Full Length Research

Implementation of Nigeria's National Gender Policy, Revisiting the Affirmative Action

Ethel Innocent Amadi

Department of Political and Administrative Studies, University of Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria.
E-mail: ethelamadi@gmail.com

This paper noted the fact that, equality in participation is central to building a democratic culture of inclusiveness and accountability. It took a critical look at the nature of implementation of the Nigeria's National Gender Policy, which had focused on women over the years, yet much significant change had not been recorded in their political positions compared to the men. It examined the need to adopt the Affirmative Action, as embedded in Nigeria's National Gender Policy objectives, for strengthening the democratic process. The work was guided by the Third World Feminist Theory, also known as the Gender and Development Paradigm. It advocates equality, empowerment of women, and the transformation of unequal gender power relations. Data was derived from secondary sources and analysed, using the qualitative method. The paper measured political empowerment by the number of seats held, and percentage of females and males represented in both elective and appointive positions in government. The paper noted that lack of prioritization of empowerment of women, and inertia towards gender equality goals, weakens the democratic process. Granting women access to spheres of rulership, through the Affirmative Action, makes a political and an economic sense. It concluded that empowering women politically, and addressing the gender question, is a critical factor in creating positive and sustainable impact on democratic governance.

Keywords: Affirmative Action; Democracy; Gender Equality; Implementation; National Gender Policy; Political Empowerment.

INTRODUCTION

With regards to the issues of gender inequality and disempowerment, various Summits and Conferences have been held, and communiqué reached. Such as, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), Millennium Development Goals(MDGs), New Partnership for African Development(NEPAD), African Union Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality and Copenhagen Declaration of the World Summit on Social Development (WSSD), among others. The Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights (ACHPR) endorses affirmative action for promoting gender equality and the representation of women in elective offices on the basis of equality (National Gender Policy, 2006:13).

This is in agreement with the United Nation's view that "empowering people, especially women, to strengthen their own capacities is a main objective of development, and empowerment requires full participation of people in the formulation and evaluation of decisions, determining the functioning of societies" (United Nations, 1995:3). This also agrees with the Beijing Declaration, as stated by, the Development Assistance Committee(1998) that "women's empowerment, and their full participation on the basis of equality in all spheres of society, including participation in decision making process and access to power, are fundamental for the achievement of equality, development and peace " (p.10). They all accept the fact that the promotion of empowerment of women is a pre-requisite, for the achievement of gender equality agenda.

Empowerment and equality in participation is a central element for building and consolidating most democratic tenets of inclusiveness. Nigeria's nascent democracy cannot be an exception. The quality of governance improves with more women participating in higher political decision making positions. From various parts of the country, evidence could be seen during the Olusegun Obasanjo's and Goodluck Jonathan's administrations. The likes of Professor Dora Akunyili, Prof. Oby Ezekwesili, Prof.

Ngozi Okonjo Iweala, Prof. Rugayatu Rufai, Princess Stella Odua, Diezani Alison Madueke, Sara Reng Ochekpe, Prof. Viola Onwuliri, Amma Pepple, presently there is Kemi Adeosun, among others.

Increasing women's representation in political and economic positions, has been recognised as a development goal. Indeed, Beijing Platform for Action recommended that governments set a target of 30% of seats for women in National Parliaments. This has prompted the adoption of policies, which if fully implemented, should perhaps have had substantial impact on the political terrain of this country. The Affirmative Action as embedded in Nigeria's National Gender Policy's objectives has the key to the goal of achieving political empowerment of women, and reduction of inequality in participation in the democratic process. This is necessary because much progress has not been recorded in the process of empowering women and men in the past. Moreover, government's inability to handle some of these democratic and developmental challenges may be related to high level insensitivity to gender issues.

In line with the UNDP Report (1995) that development that is not engendered is endangered. We can equally declare that democracy will be endangered if it is not engendered, especially for Nigeria's nascent democracy, which though, has come a long way, since 1999. There is need for it to be strengthened, through a policy of affirmative action, empowerment, inclusiveness, and equality, if there must be sustainability.

Gender inequality, often manifest in unequal gender power relations, disempowerment, poverty, and lack of adequate access to political and socio-economic opportunities between men and women. These are critical issues begging for attention, and has been a challenge to democratic process in many countries in Africa, including Nigeria. Efforts at addressing these issues, especially through the adoption of the affirmative action, for achieving gender equality in political participation has not yielded

much result.

