to the background politically for a long time, which of course made them loose their rightful place in local governance (Fatile, et al., 2017). Lately, local government election varies from state to state especially since 2009. Some states like Ondo, Osun did not even conduct any local government election but merely appoint caretakers.

Even among the states that conducted elections few women occupy the chairman and ward councilors whereas among the states that appoint caretakers, the number of women in the committee are relatively low (Adeleke, 2014).

Further, Adeleke captured the situation more succinctly when he noted that in Ondo State between 1999 and 2007, the proportion of women representation at the local government election was quite low and nothing to write home about. Although, the state has not conducted any local government election since the dissolution of those elected in 2009, out of the caretakers that have been appointed into the 18 local government areas of the state only 2 are female. In the case of the four Akoko local government areas, no single female emerged as either chairperson or councilor throughout the 149 wards in the Local government areas between 1999 and 2007. Despite the fact that some women took bold steps to contest for these positions, many of them were either screened out at the party level or discriminated against by their male counterparts. Recently, in these four local government areas there was only one female caretaker Mrs. J. Adefarait who represented Akoko South West.

The year 1999 marked the beginning of a new dawn in Nigeria as it returned to civilian government after the demise of military rule. Women political participation though witnessed an improvement over previous experience. However, this new era saw women taking a similar low participation in the Nigerian political process...at the local level, out of the 774 local government chairpersons across the nation, only 9 were women and 143 out of the 8,700 councillors were women Babatunde and Anifowose cited in Oni and Joshua, (2012).

Women representation at all levels of government since independence in 1960 till late 1990s was as low as two percent. Similar trends were witnessed under successive administrations both military and civilian. The little improvement made in Women political representation in recent time were only marginal since the beginning of the Fourth Republic in May 29, 1999, notwithstanding the general clamour of women for the implementation of the 35% affirmative action for elective and appointive positions recommended by the Beijing platform for Action of which Nigeria is a signatory, none of the governments gave women up 30% in their respective appointments (Olojede cited in (Fatile, et'al 2017, P.58).

Since the return to democratic rule in 1999, Nigerian women have tried to gain access to political decision making positions by contesting for elective positions at various levels. Though, concerted efforts have been made by Women groups, women advocates and activists, civil society organizations, international agencies and donor communities to increase women's participation in politics and decision making. Their efforts however have not translated to appreciative gains as subsequent elections since 1999 revealed (Olojede cited in Fatile, et'al 2017, P.58). Available records shows that the participation of women in local governance and democracy has been generally low. This is evident in the tables below.

Table I: Women representation in the 1999, 2003, 2007 and 2011 Nigerian Elections

Office	1999		2003		2007		2011	
	Available seat	% of Women	Available Seat	% of Women	Available Seat	% of Women	Available Seat	% of Women
Local Government Chairperson	774	13 (1.8)	774	15 (1.9)	774	27 (3.6)	774	-
Local Government Councillors	6368	69 (1.1)	6368	267 (4.2)	6368	235 (3.7)	6368	-

Source: Adopted from Awofeso and Odeyemi cited in Fatile, et al. (2017, P.58)

However, the level of gender inequality in democratic participation at local of government level in Nigeria can be further described within the context of the three classification of political activities as noted by Milbrath (cited in Olu & Temitayo, (2014, P. 106) namely the gladiatorial activities, transitional activities and the spectator activities. According to him, the gladiatorial activities had always favour the male gender since independence till date. Such offices like the presidency, governorship and the local government chairman, the female representation was almost at zero frequency, except in few instances where women were elected as local government chairpersons.

On the spectator activities, women are mostly engaged in such activities like rallies, campaigns where the uniforms, caps and bandages of respective political parties are freely displayed on them. More often than not, the female gender is easily mobilised for the election victory of the male candidates who are more financially buoyant than their female counterparts. Okorokwo-Chukwu cited in Olu and Temitayo (2014) in a study on the 2011 general election in Nigeria, refers to women “as active participants in the success of their male counterparts during elections”. He equally added that women are also known to have registered as voters more than men in successive voters’ registration exercise, while statistics equally support that women turnout in successive elections in Nigeria are usually greater than that of men. Yet, all these could not translate women representation in elective positions into an appreciable level in Nigeria.

Milbrath’s middle level classification of political participation referred to as transitional activities which include such activities as attending political meetings, attending political rallies, making monetary contributions to candidate and political parties etc. are equally male dominated activities, which had enhanced male gender overall political participation and consequent domination of political affairs in Nigeria, local government system not an exception.

