Gender, Political Participation and the Feminization of Poverty in Nigeria

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This paper examines the implications of poverty for female participation in politics. Specifically, it focuses on the role of culture and political economy which persistently engenders the feminization of poverty with adverse implication for female political participation. It does this by using the qualitative method of data collection to elucidate gender imbalance as represented by male dominance and female under representation in politics in Oyo state. In emphasizing the mutability of the existing constraints to the political participation of women in Oyo state, Nigeria, the paper underscores the extent to which economic powerlessness or poverty and other social factors will continue to inhibit women's participation and representation. As such, except there is a fundamental transformation of the social structure, the realization of the female gender in politics will only be of theoretical relevance as its practicability is almost impossible!

Key Words: Feminization, Gender, Nigeria and Political Participation.

Introduction
Declarations such as “We the women at the global forum...Speaking out on behalf of millions of women who daily experience inequalities” (Olutayo, 1999) typify what we have observed as gender agitations for equality among the sexes. Such declarations in a man's world seem to be achieving little or nothing. The little they achieve has only been what the men seem to be ready to grant them. The fundamental basis of inequality which is poverty in many societies has not been critically addressed in sustainable manners. In addition, the different agitations of the various women or feminist movements concerning the oppression and marginalization of the women folk in all spheres of life, initiated by the General Assembly of the United Nations, made the first attempt in 1975 to focus on women's problems globally. The result was the declaration of the United Nations Decade and the adoption of the World Plan of Actions of States to implement. Subsequently various steps have been taken to deliberate on how to move the women forward (Asser-Lumumber, 2000).

Gender inequalities are complex and are largely reflected in the Political and Economic structure a society which gives way to specific
types of exploitation and to some extent, deprivation. These inequalities are also reflection of the way the society is structured in terms of cultural values and social norms that are embedded across a wide spectrum of institutions. Inequalities can lead to the misrepresentation and deprivation of women subjecting them to discrimination, exclusion and marginalization in Politics. (UNRISD, 2010)

The discriminatory positions of women in most African countries, as regards socio-cultural framework enhances her restriction and deny her access to opportunities and services in the productive, political and economic spheres amongst others. Women's issues have become an important part of contemporary discourse on development and democratization all over the World. They constitute over 50% of the population and contribute over 70% to the economy but they represent 70% of the world's poor. As the majority of women tend to work in the informal sector and with too few seats at the tables where economic decisions are made, women themselves have limited opportunity to influence policy (Bastos, 2009). As a result the female gender are underrepresented in the politics of the country. They are marginalized and oppressed despite the increased awareness by the global community.

Gender and the Feminization of Poverty

There have been an increasing rate of poverty in the world today and this tends to pose a threat to the female gender for it affects their participation and representation in the political machinery. Generally, Poverty is the inability to meet basic needs, such as food, clothing, and shelter. Being poor also implies the absence of choice, the denial of opportunity, the inability to achieve life goals and the ultimately loss of hope. It can also mean the deprivation of resources, capabilities or freedoms which are commonly called the “dimensions or spaces of poverty” (Pearce, 1978).

Poverty can also be referred to as the lack, the absence or the inability to provide some essential materials, and resources which include healthcare facilities, education, food and other social amenities which are known to be necessary for human survival. Women, to a very large extent, bear a disproportionate burden of the world’s poverty, for they are more likely than men to be poor and at risk of hunger due to the systematic discrimination they face in education, healthcare, employment and control of assets. Being poor can also mean they have little protection from violence and have no role in decision-making. In Africa, poverty wears a woman’s face (UN, 2009) A corollary to funding is the stark poverty that confronts Nigerian women. Under critical economic conditions, women are mostly at the receiving end as they have less access to education, credit information, skills and finance and health care- which are largely critical recipes for attaining financial independence. The combination of all these factors and the burden of child bearing and housekeeping conspire to keep them out of the Social and Political scenes. In some cultures in Nigeria women have no property or inheritance rights. African women are said to own just 1 percent of the continent’s assets. This makes it difficult for them to access loans as they do not have collateral.

There are different views and explanations on the concept of poverty. According to Egwuatu, (2002), poverty occurs when a person lacks the resources that are required to be capable of performing a certain minimum of activities. This explanation, according to him, are of two dimensions, the income poverty depicting a lack of minimally adequate income receipts or expenditure, while the other is extreme or core poverty which is a broader concept encompassing absence of resources and opportunities that are most basic to human survival such as, deprivations in health, education, human right, political participation, dignity amongst others. The World Bank (2005) defines poverty in relation to accessible resource according
to monetary income the poor are, than those who “fall short of a certain income threshold and/or a certain amount of expenditure of consumption”. The World Bank also defines poverty as unacceptable human deprivation in terms of economic opportunity, education, health and nutrition as well as lack of empowerment and security. United Nations Development Program (UNDP) equally introduces two relevant concepts.