The National Gender Policy Strategic Framework (Implementation Plan) (2008) reveals that policies and structures put in place to support the empowerment of women and gender equality have not translated into opportunities in terms of quality representation or appointments (political) for women"(p.32). The affirmative action is all about enhancing socio-economic and political conditions and positions of women in the country. The paper discusses the concepts of implementation, national gender policy, political empowerment, democracy, among others.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The work is guided by the Third World Feminist theory, also referred to as Gender and Development paradigm. This is a variant of the theory of feminism, which advocates equality between males and females in all spheres of life (Moser, 1993; Rai, 2004; Pettman, 2004). The Gender and Development framework is more challenging as it questions status quo, and advocates transforming unequal gender power relations, and empowerment of men and women, by assigning positions and offices on the basis of equality, thereby creating avenues for the inclusion of the less powerful. Enabling the power within, to be developed, and expressed within the political space.

Inegbeloh (2003) states that "the whole question of gender and development is the issue of power. It is the question of how power is shared between the gender. It is the struggle for space"(p.103). The question of how power is shared, and how to achieve equality in political participation has been the concern of feminists from the Third World. They are in support of this view, that the gender question is about unequal power relationship, and may invariably be answered by not only acknowledging the existence of inequality, but by taking the grand step in redistributing political and economic resources, and the

restructuring of political and legal power bases, at the national, state and local government levels. This calls for a paradigm shift in the asymmetrical power relationship, to enable the females gain more access into the commanding heights of politics.

For the Third World Feminist theory, the solution to gender inequality is engendering the system of governance. It calls for a more comprehensive strategy to ensure that issues relating to gender interest are not neglected or abandoned. It also supports the empowerment of women as an entry point to achieving gender equality. The political nature of gender equity goals endears it to the gender and development framework. Its implementation impacts on gender relations, such as existing policies on political participation. Considering the fact that, the Hobbesian nature of political contest in Nigeria, discourages more females from contesting for elective positions, as candidates during elections. The near absence of internal party democracy must be considered, as this has not helped women as much.

Getting an approval or disapproval to contest during primary election, is a matter of negotiating with the godfathers, whose approval, determine the opportunity that is available for the female contestants/candidates. This calls for government intervention and regulations. The affirmative action as embedded in the Nigeria's National Gender policy is an important factor, that can determine the degree of political and social inclusion, for both males and females in the country.

GENDER EQUALITY

Gender is a socially determined quality linked to women and men. This influences how roles are assigned in each society. USAID (2010) explains that "gender encompasses the economic, political, and socio-cultural attributes, constraints, and opportunities associated with being male or female. As a social construct, gender varies across cultures, and overtime, gender roles should not be

assumed but should be investigated"(p.2). This is because, as gender varies, the roles also varies, depending on the society. Equality is relational, it is an open political concept filled with various interpretations and meanings.

While gender equality is a condition in which males and females have equal opportunity to access societal resources. Equality between the genders can be derived by politically empowering men and women in the democratic process. This will ensure that initiatives, programmes and projects earmarked by the government for the empowerment of women considers the male factor. In other words, for any policy to be referred to as gender policy, the male factor must be considered during implementation.

IMPLEMENTATION

Implementation is the process of putting into practice what the government has decided to do, in order to address some critical issues concerning the citizens. For Ikelegbe (2006) "implementation is the process of translating policy mandates into action, prescriptions into results and goals into reality". This can be done through government institutions, agencies and their representatives. Government may decide to use institutions such as; non-profit organizations, Non-Governmental Organizations, ministries, departments, and other levels of government to implement its programmes and projects. In this case, the machinery for implementing the National Gender Policy in Nigeria, is the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development (FMWSD), with its counterparts at the state level.

Both the national and the state's gender machineries, can be hindered in the process of implementing gender inclusive policy initiatives. But irrespective of uncertainties and ambiguities surrounding policy implementation process, in terms of what to do with the policy, and how to achieve the outcome, Pressman and Wildarwsky(1984, are of the view that, "implementation cannot succeed or

fail without a goal against which to judge it". The goals of empowering women and young girls have been streamlined in the National Gender Policy. The uphill task before the Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development is the problem of translating the prescribed policy to goal actualization. which is, empowering women in order to attain gender equality.

THE NATIONAL GENDER POLICY

According to Allen (2012:23), "policy can be defined in relation to function, institutions, and purpose". Policy can be define functionally, as that policy that affects the gender relation of men and women in Nigeria. Institutionally, it refers to policy made by Agencies, and Ministries of Women Affairs. Gender policy as defined by purpose, refers to the course of action targeted at influencing social values, orientation, actions of groups and organizations such as will eliminate poverty, check discriminatory laws and improve the gender balance between males and females in Nigeria. Implying that it is a redistribution policy that takes from one group (males), and gives to another (females), from the advantaged to the disadvantaged, in order to achieve a balance, that would make for equality.