Chinwe Obaji, Former Minister of Education cited in Osuji (2011) corroborates the above when she asserts that over 50 years of nationhood, women are grossly under and inadequately represented in all state Houses of Assembly, House of Representatives, the Senate and also as governors, only recently have we seen a negligible number of women being appointed as Deputy Governors, Ministers, and Commissioners. Even at the lowest cadre of political representation, local government areas only very few women have been successful as councillors but by and large, few have been elected as chairpersons of their local government

areas. For example, she equally noted, as at December 2010, in all the 774 local government areas in the country only about 5% of the Chairmen are women and 10% are councillors.

In Nigeria, women constitute a greater proportion of the total population by about 36% (World Bank Report 2012 cited in Adeleke 2014). In spite of this huge number, women are not well represented in governance (Agbalajobi cited in Adeleke, 2014). As the Nigerian National Bureau of Statistics (2009) reveals, women only have 3% representation in all contested positions in the 1999 General elections, 4% in 2003 and 6% in 2007, with the greater proportion of these being at the national level. At present, as it is shown in the same statistics, out of the 109 seats available in the office of the senate, only 7 (6.4%) are women while in the House of Representative, only 25 (7%) are women. At the local government level, there is no significant difference. In the 1999 general elections, only 1.8% of women were local government Chairpersons and 1.1% were councillors. Similarly in the 2003 General Elections there were 1.9% female chairpersons, 4.2% female councillors while in 2007, only 3.6% female chairpersons and 3.7% female councillors, all of which are far below the united nations standard of 33% (NBC 2009 cited in Adeleke 2014). The above analysis is not different from what is obtainable in subsequent elections that follow the 2007 general elections in Nigeria at various levels of government in Nigeria particularly at the Local government level.

Factors Responsible for Gender Discrimination in Participatory Democracy in the Local Government System in Nigeria's Fourth Republic

It is axiomatic that there is no smoke without fire. Based on this premise a comprehensive survey on the relationship between gender and participatory democracy in the local government system in Nigeria demands a careful and thorough justification of the factors that are responsible or impede gender balance in participatory democracy in the local government system in Nigerian's fourth Republic.

One of the main reasons for the minimal participation of women in politics in general and low representation at local government level in particular has been the assumption that women are subordinate to men consequent to social and institutional discrimination (Bekele cited in Adeleke, 2014).

From ancient times, there has always been a stereotypical phenomenon about how the female gender is viewed. Women were never seen as capable or up to the challenge and were never seen as risk-takers. A woman was seen as one that scurries for protection from the male, seen as home caretaker and a breeder of young ones, nothing more to be expected (Eniola in *Vanguard Newspaper*, Thursday, December 12, 2019).

Central to most international and regional treaties, to which Nigeria is a signatory, it has been globally suggested that in any representative body, there should be a "logical balance" of men and women to adequately voice the concerns of society in the decision-making processes. Good governance therefore, means being participatory, accountable, predictable and transparent which reasonably calls for gender balance in political decision-making (Khan cited in Adeleke, 2014).

Aina, Soetan and Abgalajobi cited in Olu and Temitayo, (2014) have unveiled the travail of the female gender humiliation, manipulation and marginalisation through a number of culturally biased norms and practices which had culminated into systematic institutionalisation of male

superiority over the female in all spheres of life-socio-culturally, economically and politically. Indeed, the life circle of a woman from the cradle to the grave is said to be characterised by all manners of violent related manipulation and control of women by men.

Several factors, including funding, women's perception of politics in Nigeria, political violence during elections, lack of self-confidence on the part of women, women's marginalisation in party leadership, illiteracy and low educational status of women as well as cultural and religious discrimination have been identified by scholars as inhibiting factors to women's political representation (Ayabam cited in Olu & Temitayo, 2014, P. 109).

The cultural factors appear to be more damming and highly entrenched in Nigerian politics than other factors. This factor roundly concludes that a woman's place is in the home where she is expected to come for her husband's shoulders, with the male gender in politics. This assumption rests on the social biological school of thought suggested by Ritzer cited in Olu & Temitayo, (2014). This identifies the biological dissimilarities between men and women as being responsible for sexual division of labour in all societies. Proponents of this school of thought believed that women were naturally and biologically inferior to men. Hence, women as a result of their inferiority did menial duties of cooking, housekeeping and domestic coining while men fought war, went hunting and perform the hard tasks. It is this programme that assigns men to the hard life of politics and leadership, governance and headship and women to soft life of motherhood, home tenders and housekeepers (Izugbara cited in Olu and Temitayo, 2014). Over the years, the Nigerian political scene has been characterized by patriarchies which in the words of Heywood cited in Olu & Temitayo, 2014:105) generally connotes the rule by men. There are two major colonial policies that helped to promote patriarchies in Nigerian politics. First the colonial policies which considered only men to be active in the public sphere and earn a living to support their families (Assie-lumuba cited in Olu & Temitayo, 2014). To Olu & Temitayo few educational assistance programmes under the colonial administration were reserved for only African male who were later recruited into colonial civil service and merchant houses. This practice gave African male gender undue advantage over their opposite sex and thus marked the beginning of woman under-representation in formal agencies of government.

