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This article examines the nature of political power relations between men and women in Nigeria between 1999 and 2007. It argues that the character of the Nigerian state; electoral violence, extensive monetization of the electoral process, politicization of political appointments and portfolios, 'use and dump policy' of government, and militarization of the political process reinforced the gender question and undermined women's contributions to national development. It concludes that Nigeria's signatory to gender-related international instruments imposes a legal obligation on the country to protect women's rights, including the right to adequate representation in government.

Key words: Gender, gender question, political governance, national development, women, Nigeria

Introduction
The role of women in leadership, particularly political leadership, in contemporary time cannot be overemphasized. This is because women in many countries, including countries of the South, have successfully negotiated a space and a voice for themselves in the traditionally male-gendered public sphere. As a result, women in different societies, and in various ways, are saddled with political responsibilities. For example, the female genre has succeeded in negotiating a political space for itself in Sierra Leone, Pakistan, India, and even in the Islamic Republic of Iran, with the appointment of the first female member of the ruling Iranian cabinet by President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in September 2009. In Nigeria, the role of women in political leadership predates contemporary time. From a history of political obscurity, women in Nigeria have gradually crept into political recognition. The appointment and election of some women into political offices between 1999 and 2007 have shown the tacit acceptance of women by the essentially patriarchal Nigerian society as equal stakeholders with men in the process of nation building. This raises a number of questions. How did the Nigerian women negotiate and secure a voice in the male-gendered political terrain? Does the acceptance of women into the country's mainstream political sphere have any historical antecedent? To what extent did women in political leadership between 1999 and 2007 contribute to democratic consolidation and national development in Nigeria? This paper examines these and other related issues within the context of the history of asymmetric political power relations between women and men in the country.

The paper begins by unbinding the concept of gender and its relation to the gender question. This is followed by the analysis of the role and place of women in political governance across time and space in Nigeria. The subsequent sections of the paper examine the role of women and the factors militating against them in governance in Nigeria between 1999 and 2007.

Conceptual Issues
Two concepts are central to this paper. These are: gender and the gender question. Gender as a concept is characterized by conceptual and operational
ambiguities. It is a contested concept involving arguments about its proper constituents and uses. There are different issues in the contestation over the proper constituents and use of the concept of gender. Two of the issues border on a neat, universal conceptualization of the concept, including its constituents and the relationship between them; and the dichotomy between gender and sex. Nonetheless, gender, in grammar, is conceptualized as a means of classifying words based on characteristics such as masculine, feminine, or neuter sex (Encyclopedia Americana; 1972: 372). In the same vein, Stoller (1968), cited in Kessler and McKenna (1978: 7), refers to gender as the amount of masculinity or femininity found in a person. Apparent from this conceptualization is the fact that gender is based on sex, or, better put, gender and sex are similar. This conceptualization is in line with the generally accepted notion of gender as masculine, feminine, or neuter.

However, some scholars argue that both sex and gender are two distinct concepts. Oakley (1972: 158-159), for example, argues that, “Sex” has biological connotations, hence is a biological term while “gender” is a psychological and cultural concept because of its psychological and cultural connotations. Also, Ostergaard (1994: 6) admits that sex is in the province of biology (that has fixed and unchangeable qualities, like destiny) and gender is in the province of social science (that has qualities that are shaped through the history of social relations and interactions). Though, both sex and gender can be viewed differently, Oakley (1972) argues that both concepts are merely two ways of ‘looking at the same division, with the implications that someone who belongs to the female sex automatically belongs to the corresponding feminine gender.

Conversely, Heywood (1997:183) argues that gender is a “cultural distinction between females and males, based on their different social roles and positions.” Gender is therefore considered as “a social construct, usually based on stereotypes of ‘feminine’ and ‘masculine’ behaviour.” In the same vein, Ostergaard (1994:6) portrays gender as not only implying male, female or neuter, but a “qualitative and interdependent character of women and men’s position in society.” These two conceptualizations suggest the salience of conceptualizing gender as the relation between men and women, largely constructed by the society rather than by biology or nature. The strength in this conceptualization of gender is that it effectively recognizes and accommodates the sexual orientation and gender identity of lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgendered people (LGBT). Gender, in the context of this paper, is therefore construed as the biological sexual identity of women and men, and the patterns of relation which the society imposes on them. The relations that the society imposes on the two sexes are however forms of reinforcement of the sexual dichotomy between women and men. These relations are not necessarily harmonious and non-conflicting. On the contrary, the relations are often of opposition and conflict, which take different forms under different circumstances. The relation, however, manifests in the pattern of deprivation which women suffer, irrespective of age, status and positions in the society. It is this pattern of deprivation that constitutes the gender question. The gender question, simply put, thus refers to the plight of women in the society; as the weaker sex, subordinate of men, inferior to men, and a species that must be relegated to the rear in every facet of human life. The question also revolves around the struggle to end the deprivation that women suffer.

The common assumption that the role and place of women is, first and foremost, tied to the family is an aspect of the pattern of deprivation which prefaces the relations between men and women. Furthermore, the notion that women are basically and primarily expected to bear and raise children, and also take care of the home is a reinforcement of the gender question. Such notions and assumptions, which used to be common all over the world, undermined the attempts by women in time past to venture out of the limitations imposed on them by society.