The Nigerian National Gender Policy, was adopted officially in 2006, by the Federal Executive Council. This course of action was taken with the intent and purpose of solving the problem of women disempowerment, feminine poverty, gender inequality, and underdevelopment in the country. The goal of the National Gender Policy (NGP), is to eradicate poverty, achieve equality of the gender, and encourage inclusiveness in the process of governance and development.

The paper is focused on the policy goals found in Section2.2.5, Objective 5, of the National Gender Policy, which states that;

> Achieving minimum threshold of representation
> for women in order to promote equal opportunity

in all areas of political, social, and economic life of the country for women, as well as for men. With the target of, adopting measures, quotas and mechanism for achieving minimum critical threshold of women in political offices, party organs and public life by pursuing 35 per cent affirmative action, in favour of women, to bridge gender gaps in political representation in both elective and appointive post, at all levels, by 2015 (National Gender Policy, 2006, pp. 77-8).

The National Gender Policy's objectives for the implementation of gender equality policies embraces the promotion of "political leadership structure that is inclusive of women and men". The policy strategies includes; "advocate for the application of the 50-50 affirmative quota of the African Union at all levels. Promote greater involvement of women in political and executive appointments. Advocate for a comprehensive review of the Constitution to make it gender-sensitive"(p.57).

It went further to streamline the role of political parties in the business of empowering women and achieving gender equality. Firstly, all political parties are encouraged to embrace affirmative action, when choosing or fielding candidates for elective positions. The target is to support the less advantaged morally, and financially. Ensure progressive increase in the number of female candidates, from 30% in 2007, to 50% in 2011, with the hope of achieving parity for elective and appointive positions by 2015.

These objectives are geared towards reversing the trend of diverse socio-economic, political and cultural encumbrances that hinders the political system, and the power relations between males and females, in all spheres of life. As such, our expectation is that the number of females at the National and State's Assembly should be on the increase, following the implementation of the National Gender Policy. It is assumed that if fully implemented, the policy should perhaps have had substantial impact on improving the socio-economic and political conditions of

women and men. Yet, only little has been achieved in terms of applying these policy goals, and objectives, in the last decade. Eleven(11) years after the adoption of the National Gender Policy, the gender question remains unanswered and as such unattended to. The authorities have been accused of abandoning the much weightier matters, by neglecting the issue of unequal power relation.

EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN

Empowerment of women as a methodology for achieving gender equality and sustainable development, is associated with Third World Feminist perspectives. For (Desai,2008;Batliwala,1994), empowerment is the process which involves challenging existing power relations, and gaining greater control over the sources of power. One of the variables of empowerment, is access to public spaces.The process of increasing the women's capacity and ability (power) to influence the direction of change, for the betterment of the society is in the domain of empowerment.

In her own contribution, Rai(2004) states that "empowerment is a process of moving from a lower to a higher state of achievement, improving and increasing in the level of consciousness, capacity and ability to aspire and to make choices". The capacity of empowered persons or groups is enlarged and expanded to a level where they can make transforming and sustainable choices. The dilemma here is that, if a proactive measure is not taken towards the appropriate process of empowerment, then, implementing the contrary will be tantamount to both political and development disaster.

Empowerment of women and gender equality, encompasses the process of moving from a lower to a higher state of achievement, improvement in the level of one's consciousness, increase in the capacity and ability to aspire and to make valuable and transforming choices, as well as exposure to a higher level of education for both males and females. In operationalizing the term

empowerment of women for development goals, especially when it comes to enhancing gender equality, scholars have adopted different perspectives. It may be appropriate to state that empowerment of women is a development goal that has to be achieved. It is backed up by international, regional and national instruments. It is also seen as a means to achieving such social justice as gender equality, eradication of poverty and sustainable development. The objective of empowering women should not only focus on changing women's disadvantaged conditions, but should rather aim at changing both the condition and the power relations (political position), at the realm of governance.

Through the empowerment approach, the self- help efforts of men and women can be; mobilized, refocused and redirected toward contributing to the socio- economic and invariably political development of their country. Empowerment confers ability on those whose capacity has been built, to recognize opportunities and possess the knowledge, to skillfully handle issues, and challenges that may arise in their environment. This is in line with the explanation given by Baines(2001), that empowerment is "a process through which women and men in disadvantaged positions increase their access to knowledge, resources and decision making power, and raise their awareness of participation in their communities in order to reach a level of control over their own environment".