Secondly, according to them, the restricting of the African traditional economies and their linkage with the international economic system transformed the Nigerian economy to producer of primary crops which were to be exported to Europe as cheap raw materials in their factories. African male quickly filled the vacuum of producers and exporters of these crops while their female counterparts concentrated on the production of food crops and domestic management. The control over export crops resources and other merchandise activities by the male gender partly accounted for the post-independence domination of the Nigerian political scene by men who could fund the cost of elections.

Nigeria like other countries in Africa experienced colonial legacy under the British rule from 1900 to 1st October 1960. At independence, the country embraced the democratic system based on non-gender discrimination in political participation modelled after the British parliamentary democratic system (Ikelegbe cited in Daniel & Faith, 2013). However, the colonial legacy of marginalisation of women in politics was intensified at independence based on the patriarchal traditional norms of colonial Nigerian society of male dominance (Aiyede & Ofiakor cited in Daniel & Faith, 2013, P. 89). Politics by nature and definition in Nigeria is a militant activity and women are not interested and would not want to involve in militant activity rather they are

more located within the caring professions (Aboribo & Oguob cited in Daniel & Faith, 2013, P. 101). Although, the 1999 constitution of the federal Republic of Nigeria provides for non-discrimination and of equality between the sexes, in reality the gap between law and practice is quite wide and seemingly parallel. Discrimination against women in Nigeria is rooted in traditional believes and practices that regard the men as superior to his female counterpart (Olomola cited in Daniel & Faith, 2013).

The cultural and religious practices, violence, thuggery and intimidation, non-indigence syndrome and high cost of party nomination were identified as the factors that facilitate the marginalisation of women in the political process and governance. The increasing domination of women by men have several theoretical underpinnings and are varied. On the one hand, women are less represented in politics due to persistent cultural stereotype, abuse of religious and traditional practices. On the other hand, the relegation of women from the realm of politics is akin to the kind of societal social structures in operation at a particular point in time. In most societies of the world, economic, political and social structures are strategically dominated by men and the women have been largely subjected to the roles of second fiddle in the affairs of things (Agbalajobi cited in Omodia, et al., 2013).

According to Hon. Adijat Adeleye-Oladapo, a former member of the Ogun State House of Assembly, who represented Ifo II constituency between 2007 and 2015, politically, we have more male active politicians and they are the ones you see every day. We have more uneducated women playing politics than educated ones because they don't want black-mail, violence and other issues associated with politics. The easiest name you can call a female politician, especially one that is climbing high is 'prostitute'. They will say that it is because she is sleeping with leader A and leader B. But, if that is what it is, then go and sleep with them and see if you can get to where they are politically (Elegbede in *New Telegraph Newspaper*, Tuesday, April 17, 2018).

During an interview with Hon. Ayere Lawrence, a former local government councillor at Oshodi/Isolo local government in Lagos State, he made it clear that women hardly participate in local politics as it is very stressful and dangerous at times. According to him, women participation in local government politics requires a god-father who can support and recommend them for the post. The money involved in campaigning is very high and a woman may not spend a huge amount of money on electoral campaign. Sometimes, sex was demanded from women who intended to participate in local governance and most of the women refused that condition. These are largely responsible for huge death of women participation in local politics and governance. Most women at local Government Areas are mostly appointed and not elected (Fatile, et al., 2017). Similarly, Okoronkwo-Chukwu cited in Olu & Timitayo (2014:108) expressed thus:

It is very difficult for a married woman to participate in politics without people casting aspersion on her person as promiscuous. A husband's consent must be obtained and his relatives consulted before a woman enters into politics. An unmarried woman venturing into politics is simply inviting public scrutiny to her private and personal life. Political opponents will accuse her of sleeping with all the party stalwarts to win. In addition, the nocturnal hours politicians keep in strategizing and mapping out campaigns deter women from effectively following the electioneering process. Most times meetings are called for in unholy hours when they are expected to take care of their children and homes.