For example, in Africa, as well as in all Third World countries, women were mainly providers of support services to their husbands/fathers in agricultural production; they assisted in planting,
harvesting and marketing of farm produce. Even in Europe and America, the condition of women prior to the emancipation movements was similar to that of traditional Africa. Women in Europe and America were overtly maltreated, brutalized and assaulted with impunity. They were regarded more as objects of sexual pleasure than for the positive potentials inherent in them. In law, women were denied equal rights with men. The Christian religion, which should have provided succour, further reinforced the secondary role and subalteran status of women in the society. Politics and governance in different parts of Africa, Asia, America and Europe were regarded as the exclusive preserve of the male gender. All these, however, began to gradually change from 1848.

This is because the Seneca Falls Convention in 1848 challenged the status quo and helped spread the awareness of the oppression, subjugation and deplorable condition of women in the society. The resolutions of the convention, which challenged the oppression of women, later underpinned an orientation of gender equality in America, and subsequently in many parts of the world. This 'new' orientation of gender equality engendered agitations by women and human rights activists for women empowerment in every facet of life. Though the Seneca Convention was the first ever successfully coordinated movement to advance the cause of women, Ruth (1980) points out that the first stirring of the women movement came with the publication of Mary Wollstonecraft's A Vindication of the Rights of Women, in 1792. Also, there had been pockets of resistance by women, both as individuals and as groups, far before both Mary Wollstonecraft's thesis and the Seneca Convention. For instance, it is argued that:

The resistance has progressed, and receded, but it has expressed itself in many ways - in writing of poetry, in marches of courthouses, or in the quieter but steady resistance of the women of the household. Also, notice must be taken of the Roman women who demonstrated in the forum in 195 B.C. for the repeal of the Anti-Female Opine Laws, the liberating poems of Sappho and the struggles for survival of the thirteen century group of women called the Beguines (who chose to abjure marriage, live and work together, help the poor in the name of Christianity, but remain independent of the control of the male church)." (Ruth, 1980: 444)

Notwithstanding, the 1848 Seneca Convention was indeed the turning point in the global awareness of the gender question. This is because it was the convention that set the basis for organized, universal agitation for women empowerment and equality, which has since gradually enveloped the world. It thus set the basis for the numerous international conventions and conferences on the plight of women (gender question). Several efforts were made, particularly at the international level, to address the subaltern position of women in the society. For example, the League of Nations, during its short existence, promoted women issues by establishing a formal relationship with various women activists and organizations. The relationships resulted in the formation of the Women's International Organizations in 1919, which comprised about fifteen international women non-governmental organizations (Banks, 1990). Though the effort of the League of Nations to address the gender question was short-lived, due to its sudden collapse, it nevertheless laid the basis for subsequent global actions against discrimination and marginalization of women in social, cultural, political and economic arenas. The United Nations, which replaced the League of Nation in 1945, also provided mechanisms to effectively accommodate the interests of women, and to tackle the gender question in the world. The preamble of the Charter, for example, states that:

We the people of the United Nations... to reaffirm faith in the fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small... (UN; 1945:2)
Similarly, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights (the Banjul Charter), both of which recognize the fundamental rights of women to equality with men; the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW); and the series of international conferences such as the Copenhagen Conference (1980), Nairobi Conference (1985), and Beijing Conference (1995) are some examples of the international efforts to address the gender question.

However, in spite of the increased awareness of the gender question by the global community, and the increasing UN efforts to tackle it, it is apt to assert that most women all over the world are still marginalized and oppressed. The extent of marginalization and oppression however differs from one country/region to the other. For instance, while a socio-political and economic space has successfully been negotiated for women in the developed countries of the North, as women now enjoy equality with men, the converse is the case in most countries of the South. Also, while women in the developed countries are treated as equal stakeholders with men in the society, and their roles in nation building, national development, and international peace and security recognized and emphasized; women in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Middle East still suffer wide-range discrimination and exploitation.

But even in the developed countries, women still experience marginalization. Heywood (1997:182), for example, observed that, “in the UK, fewer than 4 per cent of the members of the boards of major companies are women. Even though women gained the right to vote in 1918, only 9 per cent (around 60) of Members of the Parliament were women in 1996.” Heywood also noted that, “despite the steps taken since the 1960s to reduce gender-based inequality, it is estimated by the United Nations that women worldwide contribute 66 per cent of the hours worked, earn about 10 per cent of the world’s income, and own only 1 per cent of the world’s property.” In the same vein, Boutros Boutros-Ghali, the former Secretary General of the UN, remarked that:

Despite the progress made, much more remains to be done. While women have made significant advances in many societies, women’s concerns are still given second priority almost everywhere. Women face discrimination and marginalization in subtle as well as flagrant ways. Women do not (still) share equally in the fruits of production. Women constitute 70 percent of the world’s poor.

(UN, 1996:2)

Also, the UNDP Annual Report for 2006 emphasized the gender question by referring to the continued marginalization and discrimination of women in many countries. The report noted that:

The majority of women in developing countries are in informal employment…. In developed countries, part-time work and self-employment are a more important source of income for women than for men. Women generally earn less than men; have less access to quality jobs, and fewer opportunities for the education that could help them find better, safer means of income.

(UNDP, 2006)

The above clearly underscores the prevalence and pervasiveness of the gender question, which manifests in form of asymmetric power (political, social and economic) relations between women and men globally, even in the twenty-first century.