In the words of Alsop, Bertelsen, and Holland (2006), "empowerment often means redressing imbalance of power between those who have it, and those who do not have"(p.2). Empowerment is a process of attaining a higher level of political office or position. This relates to political empowerment.

POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT AND GENDER EQUALITY

Political empowerment can be considered to be the

equitable sharing of, and representation of males and females in the sphere of governance. "It is the degree of representatives in deliberative bodies and its often measured by the percentage of women in the Legislature (Beer, 2009). It then means that, if the degree and percentage of women is less than 30 per cent, then empowerment of women has not taken place and gender equality may not be achieved. Human Development Report (2014), states that empowerment is measured by the share of parliamentary seats held by women and men"(p.154). This is also in line with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) 3, the goal seeks to, 'Promote gender equality and empower women'. Empowerment is here measured by indicator twelve(12), that is the "proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments" (Rigg, 2008). Empowering women and men politically has also been endorsed nationally, regionally, and internationally as an entry point to achieving gender equality, eradicating violence and establishing democratic rulership.

Political empowerment confers on the beneficiaries, the ability to challenge unjust policies, gives them a voice to articulate gender strategic interest. Therefore, the process of empowering women should embrace programmes and projects geared towards increasing the capacity of women and men to aspire to higher decision-making position. Lack of prioritization of empowerment of women, and inertia towards gender equality goals, weakens the democratic process. Granting both males and females access to spheres of rulership, will make a political sense, if a corresponding effort can be made towards raising the consciousness of the citizens to the necessity for accepting the female contestants, of political office. Not doing so will probably be counter-productive to the democratic process.

Politically empowered men and women are properly armed with the power to make choices relevant to each situation, they are equipped with a stronger voice to articulate the interest of their group. This makes for an active citizenship, stronger human resource, who may

likely perform better in parliamentary sessions, than their counterparts who are not empowered. This forms a catalyst for transformatory and sustainable democratic change.

DEMOCRACY AND GENDER EQUALITY

Democracy operates with an array of institutions, and structures such as; the executive, legislature, judiciary, the political party, periodic elections, among others. Political parties are the chief suppliers of candidates occupying key positions in the legislature, and the executive. This requires full participation of both men and women, whose capacity must be sharpened and strengthened in the governance of their country. According to Tommasoil (2013) "women's participation is a central element of democracy and the nature and degree of women's participation is a key indicator of the quality of democratic culture" in such country. One of the qualities depicting democratically developed countries and those struggling to develop their political culture, is the allowance given to the citizens to participate in the democratic process, such as, ability of the citizens to actively participate in making decisions that affect them.

How the responsibilities of government are discharged, determines the nature of, and ideals of good governance. Nurtured by people with strong democratic ethics, in line with good practices accepted internationally. Good governance depicts acts carried out within democratic institutions. In which strong democratic institutions are developed, built and managed by elected and appointed men and women in government and outside the government. Expanding participation to those previously excluded in governance enables the participants to be responsive to the needs of all.   This, according to Anuradha (2006) "is critical for women as a subordinated group, because, the lack of democracy in gender relations, excludes them from participating in governance and the consideration of their interests in the business of

governmental decision-making". The political system can be engendered to create opportunities for the involvement of both men and women in the political process.

This gives the allowance for more women and other territorial groups to experience the dividend of sustainable democracy, in which power relations can be democratized and 'genderized'. "It makes both economic and political sense, to empower both men and women. By giving them same opportunity to participate equally in all sectors. The derived assets, usher those who are empowered, into opportunities at the higher level of economic and political authority"(Amadi, 2017).

In more vibrant democratic societies, where empowerment of women in the context of achieving gender equality has been adopted, gender is being accorded greater recognition in terms of representation in politics. This is now popular in such international organisations, as the UN Women, and European Union. CNLS Rwanda (2010) writes that the country (Rwanda), boasts of the largest number of female parliamentarians in the world (at 56%). The Human Development Index, 2013, reports that South African women have 41%, seats in Parliament. Sweden has high number of female representatives in senior political positions. Even in a highly democratic country as United Kingdom, "women-only short list" is adopted so that the number of women in Parliament can increase. The National Democratic Institute (n.d.) wrote that in Macedonia, the amendment of the electoral law, introduced "a list placement system which mandates that every third place on the list, go to a female candidate" as a result, more females have been elected into the Parliament.