One is, on Human Development which is defined as a process that enlarges people’s choices including freedom, dignity, self-respect and social status. The second one is human poverty which refers to the deprivation of essential capabilities such as long and healthy life, knowledge, economic resources and common participation. Samuel (2005) defines poverty as a highly political issue and that people with right ways often see it as related to laziness, and lack of family planning. Poverty can also be viewed from the viewpoint of political economy, by looking at the capitalist structure and the gaps that exist between the so-called rich and the poor, which now do not just bother on individuals but within nations, also the developing and the developed nations of the world and on the female gender.

It is of relevance to note that the universality of poverty is incontestable. It is all over the world thus the UNDP claimed that billions of people across the globe are living in squalid condition of hunger, disease and desperation. It further buttressed the fact that poverty has become part and parcel of the people and they see it as natural and inevitable. Thus, majority of Nigerians do struggle daily to make ends meet. The majority of the women folk are unable to cater adequately for their basic needs and cannot meet to their social and economic obligations. They lack gainful employment, skills, assets and even self-esteem. These have made them have limited access to social and economic infrastructure.

The feminist approach to poverty focuses on the gender implications and social costs of poverty. They include the growing involvement of women and children in the informal economy; differential treatment of girls and boys in households; pressure to get girls married off quickly; higher school drop-out rates for girls; less control over fertility; and recourse to prostitution. Studies on female poverty have given rise to policy recommendations that there be poverty-alleviation or employment-generation programs designed specifically for women, or that households maintained by women alone be targeted for social programs. Similarly, the Beijing Platform for Action calls on governments to “Formulate and implement, when necessary, specific economic, social, agricultural and related policies in support of female-headed households

Human Poverty is more than income poverty, it is the denial of choices and opportunities for living a tolerable life” (United Nations, 2006). Poverty amid plenty is the world’s greatest challenge. The poor often lack adequate food and shelter, education and health, deprivations that keep them from living the kind of life that every one values. They also face extreme vulnerability to ill health, economic dislocation, and natural disasters. And they are often exposed to ill treatment by institutions of the state and society and are powerless to influence key decisions affecting their lives. These are all dimensions of poverty (World Bank, 2005). Indeed, of the world’s 6 billion people, 2.8 billion live on less than $2 a day, and 1.2 billion live on less than $1 a day. In rich countries less than 1 child in 100 does not reach its fifth birthday, while in the poorest countries as many as a fifth of children do not. And while in rich countries fewer than 5 percent of all children under five are malnourished, in poor countries as many as 50 percent are. The great majority of Africa lives on barely $0.65 a day and this number are growing relentlessly. Moreover, a severe lack of capabilities (education, health, nutrition) among Africa’s poor threatens to make
poverty “dynastic,” with the descendants of the poor also remaining poor. Unfortunately, the female gender does constitute 70% of these categories.

Feminization, on the other hand, can be applied to indicate a gender-based change in any dimension. It is an action or process of becoming more feminine. The feminization of poverty, according to Thibos (2007), is the term given to the phenomenon in which women experience poverty at far higher rates than men. This term was coined by Diana Pearce in the 1970s and it referred to the concentration of poverty among women. It is more than just a lack of income or a state of financial need for women. It extends beyond the economic domains of income and material needs to the core of individuals and political life. It can also be viewed as a change at levels of poverty biased against women, or an increase in the differences in the levels of poverty among women and men. To Chant (2008), feminization of poverty means an increase of the role that gender inequalities have as a determinant of poverty.

Although the 1960s and 1970s were characterized by the women's liberation movement fostering remarkable achievement in gender equality, affirmative action and increased participation in the paid labor force, this era also represented a time during which poverty was identified as a female problem. It was observed that women are enduring and consistently have a larger proportion of the poverty population than men. Despite all the potentials for the improvement of women's economic stability, women, nonetheless, accounted for a strikingly larger proportion of the poverty population.

The platform for action adopted by the fourth world conference on women held in Beijing in 1995 identified the eradication of the persistent and increasing burden of poverty on women as one of the critical areas of concern requiring special attention and action by the international community, governments and civil society. Goal 1 of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) focuses on the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger though not with any special to women. (MDGs, 2010) Though the phenomenon is a global one, in that it is not restricted to Africa or Nigeria specifically, the picture of the African women is bleaker still. This made Palmer (1983) introduce the concept of “racial feminization of poverty” to describe their unique plight. Researchers also confirmed the presence of a gendered component of poverty, and it was revealed that it is more evident and pronounced with the increase in female-headed households and more marked among young, illiterates and elderly female population (Sheakey, 1985; Gittens, 1983).

Gender and Political Participation

A systematic study of women and politics did not begin until the mid-1970s. These studies compared women's participatory behavior with standards set by men of different classes. The most important measure of participation was holding elected or appointed political office. Not surprisingly, by this measure, women were shown to participate in much lower levels than men. A lot of historical researches have also been done about women's great contributions to the national development of their societies in all spheres of life through their activities in the economic, social and political arena (Boserup, 1965). The position of women within the socio-cultural framework tends to restrict their access to services and opportunities in all spheres of life. This disadvantaged nature of women's position restricts their ability to take advantage of opportunities to break out of the cycle of low productivity, no decision making power, poor health poverty and illiteracy. Women in Sub-Saharan Africa, Nigerian inclusive, still live in a society that creates and reinforces female oppression and they still suffer the double burden of
being poor which in turn affects their level of participation in the decision making level (De-Groot and Maynard, 1993).