Women and Political Power Relations in Nigeria: A pre-1999 Overview
The pattern of relations between men and women in Nigeria’s political history, particularly with regard to governance, is typical of all patriarchal societies. In many patriarchal societies, women usually play second fiddle to men in political and governmental issues. Political leadership in such societies is considered the exclusive preserve of men. Nonetheless, women in patriarchal societies have always played critical roles in community and national development. This is because even the
traditional roles of women in the society are vital for growth and development. In Nigeria, for example, women have been identified to perform five critical roles: mothers, producers, home managers, community organizers, and social, cultural and political activists (UNDP, 1997: 9). These roles are, no doubt, vital to the socio-political and economic development of Nigeria. As mothers, home managers and community organizers, women provide an environment conducive for human and social development. As producers, women contribute to economic production and development of the society. And as socio-cultural and political activists, women promote and engender the process of nation-building and democratization.

The history of women and political leadership in Nigeria before 1999 was, however, on the one hand, that of exclusion and marginalization by the male-gendered polity, and, on the other hand, that of relentless agitations by women. The history of women and political leadership in Nigeria can be broadly categorized into two periods: the colonial and the post-colonial periods. The significance of this classificatory pattern lies in the difference in the nature, pattern and dynamics of the gender question and the reactions of women to it during the two periods. For example, while the stereotyping of women as the weaker sex and the object of sexual pleasure, and the under-representation of women in political power cut across both periods, the extent of political marginalization of women was more severe in the post-colonial period than the colonial period. This is because while the colonial government governed the country with the sole purpose of exploiting the resources of the people, the post-colonial period was meant to usher in freedom and liberty to all Nigerians, irrespective of sex.

But, contrary to these expectations, Nigerian women continued to be marginalized and oppressed, or better put, ‘colonized’ by their male counterparts years after the colonial rule. However, the issue of women and political leadership in Nigeria should be treated as an historical construct, rather than an ‘episode’ in Nigeria’s history. This is because the issue has a pre-colonial antecedent. For example, the pre-colonial indigenous communities and groups had practices such as payment of bride price, female circumcision or female genital mutilation (FGM), negative attitude towards childless women, degrading widowhood practices, and inheritance practices that discriminated against women (Enemuo, 2005:230). Also, women in some pre-colonial communities and groups were politically marginalized and disempowered, as they did not have or play any direct political roles in their communities. It was assumed that men in political leadership were representatives of both women and men. This was the case among the Igbo and Hausa ethnic groups. Among the Igbo, for example, women played a vital role in the administration and governance of their communities. This was done through the Igbo age grade system. By the age grade tradition among the Igbo, adult males and females were grouped into different age grades, based on their age. It was customary for members of the age grades to perform social functions, ranging from enforcement of community rules and regulations, environmental sanitation, policing and the maintenance of culture and tradition among their members. These functions assisted and contributed, albeit implicitly, to the effective political governance of the community.

Women in some other ethnic groups played direct, visible and very critical roles in governance. Specifically, women were vital to the overall success of the political institutions and machinery of government of the Kanuri and Yoruba ethnic groups. For example, the traditional political system of the Kanuri of the Kanem-Borno empire provided opportunities for women to be in political leadership. The political arrangement of the empire accommodated three important women political leaders in the royal palace. These were the Magira (the Queen Mother), the Magari (the Senior Sister of the Mai, the king) and the Gumsu (Mai’s first wife). These women political leaders held sensitive political positions as members of the Mai’s (the king) court. This allowed them to influence the Mai significantly (Okoh, 1995: 164, Falola and Adefayo, 1985:41). The Queen Mother (the Magira), for instance, was among the eminent personalities and leaders of
thought that elected the king (the Mai).

Similarly, the idea of women in politics and governance was part of the pre-colonial political system of the Yoruba people. Though the number of women that had access to political power was few, they held important positions in the king's court. Political offices occupied by women in different Yoruba communities included, for example, the Iyalode in Ibadan, Arise in Ilesa, Lobun in Ondo and northeastern Yoruba communities, among various other titles (Denzer; 1998: 1). Also, political offices were held by women in the Ife Kingdom and in the Old Oyo Empire. In the Old Oyo Empire, for example, the palace officials included women political titled officers, among whom were eight titled ladies of the highest rank, eight priestesses and other ladies of rank, besides the king's wives (Johnson, 1921: 63). Examples of the titled ladies and ladies of high rank are the Iya Oba (the queen mother), Iya Kere, Iya Naso, Iyamonari, and Obagunte. Women political offices in the Ife Kingdom included the Ojumu, Yeloja, Yelaje, Iyamokun, Elewi, Lagora, among others (Fabunmi, 1985: 85). In addition, political titles were conferred on distinguished women in the kingdom. The recipients of such titles went by the appellation of 'Obinrisogba' (Fabunmi, 1985). The importance of the roles these women political appointees performed can be gleaned from the nature of the political offices they held. For example, the Obagunte in the Old Oyo Empire had the responsibility of representing the king at the meetings of the Ogboni council, comprising the senior chiefs and all leaders of thought in the empire (Johnson, 1921).

However, despite the involvement of women in the pre-colonial political administration of some communities, as evident among the Kanuri and Yoruba communities, the number of women political office holders was very small. In the same vein, the political relevance of the offices occupied by women, when compared with those occupied by men, was not too important; since women could not attain the highest political positions such as the position of the king (oba/emir). Also, appointment of women to political offices during the period was made exclusively and principally by the male political leaders, particularly the kings and their chiefs. All this buttresses the extent of women marginalization in traditional, pre-colonial political context.