Over the years, Nigeria has recorded low female participation in leadership, and rulership, as well as in politics or governance, in her journey towards attaining the democratic tenets of equality in participation. Governance involves the exercise of both political and economic power by the citizens. The people are the driving force of change in any country. As such, involvement in, and participation in the decision making process is a political project, that

must incorporate males and females, equitably selected through the process of election, appointment, concession, co-option, quota, special seats, among others.

The impact of outright neglect attracts loses. Lost opportunities, poverty, violence, human rights abuse, political lousiness, corruption, hostility towards the opposition, political instability and immaturity, recklessness in high places, political amateurism, and flagrant violation of the rule of law. When half of the human resources are inadvertently excluded from participating in the process, the likely implications are reduced female presence at the decision making fora, the leadership abilities of women and the marginal groups will not be fostered.

A reporter in the Vanguard Newspaper ,Kolade(2015) writes that "the only reason we live in a democratic world is for equal participation of all citizens in the development of their country, irrespective of gender or sexual orientation". Integrating gender issues into national development process is critical for the realization of a democratic culture that is transformational, and sustainable.

Tommasoil (2013) reveals that," experience has taught us that democratic ideals of inclusiveness, accountability, and transparency cannot be achieved without laws, policies, measures, and practices that address inequalities". Realistic women empowerment and gender equality objectives should be of optimum importance to the government. At the level of access to, and control of positions of authority, how can the difference in women and men's participation in democratic leadership be addressed? "Enforcement of change in the gender relations of power must be achieved through strong political actions"(Callerstig, 2014). This strong political action, will emanate from government's commitment, irrespective of religious and cultural limitations. Adopting the affirmative action, and adapting it in the context of Nigerian situation, will be a welcome development.

In the same vein, Rao and Kelleher (2005), are of the view that, "all approaches to bringing about gender equality must have a political component. This is because

gender relations exist within a force field of power relations, and power is used to maintain existing privilege". They went on to acknowledge that "the transformation of gender relations requires access to, and control over material and symbolic resources, in addition it requires changes in deep-seated values and relationships that are held in place by powers and privilege"(p.59). Power is also used for creating and consolidating new positions. For empowerment of women to become transformative in relation to the content of the National Gender Policy, the political dimension must be considered and engaged.

Transforming unequal power relations between men and women is in the domain of gender and development paradigm, and requires strong state intervention. It advocates redressing the political component upon which inequality strives. The gendering of the policy implementation mechanism, so as to create more opportunities for the disempowered to be empowered. In order for them to gain access to, as well as control political power, for working with others towards, achieving positive and transformative impact in the society.

Contributing to the debate on how the democratic process can be strengthened, Olayode (2013) advices that, "political parties would need to address the following areas; restructuring all political parties and making them gender responsive. Demonstrating at least 30 per cent affirmative action in party leadership and in the nomination of electoral candidates". Citizen's participation, especially women's involvement in the electoral process, must be encouraged within political party activities. Mostly, as party candidates, chosen, and sponsored by their parties to contest for an election. Expansion of opportunities for both males and females will be of benefits to the democratic process, and to development in general. The entry points for more women to gain access to democratic governance, is through the process of election and appointment. Although, the National Assembly intends to adopt the 35% Affirmative Action for appointive positions only, what happens to the elective positions? Maybe, the political parties might have to decide on the party list option. We

have not heard the last of it, this view is based on the on-going Constitutional review by the legislature.

Equality in participation is a way of strengthening and consolidating any democratic process. Olayode (2013:89), confirms that increased participation of women in politics in most African countries is being achieved through constitution reviews, national gender policies, and strategies such as affirmative action, and quota systems. Although some of these strategies especially affirmative action have been criticized, they remain very viable options in countries where politics bears a "masculine face" such as in Nigeria.

Reasons for encouraging more females to participate in the political process, is that issues concerning women and children will be properly handled from the "woman's standpoint", than from the men's stand point. Moreover, whenever "women's perspectives are placed on the political stage, a critical mass of women was required. With 30 per cent often cited as a figure above which women begin to make an impact on political life"(Oxaal and Baden:199). Also, whenever women's share of seats in political bodies is less than 30 per cent, such set-up can be described as undemocratic, and they may not be able to have much impact during legislstive debates. For instance, the gender equality bill presented in the Senate in 2016, was thrown out as majority of the members of the House are males. What can 7.34% achieve in the face of opposition from 92.66%. Hence the reason for the call for the affirmative action, so as to increase the number of females in the deliberative bodies, where vital decisions are taken, bills are passed, and adopted , and laws are made, constitutions are reviewed or amended.