The ones that brave it to the venues are booed and taunted by opponents as shameless women. Majority of the people in Nigeria believe that no decent woman can play politics without compromising their virtue... This attitude of the society creates a sense of apathy in the women and explains the reason why they are more comfortable as voters, mobilizers, praise singers and supporters of male candidates.

The low participation of women in politics was also fostered by the nature of post-colonial politics. The ethnic and personality based, paternalistic and acrimonious politics of the independence era were detrimental to women's participation (Ogo, Ana & Ikpe cited in Oni & Joshua, 2012). The institutional designs which is found to hinder women's political participation in the mainstream politics include system practice of majority electoral system instead of proportional representation, lack of gender electoral quota system and constitutional provision for equal gender representation in parties political nominees. All these institutional designs impede women's significant involvement in political activities. Though, affirmative action and gender equality have been appreciated in the country, however, there is hitherto no specific guideline and modality of affirmative action and no conscious efforts made by the government to entrench such constitutional policies for implementation in Nigeria (Oni & Joshua, 2012).

According to James in *New Telegraph Newspaper*, Friday, August, 2023, Mrs Francisa Effiom, Project Coordinator of Women's Voice and Leadership Nigeria Project (WVLP), an affiliate of Gender and Development Action (GADA) noted that indeed, there has been a debate as to whether women should take a prime place in politics in the country. While some agree that women cannot be isolated from leadership positions and therefore, must be carried along in the development of the country, others, however, have some reservations, believing that a woman's brain only works well in the kitchen. These reservations, for instance, explain why some men ignore their girl child while ensuring that their boys benefit maximally from education. This also explains why men dominate the political terrain, nearly making it an exclusive area for themselves.

Unfortunately, all along human race, men have largely tended to assert authority, superiority and power over women. Although, there are several injunctions in the holy books in both Christian and Islamic religions that a wife should be under the husband, there is also an injunction that men must treat women with respect, love, affection, care and understanding as the weaker sex (Osuji, 2011).

Reasons for the Failure of Gender Balance in Participatory Democracy in Local Government System in Nigerian's Fourth Republic

The phenomenon of gender inequity in Nigerian politics in general and the local government system in particular had not been left in the hands of fate, efforts have been put in place by successive governments in Nigeria to see that both male and female gender are adequately represented for effective realisation of the democratic ideals that hang on equity, justice and fairness. Both local and international treaties have been signed to this effect.

Nigeria has made several efforts to ensure the participation of women who are the excluded, to participate in governance issue through the adoption and creation of some institutions that will facilitate their full participation in governance. However, the question here is, are these

institutions and agencies fully implementing the charters and treaties to its convincing conclusion? (Decnigeria.com, 2017).

In 1985, Nigeria ratified the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) of 1979. But it is worthy to note that despite the operation of the 30 articles of the convention in Nigeria its goals are yet to be realised in the country. Nigeria also adopted the 1985 Beijing platform of Action and signed the Universal Declaration of human Rights; International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the African Charter on people's Rights and the protocol on the rights of women in Africa (Maputo Protocol) (Decnigeria.com, 2017).

Despite the United Nations declaration of 1975-1985 as the United Nations' decade for women and subsequent conference organized by the United Nations in 1992 (the Rio conference on Environment and Development); 1993 (the Vienna Human Right Conferences); 1995 (the Copenhagen Summit on Social Development); and 1995 (the Beijing World Conference), all of which, Nigeria effectively participated and signed their legal instrument, women participation and representation in politics continued to fall below expectation. It is instructive to note that successive governments in Nigeria have continued to ignore the Beijing 35% affirmative action for women participation (Olu & Tamitayo, 2014, 109). Having recognised the essence and importance of these global and regional affirmative declarations, the federal government of Nigeria in an attempt to implement them, captured them in Nigeria Gender Parity (NGP) which was launched in 2007. The document is unequivocal in its assertion that Nigeria is highly patriarchal society, where men dominate all spheres of life at the expense of the women (Federal Ministry of Women's Affairs and Social Development 2006 in Adeleke 2014).

Nigerian Government in its efforts to tackle this phenomenon of low women's political participation ratified some national and international instruments such as the convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1989 and adopted a National Policy on women in 2000 (replaced by a National policy on Gender Equality in 2007 and Platform for Action, the National Committee on Affirmative Action, the Additional protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of women in Africa 2003. The African union solemn Declaration on Gender Equality 2004, the National Gender policy 2006 etc. (Akiyode-Afolabi & Arogundade, Ajeyi cited in Oni & Joshua, 2012).