During the period of colonial rule, women's contribution to the political development of Nigeria manifested in a number of ways, including agitations against obnoxious colonial policies. The Aba women riot of 1928 is a good example. The riot was against the introduction of comprehensive tax regime alongside the imposition of warrant chiefs on the people of the eastern part of Nigeria by the colonial government. Though the demands of the women were not immediately met, and some of them even lost their lives in the riots, it is an indication that Nigerian women also sacrificed for the political development of the country. Some other women political activists also ventured out of the cocoons of inhibitive traditions and customary practices to contribute to the socio-political and economic development of Nigeria. Awe (1992:31) noted that "while Charlotte Obasa and some others formed the Lagos Women's League, which from 1923 to 1944 campaigned for more employment opportunities, lady Oyinkan Abayomi set up in 1944 the Women's Party, which clamoured for the expansion of opportunities for women." Mrs. Margaret Ekpo, Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti, Henrietta Lawson, Keziah Fashina, Mary Ededem, Remi Aiyedun, Wuraola Esan, Janet Mokelu, Hajiya Gambo Sawaba and Benice Kerry are some of the other notable women political activists and suffragists during the colonial and immediate post-colonial eras.1

A major drawback to women political activism was the fact that the success of women activism depended largely on men's willingness to nominate or concede political positions to women. This accounted for the low number of elected and appointed women in significant political leadership positions such as

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1For details on the activities of these women and other colonial Nigerian women activists, see Awe, B. (1992) "Women in Historical Perspective." In Ayoade, I.A.A., Nwabuzor, E.J. and Sambo, A (eds.) Women and Politics in Nigeria, Lagos: Centre for Democratic Studies, pp. 25-35.
regional governors, ministers, and legislators among others dominated by the men during the colonial period.

Nevertheless, the relentless agitations of women activists and suffragists resulted in women in southern Nigeria gaining the rights to vote in 1954, thus resulting in a few women being elected into the federal and regional parliaments between 1960 and 1965. Mrs. Wuraola Esan, Bernice Kerry, Margaret Expo and Janet Muokela were women members of parliament at various times during the First Republic (1960 - 1965). This, however, was not the case in northern Nigeria where women did not gain the right to vote until 1976 (Best, 2006:135). The disenfranchisement of women in northern Nigeria till 1976 was due to the religion of Islam, which recommends that wives/women be subject to their husbands. But despite the enfranchisement of all Nigerian women by 1976, the number of elected women political office holders, and also political appointees, during the Second Republic (1979-1983) was still low. There was only one female in the 57-member Senate (the upper legislative chamber), and eleven in the 445-member House of Representatives (the lower legislative chamber) during the Second Republic (Best, 2006: 136).

The above trend of political marginalization of women, which characterized both the colonial and the First and Second Republics, continued until 1999. According to Udegbе, a Nigerian Professor of Psychology and expert in gender studies, the representation of women in positions of leadership in the three tiers of government in Nigeria in the last three decades was very low, hovering at about 2% (Udegbе, 1998:13). She further notes that appointment of women into political offices was “characterized and motivated by tokenism”, and that women in positions of authority “find themselves working in groups that are in essence predominantly male”, thereby aggravating their feeling of ‘marginality’ (Udegbе, 1998: 13). Though the above assertion by Udegbе is very correct, women, even in their marginalized position, still contributed to the process of national socio-political and economic development. This is because Nigerian women devised means to contribute to national development.

One of such means, in relation to politics, was through the activities of the wives of political executives, particularly the wives of the heads of state and state military governors. This became apparent during the eight year-rule of General Ibrahim Babangida between 1985 and 1993. The Babangida military government tacitly established the office of the first lady, by recognizing that the wife of the head of state had certain social functions to perform. This resulted in the emergence of similar portfolio for the wives of state military governors. However, more than any other thing, this idea brought the gender question and the leadership capability of women into political limelight. This is because the idea of the office of the first lady, on the one hand, created the platform upon which wives of the head of state and state military governors showcased their leadership potentials. And, on the other hand, it was an avenue by which women, through the first ladies, contributed to the socioeconomic and political empowerment of the ordinary people, particularly women.

Through the office of the first lady, important state assignments were performed by the first ladies. For example, Mariam Babangida, the wife of the military head of state, through her ‘Better Life for Rural Women Programme’, provided financial grants, loans and material assistance to rural women. Under the same programme, boreholes were sunk in some communities, while some women were trained in income generating activities and provided with takeoff capital. These activities no doubt contributed to the socioeconomic empowerment of rural dwellers. Even after the Babangida regime, successive governments (except the Gen. Abdusalaam Abubakar-led military government: July 1998 - May 1999) accommodated the office of the first lady at both the federal and state levels. The military government of General Sani Abacha (1993-1998), which succeeded the Babangida government, for example, retained and continued with the office of the first lady. The wife of General Abacha, Mariam Abacha, through the office of the first lady, established the ‘Family Economic Advancement
Programme’ (FEAP) to empower women economically and socially.