AFFIRMATIVE ACTION AND NATIONAL GENDER POLICY

Affirmative Actions are positive steps adopted to include the excluded groups, in order to achieve equality in elective and appointive positions in government. Such

groups includes women, certain categories of men, and youths, by increasing the number of female representatives at the political sphere. Convention on Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)'s Affirmative Action, advocates 35 per cent or at least one third of elective positions, to be kept for women.

One way of achieving this feat will be basically to understand each socio-cultural, and political environment. Domesticate, modify, adapt and localise the Affirmative Action to reflect the Nigerian condition. The affirmative action endorses 35 per cent positions for women at the realm of power and politics. The inclusion of women into mainstream politics, especially, into elective positions has been limited, and equally very slow to achieve, even with the adoption of the National Gender Policy in 2006.

The Affirmative Action as embedded in Nigeria's National Gender Policy has the goal of empowering women politically, and minimising inequality. This may encourage the adherence to sustainable democratic principles of governance. Introducing the Affirmative Action should be viewed as a viable political option for reducing inequality such as manifest at the political spheres. Considering the fact that the Senate have thrown out the gender equality bill for third consecutive time. It is crucial to the extent that its attainment can have positive impact on the socio-cultural, economic and political terrain of the Nigerian state. Giving the high population of women, its benefits cannot be dismissed.

The study examined the degree of political empowerment for women at the level of governance, through election. It found out that the National Gender Policy has not made much impact on the outcome of the elections into various political offices. In recent years the focus has been on empowering women economically, rather than politically. Yet this focus on women has not led to much significant change in the position of women in the political sphere. Using the South-South geo-political zone as a case study, in order to generalize the trend of disempowerment, and inequality in Nigeria. (See Table 1). In the South-South geo-political zone, before the

Table 1 : Showing the National Assembly Federal Constituency Seats by State and gender.

BEFORE National Gender Policy (2006)   AFTER National Gender Policy (2006)

State	1999		2003		2007		2011		2015		Total
	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	Total
Akwa Ibom	1	9	1	9	-	10	-	10	-	10	10
Bayelsa	-	5	-	5	-	5	-	5	-	5	5
Cross River	-	8	-	8	-	8	2	6	-	8	8
Delta	2	8	2	8	1	9	1	9	3	7	10
Edo	-	9	-	9	-	9	-	9	-	9	9
Rivers	-	13	-	13	1	12	2	11	-	13	13
Total	3	52	3	52	2	53	5	50	3	52	55

(Figures derived from National Assembly Yearly Report, and compiled by the   Researcher).

introduction of the National Gender Policy in 2006, out of a total of 55 legislators, 52 are males and 3 are females. After the National Gender Policy, from 2007 to 2015, the figures fluctuated from between 52 males versus 3 females, in 2007, to 50 males versus 5 females, in 2011. In 2015, the figure nosedived to 52 males versus 3 females. The old and the newly elected members of the House of Representatives, from the South South Senatoral zone presently, are 55 persons, made up of 52 males, and 3 females.

The Eight Assembly closed its doors against women, in all the states in the South-South except Delta. With a House dominated by men, for the next four years, what would become the fate of gender equality bills and debates as it relates to gender friendly legislative reforms in the various Houses of Assembly? The statistics for other parts of the country, such as the North-East, North-West North-Central, South-East geo-political zone, proved that measures such as; affirmative action, concession of power, quota, special seats, legislation was not adhered to, and as such needs to be re- visited. (See Table 2)

Before the adoption of National Gender Policy in 1999, the South-South had 18 senators, 16 males and 2 females. In 2007, they had 17 males and 1 female, that is about 94.4%

and 5.56%. During the seventh Assembly, there is no female at all. (See Table 3)

At the national level, the Eighth Assembly has 109 senators, 101 are males, while 8 are females, that is about 92.66% males, 7.34% females. Nationally, both National Assembly, has a total of 469 legislators, males,446 males, and 23 females. In an interview with Kolade Larewaju in the Vanguard of July 5, 2015, Kehinde Okunuga is of the opinion that "Nigeria has implemented only 5% of affirmative action on women" and she believes, that "Africa and not only Nigeria's democracy will prosper, if we have more women in politics". For elective positions, the women have not fared better, gender equality train has been moving on the slow lane, and in a very slow pace.

For appointive positions, during the Goodluck Jonathan's tenure, there were 38 ministers, 6 females, and 32 males. That is 15.79% females, versus 84.21% males. Out of 36 Federal Permanent Secretaries, 25 are males, that is 69.4%, while 11 are females 30.56%. Mohammadu Buhari government appointed 25 full ministers and 11 ministers of State, made up of 30 males (83.33%), and 6 females(16.67%). Out of the 18 new permanent Secretaries, 14 (77.78%), are males and 4 (22.22%) females. There are higher percentage of females given

Table 2:   Number of seats held in the Senate by states and gender.