The poor performance of women in elections was the basis for the national summit for all women politicians organized by the international Human Rights Law Group, Centre for Development and Population Activities (CEDDPA) and Gender and Development Action (GADA) held on June 28, 2002, in Abuja with the objective of enhancing women's active participation in Nigerian politics (Akiyode-Afolabi & Arogundade cited in Oni & Joshua, 2012).

With the view of maintaining gender balance in every endeavour, Nigeria like other countries in the world is responding to the clarion calls made variously by the United Nations to rid societies of all forms of discriminations especially gender-based discriminations (Ekpe & Eja-John cited Fatile, et al., 2017, p.53). Nigeria took a bold step in the year, 2000, when it adopted and passed into Law National Policy on women guided by the Global instrument on the convention for the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against women (CEDAW). Nigeria is currently reawakening its effort in achieving gender equality. To achieve this, a

development process which challenges the structure which continues to produce gender-based inequalities in the society and balances power relations between women and men both at micro and macro levels is inevitable. They equally stressed.

Thus, having been stimulated and fired on by the Beijing conference resolution of 1995 and reinforced by the United Nation's 2002 resolution on affirmative Action for women, the women in all countries that are members of the United Nations were bound to implement the articles of those resolutions. It is a matter that is not open to debate or contradiction that today, women attained a greater political status in their various countries. It is for this reason that many women have come to occupy many sensitive and powerful positions in their various countries. This must be attributed to positive response to those two major global resolutions (Osuji, 2011).

A citizen of Nigeria from a particular community, ethnic group, place of origin, sex, religion or political opinion shall not, by reason only that he is such a person be subjected to any form of discrimination (Section 42 (1) of the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria as amended). In corroborating this Omodia et al. (2013), note that any man or woman can proceed to court to seek redress if his or her right to franchise is being violated and that the constitution in its entirety prohibits discriminations of any kind on basis of sex or otherwise. The constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria which of course is the reference point for social co-existence amongst groups and persons has not by any means discriminated against anyone, man or woman in the social-political scheme of things. It is therefore, unjustifiable for men to want to dominate the Nigeria political scene and hence, boxed women to the corner.

The failure of the above laudable strategies to curb the issue of gender discrimination in the local government system in the country's Fourth Republic could be attributed to lack of political will and commitment on government at all levels to ensure that both local and international laws and conventions which the country has made and is signatory to are strictly obeyed, domesticated and operationalized especially at the local government system. This situation contributes to ensure that such negative indices like intimidation, political violence, money politics etc. that have continued to fan the embers of gender disparity in political participation in the local government system in Nigeria subsist.

In Nigeria, the extant National Gender Policy (NGP) recommends 35 percent affirmative action and seeks for a more inclusive representation of women with at least 35 percent of both elective political and appointive public service positions respectively. Last year, lawmakers rejected five gender bills, prompting protests by women at the entrance of the national Assembly in Abuja. This was in complete violation of the NGP. The European Union, through its funded programme, the Support to Democratic Governance in Nigeria (EU-SDGN) continues to reiterate the fact that there cannot be strong, effective and legitimate democratic institutions without the inclusion and participation of women (James in *New Telegraph Newspaper*, Friday, August 18, 2023).

Conclusion and Recommendations

Gender and participatory democracy in the local government system in Nigerian's Fourth Republic is an issue well recognised. Political participation at the local government system in the country is lopsided in favour of the male gender to the detriment of the female folk. The women's interest to participate actively in grassroots politics by vying for elective positions

have been greatly eroded. Despite efforts by government at all levels in Nigeria as well as globally to arrest this cankerworm, the problem still subsists. Certain factors were attributed to be responsible for the increasing under-participation of female in politics at the local government level in Nigeria. They include amongst others colonialism, lack of women's self-confidence, funding and political violence. It is therefore recommended as follows: First, the 35% affirmative principle for women in Nigerian politics should be strictly observed at the local government level. Secondly, such negative tendencies that have characterised Nigerian politics such as intimidation, harassment, violence, threats and money politics should stop forthwith in our local governments through the enactment and implementation of appropriate laws. Government should show enough political will to eliminate the issues of money politics and godfatherism thereby provides equal playing ground for politics at the grassroots devoid of any form of segregation.

Finally, both the national and international Laws and Conventions which Nigerian government have enacted and is signatory to, that aimed at solving the problem of gender in the participatory democracy in the country should be strictly obeyed by governments at all levels in Nigeria particularly at the local governments. The local government serves as the breeding ground for training political leaders, the female gender should be availed the opportunities by removing all forms barriers that have continued to make the women second fiddles in the political and administrative affairs of the local governments in Nigeria.

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