Though significant contributions on national development were made by the wives of the political executives at the federal and state levels during the Babangida and Abacha regimes through the office of the first lady, the idea of an office for the wife of the political executive was heavily criticized. Firstly, it was a novel idea that had no historical precedent in Nigerian politics before 1985. There was no government (whether military or civilian) before 1985 that recognized or allowed the wife of the head of state/president/prime minister and governors in Nigeria to have any political function. Secondly, the idea was unconstitutional and illegal. There was no provision whatsoever in the country’s legal framework, be it decree or the constitution, for the establishment of an office for the wife of the political executive. At the same time, there was no decree or edict by the Gen. Babangida and Gen. Abacha’s military governments to legalize and justify the existence of the office of the first lady and the activities being carried out by the first ladies. This, among other things, means that the funds used by the first ladies to execute the numerous projects were not covered by the yearly appropriations of the government, and as a result, there was no way to ensure accountability.

Thirdly, the activities of the first ladies were smacked of image laundering by the military governments of Babangida and Abacha to perpetuate themselves in power. And lastly, the idea itself lacked moral credibility because many of the political executives, including the heads of state and military governors, practised polygamy, which made the issue and choice of who becomes the first lady a political one. But much as the idea is criticized for being an avenue for wasting the nation’s resources, it, nonetheless, created an avenue for women, through the first ladies, to negotiate a political space for themselves in the male-dominated public sphere of Nigeria.

Besides using the mechanism of the office of the first lady, women also contributed to national development through their participation in the political process as elected and appointed state officials during the first and second republics and the years of military dictatorship. The number of women in political leadership positions was however, ridiculously low when compared with the number of men. For example, the transition to civilian rule programme of the Babangida administration brought a number of women to political leadership positions. This reflected in the inclusion of two female members in the seventeen-member political bureau. Also, by 1990, there were three women chairpersons out of a total of 591 in the Local Government Councils; 27 women legislators out of 1,172 legislators in the State Houses of Assembly (there was no woman legislator in 14 states); 14 elected women out of 589 members of the House of Representative; one female out of 91 members of the Senate, and one female presidential aspirant in 1993 (Best, 2006: 136).

Also, a number of women occupied political leadership positions at the federal and state levels under the General Abacha (1993-1998) and General Abdulsalaam Abubakar’s (1998-1999) administrations. According to Agina-Ude (cited in Best, 2006:137), 20 women were among the 360 member-House of Representatives (lower federal legislative chamber); 9 women senators in the 109-member Senate (the upper legislative chamber) between 1993 and 1998; while between 1998 and 1999, 3 women got elected into the Senate, and 12 into the House of Representative. In addition, 143 women were elected as local government councilors, 9 (out of 774 local governments) as chairpersons of local governments.

Furthermore, some women were also appointed into political offices between 1960 and 1999. Again, the number of women political appointees was very low when compared with the number of men. Also, the political leadership positions occupied by the women political appointees between 1960 and May 1999 were of little political significance when compared with those occupied by men. This is because most of the women political appointees during the period were junior ministers (ministers of state). And many of the women political appointees who were senior ministers were placed in less fancied
and less strategic political offices such as the Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Welfare. All of this attests to the nature of the gender question in Nigeria before 1999.

Some of the women political appointees before 1999 are Adenike Ebun Oyagbola, Minister of National Planning (1979 - 83, 1983 - 85, and 1997); Janet Akinrinade, Minister of State for Internal Affairs (1979 - 83); Elizabeth Afunwana Ivasse, Minister of State for Education (1979-83) and Deputy Minister of Education (1983-85); Bola Kuforiji-Olubi, Minister of Trade, Commerce and Tourism (1993); Mobolaji Osomo, Minister of Establishment and Management Services (1993-95); Ada Adoyu, Minister of State for Agriculture (1993-95); Judith Sefi Attah, Minister of Women Affairs and Social Welfare (1995-97); Mariam T. Clark, Minister of State for the Federal Capital Territory (1995-97); Iyabode Anisulowu, Minister of State for Education (1995-97); Onikepo Akande, Minister of Industries (1997-99); Hajia Sani, Minister for Women Affairs (1997-98); and Rose Adenike, Minister of State for Education (1998).

**Women and Political Governance in Nigeria, 1999 - 2007**

The pattern of political power relations between men and women between 1999 and 2007 was markedly different from the preceding years. In the first place, the inauguration of the civilian government of Olusegun Obasanjo on 29 May 1999 marked a defining moment in the pattern of political power relations between men and women. This is because the issue of the political marginalization of women or, better put, the gender question, took the front burner in the nation’s politics. One of the bold steps undertaken by the government to address the gender question was the adoption of a policy document (the National Policy on Women) in 2000. The document, among other things, recommended 30% women representation in appointed and elective positions in national government. The government equally signed and ratified some important gender-related international instruments which impose legal obligations on the government to protect women’s rights. These include the Protocol on the Right of Women (December 2003), African Charter on the Right and Welfare of the Child (July 1999/July 2001), and Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discriminations against Women (November 2004).

Essentially, two discernible trends characterized the issue of women and political leadership between 1999 and 2007. These are the resurgence of the phenomenon of the ‘office of the first ladies’ at the federal and state levels, after the practice seemed to have disappeared during the reign of General Abubakar between 1998 and 1999, and an increase in the number of elected and appointed women political officials.

Like the governments of Generals Babangida and Abacha, the wives of the political executives, including the president and state governors, established non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to address one or more issues affecting the lives of the people. But unlike under Generals Babangida and Abacha, where some of the wives of the military governors did not engage in the practice of having an office of the first lady through which they could launch pet projects, all the wives of the civilian governors between 1999 and 2007 embarked on pet programmes through the office of the first lady. At the federal level, Stella Obasanjo, the wife of the president, established the ‘Heart Care Foundation’ to take care of people with heart-related problems. Also, the wife of the vice president, Titi Abubakar, established the ‘Women Trafficking and Child Labour Eradication Foundation’ (WOTCLEF) to address the problems of women and child trafficking.