State	BEFORE 2006				AFTER 2006					
	1999		2003		2007		2011		2015	
	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M
Akwa Ibom	-	3	-	3	1	2	-	3	-	3
Bayelsa	-	3	-	3	-	3	-	3	1	2
Cross River	1	2	-	3	-	3	-	3	-	3
Delta	1	2	-	3	-	3	-	3	-	3
Edo	-	3	1	2	-	3	-	3	-	3
Rivers	-	3	-	3	-	3	-	3	-	3
Total	2	16	1	17	1	17	-	18	1	17
Total%	11.11%	88.89%	5.56%	94.44%	5.56%	94.44%	0%	100%	5.56%	94.44%

(Figures compiled by the Researcher, from the National Bureau of Statistics Report, 2015)

Table 3:   Showing the disaggregated data on the outcome of the general elections into various political positions in Nigeria.

Position	Before	2006			After 2006						Total
	1999		2003		2007		2011		2015		
	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	
President	-	1	-	1	-	1	-		-	1	1
Vice President	-	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	1
Governor	-	36	-	36	-	36	-	36	-	36	36
Deputy Governor	1	35	2	34	5	30	3	33	4	32	36
Senators	4	105	3	106	9	100	7	102	8	101	109
House of Reps	12	348	23	337	26	334	26	334	15	345	360
House of Assemblies	12	978	36	954	54	936	62	928	55	935	990
LG Chairpersons	7	767	14	760	56	510	30	738	34	740	774

(Figures compiled by the Researcher from the National Bureau of Statistics Report 2016.)

political appointments than those elected. The 2015 election, gave women 4 slots into the office of the deputy governor, out of the 36 deputy givernors in Nigeria, 4 are females, while 32 are males. How can we overcome social exclusion and inadequate representation of women in the public sector and its policy making apparatus?

From the table 3, the position of a president, vice president, governor, is "no-go areas" for the females. In the nearest future, women can clinche these top echelon of power, depending on the level of development of the democratic and political culture, in the country. Since the Gender Equality Bill has been rejected thrice, by the Senate, based on religious and cultural encumbrances. For now, the Affirmative Action, special seats, quota, party list, et cetera, can go a long way in ensuring gender inclusiveness in the political sphere. The affirmative quota

Table 4 : Demands for Equality

	Female %	Male %	Total %	Less	
AU	**50 %**	**50 %**	**100 %**	**0**	**Equality**
CEDAW	**35%**	**65 %**	**100 %**	**30**	**Inequality**
NEPAD	**40 %**	**60 %**	**100 %**	**20**	**Iniquality**
WOMEN FOR CHANGE INITIATIVE	**30 %**	**70 %**	**100 %**	**40**	**Inequality**
NEEDS	**30 %**	**70 %**	**100 %**	**40**	**Inequality**
RIVSEEDs	**30 %**	**70 %**	**100 %**	**40**	**Inequality**

(Source: Compiled by the Researcher 2016)

can be adopted by the ruling party in order to open up more positions for the females.

VARIATIONS IN DEMANDS FOR GENDER EQUALITY

Gender equality is a condition of women and men having equal access to opportunities. It preaches equal access to political, economic, social life for both males and females in the country. The ratio of 50/50 quota, may go a long way, especially at the level of executive appointment as more women gain access to political power through appointment, than through elective process. The demand may be on a 50/50 bases, as advocated by the African Union (AU) Heads of States in 2004, or 35 per cent Affirmative Agenda of CEDAW, the National Gender Policy recommends 30 per cent minimum representative for women or the 30 per cent concession requested by the "Women for Change Initiatives" group in Nigeria. The study observed some inconsistencies in the percentage envisaged for the achievement of equality.