At the state level, the wives of state governors established different non-governmental organizations to carry out a wide variety of programmes. Examples include the ‘Iderade Foundation’ of Mutiat Olayinka Ladoja (wife of the Oyo State governor), the ‘Poverty Alleviation Programme’ of Fatimah Bunu Sheriff (wife of the Borno State governor in northern Nigeria), the ‘Care for the Aged Programme’ of Olufunke Daniel (wife of the Ogun State governor in southwest Nigeria), the ‘Millennium Hope Initiative’ of Hajia Markafi (wife of Kaduna State governor in...
northern Nigeria), and the headship of the Social Mobilization Committee on the Eradication of the six killer diseases by Hajia Badru Muazu (wife of the Bauchi State governor in northern Nigeria). Other NGOs set up by some first ladies are the ‘New Era Foundation’ of Oluremi Tinubu (wife of the Lagos State governor), the ‘Idia Renaissance’ of Eki Igbinedion (wife of the Edo State governor) and the ‘Youth Empowerment Scheme’ of Hajia Zainab Kure (wife of the Niger State governor).

Each of the projects/programmes above targeted and addressed one or more areas of the social needs of the people. For example, the pet project of the wife of the Ogun State governor focused on caring for the aged in the society. The Idia Renaissance of Eki Igbinedion addressed women and youth empowerment in Edo State. In all, the first ladies’ projects and programmes facilitated capacity building of women, youths and rural dwellers. This was a subtle way by which the wives of political executives provided some of the needed dividends of democracy for the people and, by so doing, deepened the country’s development and democratization process. In the same vein, the utility of the numerous projects and programmes of the first ladies to the society demonstrates the leadership capability of women. This is because they initiated and executed the programmes and projects. The major snag in the contributions of the first ladies is that the office of the first lady, through which the contributions were made, was illegal in the sense that the Nigerian constitution does not delineate any parameters for the first lady’s role, duties or powers in government.

Another area in which women contributed to national development was in their participation in the governance of the country. Between 1999 and 2007, women participated in the political process by contesting elections or being appointed into political offices. As a result, a number of women got elected or appointed into political offices between 1999 and 2007. What facilitated this, however, was the positive disposition of the administration of Olusegun Obasanjo (1999-2007) to the plight of Nigerian women. Right from inception, the administration put in place mechanisms to address the age long marginalization of women in governance. This was done through the formulation of a national policy on women in 2000, being signatory to, and ratifying gender-related international instruments, including the Protocol on the Right of Women in 2003, Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discriminations against Women in November 2004, and the appointment of women into political leadership positions.

Women were appointed as ministers, ministers of state, commissioners, special advisers to political office holders, and heads/acting heads of government agencies/parastatals. Between 1999 and 2003, women political appointees included six ministerial posts and six permanent secretaries in federal ministries (Women in National Parliaments, 2006). Between 2003 and 2006, the number of women political appointees increased to about 9 ministerial posts (Women in National Parliaments, 2006). In all, 86 women (11.9%), out of a total of 833 persons were appointed into political offices between 1999 and 2007 (This Day, 2007).

Similarly, a number of women contested and won elections into the federal and state legislatures during the 1999, 2003 and 2007 elections. In the April 2007 elections, for instance, 628 of the 7,160 contestants were women. The breakdown of the 628 women aspirants shows that one woman contested for the office of the president, 5 for vice president, 14 for state governors, 21 for deputy governors, 59 for the Senate, 150 for the House of Representatives, and 358 for the State Houses of Assembly (This Day, 2007). Tables 1 - 3 below give a clear picture of the extent of women participation in elections into legislative assemblies between 1999 and 2007.

From the tables, it is evident that the number of women who got elected into legislative political leadership positions increased with each election. In the same vein, the number of women who got elected as political executives increased with each election. For example, 5 women were elected as deputy governors in 2007 as against 2 in 2003 and one in 1999. The above figures and percentages of elected and appointed women political office holders between 1999 and 2007 are no doubt impressive given the fact
that the pre-1999 percentage of women representation was, according to Udegbe (1998), as low as about 2%.

Table 1. Women in elective political leadership positions in 1999

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total membership (male and female)</th>
<th>No. of women elected</th>
<th>% of women elected</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>State Assemblies</td>
<td>990</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>House of Reps</td>
<td>360</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senate</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1459</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>7.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Compiled and calculated by the author from raw data provided by Women in National Parliaments and Inter-Parliamentary Union.

Table 2. Women in elective political leadership positions in 2003

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total membership (male and female)</th>
<th>No. of women elected</th>
<th>% of women elected</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>State Assemblies</td>
<td>990</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>House of Reps</td>
<td>360</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senate</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1459</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>13.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Compiled and calculated by the author from raw data provided by Women in National Parliaments and Inter-Parliamentary Union.

Table 3. Women in Elective Political Leadership Positions in 2007

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total membership (male and female)</th>
<th>No. of women elected</th>
<th>% of women elected</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>State Assemblies</td>
<td>990</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>House of Reps</td>
<td>360</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senate</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1459</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>24.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Compiled and calculated by the author from raw data provided by Women in National Parliaments and Inter-Parliamentary Union.

However, the fact that no administration prior to 1999 ever appointed women into 'sensitive' political portfolios such as the Ministries of Finance, Foreign Affairs and Health, as well as the chief spokesperson for the presidency attests to the increased women participation in governance between 1999 and 2007. Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, for instance, was appointed minister of finance (1999-2006) and minister of foreign affairs (2006); Oluwemi Oyo was appointed special assistant to the president on media matters; Prof. Joy Ogwu as the minister of foreign affairs (2006-2007); Obiageli Ezekwesili as the minister of solid minerals and special assistant to the president on budget monitoring and due process (2005-2007), and Nnemdi Esther Usman as minister of finance (2006-2007). But, considering the recommendation of both the National Policy on Women and the Beijing 1995 conference of a 30% women representation in national government, the percentage and number of women in government between 1999 and 2007 was still very low.

Women and Political Leadership between 1999 and 2007: The Gaps

There is no gainsaying the fact that the women that were saddled with leadership responsibilities such as political appointees, elected officials, as well as wives of political office holders, between 1999 and 2007, contributed to the process of national development and democratic consolidation. This assertion is predicated on a number of reasons. Firstly, the first ladies, through their programmes/NGOs, provided basic social amenities for the people. In the same vein, women political appointees, especially at the federal level, demonstrated an excellent mastery of their 'political callings' and exhibited high leadership ethos. These women political appointees showed commendable administrative and leadership skills in the handling of their political portfolios (ministries, parastatals and agencies), and in the general handling of government affairs. Women political appointees such as Dora Akunyili, Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, Oluwemi Oyo and Obiageli Ezekwesili, as well as female speakers of some state assemblies such as Titi Oseni of Ogun State performed so creditably well that they earned accolades and commendation from local and international communities.

But, in spite of the political success story of Nigerian women between 1999 and 2007, certain factors still militated against equitable distribution of political power between men and women, and the maximum utilization of the leadership potentials of
the few women in government. These include government's policy of periodic redistribution of political portfolios among political appointees, government's penchant for the 'use and dump' policy, the over-monetization of the electoral process, militarization of the electoral process, and political violence. The first and second factors were widespread between 1999 and 2007. This was because political appointments were personalized by the political executives, particularly the president and the state governors. In many cases, the political executives discountenanced merit as a yardstick for considering people for political appointments.

Most of the political appointees, except in few cases, were party loyalists. In addition, political appointees whose loyalty and commitment to the president or governor was in doubt were either dismissed or re-deployed. This practice by the elected political executives constitutes the 'use and dump policy' of the government. It was this policy that occasioned the untimely and unceremonious removal from office of some seasoned women political appointees, including Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, the minister of finance, Mrs. Olufunke Ojomo, the minister of housing and urban planning, and Prof. Aduke Grange, the minister of health. Though the official reason by the government for the removal of political appointees was often premised, in some cases, on the need to foster ministerial efficiency, and in some others, to curb corruption, it was common knowledge that the removals were politically-motivated. This is because due process was not followed even in the case of ministers removed from office on the ground of allegations of corruption.

Also, the practice of periodic redistribution of political portfolios among political appointees by the government was another factor that affected women political appointees. Cabinet reshuffle was a common feature of the government between 1999 and 2007. Within the period, the federal government reshuffled the federal cabinet, comprising mainly of political appointees of the government, and redistributed political portfolios among them, on not less than four occasions. However, while the rationale for the policy was often predicated on the need to promote efficiency, and rid the cabinet of non-performing appointees, the practice nonetheless had a political undertone. The cabinet reshuffles were, in most cases, politicized; oftentimes the reshuffles were carried out to victimize and frustrate political appointees considered non-cooperating, and as a prelude to their dismissal.

The effect was that some political appointees were placed in ministries/agencies/units that they had little or no knowledge of, and were subsequently frustrated out of government. For example, the sudden redeployment of Dr. (Mrs.) Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala (a finance expert and World Bank staffer) from the finance ministry, where she was a minister and head of the government's economic reform team, to the foreign affairs ministry occasioned her untimely exit from the service of the nation. However, while the government justified the action as a normal exercise, the insinuation in the media was that Okonjo-Iweala was dismissed for her refusal to support the 'third-term agenda' of President Olusegun Obasanjo. Whether the insinuations were true or not, the fact that she was redeployed was a faulty policy decision by the government; since she was an expert in financial matters, and not an expert in foreign affairs. This shows that the practice of cabinet reshuffle, which was common during the period, was politicized, and that it undermined the contribution of political appointees to national development.

In addition, the excessive monetization of the political process as evident in the huge financial commitment expected of political office seekers by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and political parties, was a major hindrance to women's political empowerment, representation and participation in government between 1999 and 2007. This is because political parties, especially the leading ones, required interested members seeking elective positions to pay some amounts of money as nomination fees. The amounts varied, depending on the political party and the political post being sought. The amounts were however usually too huge for many people to afford. According to the IDEA
money was used “to bribe officials and induce voters to support particular candidates” at party primaries. Similarly, the provisions of the Electoral Act 2006 on election expenses to be incurred by candidates placed a serious limitation on the ability of women to contest elections. Section 93 (which replaced Section 84 of the 2002 Act) listed the maximum amount to be spent by aspirants for elective positions as: ₦500,000,000 for presidential aspirants, ₦100,000,000 for governorship aspirants, ₦20,000,000 for senatorial aspirants, ₦10,000,000 for aspirants to the House of Representative, ₦5,000,000 for aspirants to the State Houses of Assembly, ₦5,000,000 for aspirants to the local government chairmanship positions, and ₦500,000 for aspirants to the local government councilorship positions (FGN, 2006). This raises a fundamental question of how many women, given their stereotype and subaltern position in the society, would be able to afford the amount. And the fact that more than half of the total population of over 140 million Nigerians, of which 48.78% are women, live below USS1 a day (APRM, 2008: viii), underscores the limitation that the provision of the Electoral Act 2006 on election expenses places on Nigerians, particularly women’s ability to contest for elective posts. In a survey conducted by the Women’s Rights Advancement and Protection Alternatives (WRAPA) on the 2003 elections, 90% of the aspirants reported lack of finances as a major constraint to their political ambition (Best, 2006: 141).