From table 4, the African Union (AU) made a demand for 50%, New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD), asked for a concession of 40%, the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) Affirmative Action made a demand for 35%. The

measures adopted by the Nigerian government under the National Economic Empowerment Development Strategy is to "ensure equitable representation of women all over the country in all aspect of national life by using affirmative action to ensure that women represents at least 30% of the work force, where feasible". While the Rivers State Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy's (RIVSEEDS)'s target is to achieve at least 30% appointive positions, and 10% elective position, by the year 2007 (RIVSEEDs,2005). For the National Gender Policy, the target is to achieve at least 30% representation in 2007 national election, and a progression to 50% representation by the year 2011(National Gender Policy, 2006). The Women for Change Initiatives demanded 30% concession for women. The Peoples Democratic Party's (PDP) guidelines concede two out of every seven seats to women, that is, about 28.6%. According to Kolade (2015), the All People's Congress's (APC) manifesto ensures "that women are adequately represented in government appointments and provided greater opportunities in education, job creation, economic empowerment. It also promised the promotion of the concept of reserving a minimum number of seats in the National Assembly for women"

There seems to be some confusion and contradiction in the percentage that the mainstream development

institutions are requesting, and what the local representatives are demanding, in comparison to what the national or state governments and the political parties, are ready to concede, for the purpose of empowering women, and attaining gender equality. From all indication, much needs to be done to enable all citizens to contribute to the democratic process, in their country and in the world at large. For instance, deliberate political commitment is required, to upset the internal party dynamics, as well as adopting statutory backup from the constitution, just like the Federal Character Principles. Entrenching the Affirmative Action into the Nigerian constitution, can go a long way in ensuring that more women are appointed or elected into political offices.

SUGGESTIONS

The study suggests the adoption of the Affirmative Action as a panacea for strengthening Nigeria's democratic rule. This creates room for more females to be elected or appointed into various political offices in the country. This can have positive impact on the level of female participation in the process of governance, reduction of inequality, and marginalization. Policy tools such as affirmative quota, reservation, can be effectively utilized in increasing the representation of women in governance.

Efforts aimed at building and strengthening democratic rule, in an emerging democracy as Nigeria, must emphasize the centrality of empowering the disempowered through the Affirmative Action which is embedded in Nigeria's National Gender Policy objectives.

Strengthening democratic rule, ensures that avenues for expansion of choices are put in place, such that can promote freedom from deprivation, poverty, violence, and expansion of political opportunities for women.

If the democratic process is to be strengthened, then, the existing gender order of inequality has to be questioned, and the democratic process transformed with more female participants.

Impressive strides can be achieved by female legislators when it comes to issues relating to the youths and children. Moreover, elected female representatives are better equipped to influence legislations that will benefit children, youths and the marginal group in their constituencies, than those appointees whose loyalty is to the powers that appointed them.

Efforts at building and consolidating democratic ethics must emphasize the centrality of empowering women and men. As much as transforming unequal gender power relations, and achieving gender equality through the Affirmative Action. A better governing process can be achieved through an effective democratic system that is inclusive.

The study believes that an empowered population will transform a struggling economy, as much as make an economic sense, since it is a human right. As such, concerted efforts should be taken towards; capacity building, improved leadership skills, consciousness raising, fund raising for female candidates for elective positions, to free them from the clutches of political godfathers. For more women and the marginalized groups to be represented at the political sphere, their capacities need to be expanded and strengthened, because, without the increase in the consciousness of women, concession of power will not be of much benefit to them and the society.

The process of empowering women should embrace initiatives, geared towards increasing the number and capacity of female occupants of higher decision making positions, by addressing the gender strategic interest.

In the process of selecting or electing party representatives, the principles of equality of the gender must be considered. In terms of including more female candidates, in order to establish internal party democracy in the party system in Nigeria. More space should be created for the females, during election, and in choosing political appointees for political offices.

For more females to be represented at the political sphere, their capacities need to be strengthened. There must be more advocacy for increased female participation

in politics and the democratic process. Government should put in place modalities for constitutional reforms requiring institutions of power to accommodate both gender at the ward, local, state and national levels.

CONCLUSION

Empowerment of women and gender equality is critical to achieving sustainable democracies. Government should ensure that there is maximal articulation of the issues affecting the marginalized, as well as gender interest. Presently, these are not only lacking, but are not addressed during the implementation of the Nigerian National Gender Policy.

Although, having gender equality does not necessarily mean that issues concerning women, would be addressed, but female legislators, executives, judges, among others, are in a better position to make impressive strides in addressing women/gender issues. In other words, increasing the number of females in the Legislature, and other arms of government, can guarantee the promotion of gender equality, and women empowerment legislative agenda. All the same, the presence of more females in the National and State Houses of Assembly, can create a political clout that may positively influence pro-women, pro-children, pro-empowerment and pro-gender equality decisions. Rwanda and Sweden are typical examples of countries that have a greater number of their Parliamentarians as females. They have achieved a significant high level of gender equality in the political sector. Nigeria can borrow a leaf from other countries, where affirmative action has been deemed successful. That calls for restructuring of institutions of power and transforming of unequal power relations, and revisiting the Affirmative Action, which is part of the gender agenda.

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