Furthermore, political campaigns between 1999 and 2007 were capital-intensive. Aspirants had to spend a lot of money to canvass and win votes both at party primaries and in general elections. Though there are no official records of the amounts incurred by the aspirants, it was common knowledge that huge sums of money were expended by most aspirants. And since most male aspirants had more money than female aspirants, because many of the male aspirants were able to trade-off with the ‘money bags’ and ‘godfathers’, many women lost party tickets at primaries, and even at general elections. According to Ibrahim and Salihu, (2004), many female aspirants were eliminated because they could not match their male opponents naira-for-naira (cited in Okoosi-Simbine, 2006:153). The Transition Monitoring Group (a coalition of civil society organizations), in a statement on the conduct of the PDP, ANPP, UNPP, and NDP primaries in 2003, complained that “there was widespread bribery of delegates with sacks stuffed with money to influence their votes” (Adetula, 2006: 167).

Also, the militarization of the political process, as evidenced by incessant violent intra-party and inter-party crises, politically-motivated assassinations, and electoral violence, impacted negatively on women participation and representation in government. Between 1999 and 2007, the Nigerian political process was characterized by incidences of political assassinations and violence. A number of political leaders, including Bola Ige, the former attorney general and minister of justice, Funso Williams and Harry Isokrari Mashal, former national Vice Chairman of the All Nigerian Peoples Party, were assassinated between 1999 and 2007 in manners that suggest that the motive of their assassination was political. This shows the level of instability and insecurity in the country. In the same vein, the activities of the ethnic militias between 1999 and 2001, youth restiveness or militancy in the Niger Delta region, election violence, the non-adherence to the rule of law, the executive-legislature intransigencies, both at the federal and state levels, and the unconstitutional impeachments of governors of Oyo, Anambra, Ekiti and Plateau states, among others, militarized the polity and contributed to the lingering state of insecurity in the country at the time. Thus, politicking in the country, and the entire political process, was heated to the extent that only the strong-willed participate in it. This, along with other factors, no doubt, militated against many women showing interest in and contesting for political offices.

Conclusion
This article has demonstrated that the issue of political empowerment of women received an unprecedented impetus during the 1999-2007 civilian
administration. Unlike the previous civilian administrations and military regimes, women were elected as deputy governors in some states. Examples include Erelu Olusola Ohada in Osun State, Salimot Badru in Ogun State, Virgy Etiaba in Anambra State, and Abiodun Olujimi in Ekiti State. Women were also elected into the legislative arm of government, as members of both the federal and state legislatures, with some of them occupying sensitive political posts in the parliaments. For example, Senator Stella Omu was the chief whip of the Upper Legislative Chamber (the Senate) between 1999 and 2003. There were equally women speakers of State Assemblies. Hon. Margaret Icheen, for example, was the speaker of the Benue State House of Assembly between 1999 and 2003, and Hon. Titi Oseni was the speaker of the Ogun State House of Assembly between 2003 and 2007.

Women also got political appointments. Examples include Okonjo Iweala as the minister of finance, and later the minister of foreign affairs; Obiageli Ezekwesili, the Minister of Solid Mineral Resources, and Oluremi Oyo, the Special Adviser to the President on Media Matters. One thing that cut across women in political leadership between 1999 and 2007 was the display of astute managerial ability, which reflected in the effective discharge of their duties. Some of these women won accolades and commendations for their excellent service from notable international organizations/bodies. Among the international commendations given to these Nigerian women was the Time Magazine Award 2006 to Prof. (Mrs) Dora Akunyili, the director-general of the National Agency for Foods and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC). Earlier in 2003, Transparency International had honoured Akunyili with the Integrity Award 2003.

However, given the Beijing 1995 recommendation and the National Policy on Women of 30% women representation in national government, the percentage of women in government, as elected or appointed officials, between 1999 and 2007 was still low. It is thus pertinent to increase women representation and deepen their participation in governance. In view of this, it is imperative that the Nigerian state adhere to its obligations under the international human rights instruments to which it is a signatory. This is because Nigeria’s signatory to international treaties and conventions that emphasize the equality of women with men and non-discrimination against women in both public and private life, such as the UN Charter, Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the Banjul Charter, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), and the African Protocol on the rights of Women, which was ratified in 2005, imposes legal obligation on the country. This suggests that the continued asymmetric socio-political and economic power relations between men and women in the country indicate the violation of the fundamental human rights of women by the Nigerian state. To remedy this, it is pertinent that the government, using the instrumentality of the constitution, should accord special political representation to women in line with the 1995 Beijing recommendation, and the National Policy on Women should equally be implemented.

References


Biographical Note

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