Their experiences are further compounded by being poor and exposed to greater demands of living in terms of their multiple roles as mother, wives, producers and community developers. It has been acknowledged by researchers that women everywhere are economically active. Most women engage in 3-5 income generating activities but nearly all are what Mabogunje (1991) refers to as "petty" that is small-sized, small scale low capital base and low technological levels. Afonja and Aina (1995) emphasized the economic roles women played in pre-colonial Nigeria, which in turn enabled women gain political power and status, though in some major ways less than those of men. Economically, they played the role of producers of goods and services in or outside the home, while their societal roles ranged from the role played as kinswomen to the community.

The control of Nigeria's social, political and economic affairs by the British government meant the replacement of indigenous value structure of the people with the British ideas (Nduka, 1964). With this, there was forceful penetration and the introduction of foreign culture and ideas. This made women, who were active in an indigenous political agenda, to be depoliticized. This condition created the very condition necessary for a capitalist transformation to both foster and enable men's participation in a cash economy. This transformation required that women work in the home and to become economically dependent on men. Thus, this gender distinction undermined women's economic base and the political means to protect that base thereby generating gender inequality. It was women's importance in the pre-colonial economy that partially accounted for their political participation. As their economic importance reduced so did their political freedoms in the new colonial capitalist economy (Pappart, 1987). Also, since the incorporation of the indigenous economy into the global capitalist economy transformed the colonized people into producers and consumers of commodities, the male made it through the assistance of colonial masters, thus favoring men's access to cash. As a result, there is the economic dependency of women and, from thence, the emergence of the patriarchal nuclear family (Leacock, 1991). The foreign system to a large extent favored men over women in terms of economic opportunities, allocation of resources, education and political office. These preferential differentiations in turn enabled Nigerian men to exercise a greater degree of social, legal, economic and political control over the women.

Consequently, the various elections held in the country have been dominated by the male gender. The men do vie for political posts more than the women and they do contest important posts such as presidency, gubernatorial, and senatorial, amongst others. These situations of the female gender are said to be informed by their poverty status. Unfortunately, reducing poverty is particularly difficult in sub-Saharan African because of slow economic growth, rapid population growth and a fragile economic base. The share of people living in poverty is larger amongst the women. Poverty level of women is reflected in poor nutrition, low health standards and inadequate shelter all of which affect productivity as well as the quality of life. Women lack equal representation in formal labor activities which is also regarded as an important means of eradicating poverty in any society. In addition, they lack access to credit facilities and factors of production: land, capital and technology (Schmittroth, 1991).

Since women everywhere control fewer resources to reap a lesser share of the world's wealth than men and they have to support the families, they end up being poorer than men. No matter how
poverty is measured, the poor population increasingly consists of women and children. This is now commonly regarded as feminization of poverty- the female gender's disproportionate experience relative to poverty in manners that make poverty appears as synonymous to the females. The poverty level of the women has not only affected their living conditions, but also health. Thus there is high rate of mortality among women, increasing abortion and high rate of HIV and other Sexually Transmitted Diseases among women due to prostitution. All these tend to work against their high representation at the decision making levels.

A Theoretical Framework
There are various theories explaining the position of women in the society especially the problem of subordination and equality of women and the need for their freedom. Sheila Rowbotham (1992) and Juliet Mitchell (1977) focus on tackling the cause of its roots and in overthrowing capitalism, which was a fundamental basis of inequality.

Marx (1964) also made several references to the emergence and the demise of gender inequality in the emerging society. Twentieth century Marxists made many distinctions between the feudal household where women's work is economically essential and capitalism where the material basis of oppression has been evident. It offers both a more detailed account of women's oppression as it is specific to a capitalist mode of production and on account of its operation in the family (Coole, 1988). In short, ideological as well as material factors have been deemed responsible for sexual inequality. They also believe that capitalism incorporated patriarchy because it assumes women are supported financially by male relatives (Mackinnon, 1991). This paper adopts the political economy approach or theory in explaining the gender situation in politics. It is concerned with explaining how the government might increase the wealth of the nation. Its meaning can be explained to include the study of the relationship of economic forces to political and social process.

In general, political economy is not homogenous for there are political economists of the right and of the left, but they all believe that the relationship of economics to politics is the least starting point of raising questions about the distribution of power in society. It can also be referred to as the political implication of economic relations decision or development of any country. Political economy is also a discipline whose object of enquiry is the relationship between the state, power and politics, on the one hand and economic relations and the market on the other. It is concerned with the ways in which politics affect the structures, institutions and practices of politics. That is, political economy examines the manner in which power is implicated in economic relationships. Gender is one of the central dimensions along which power and politics are structured in capitalist societies and economy resources and outcomes systematically vary on the basis of gender. Just as political economy as a discipline seeks to breakdown the boundary between the political and economic and to identify how each influences the other, so does a gendered political economy examine the permeable boundary between the public sphere of the state and the private sphere of gender relation. Thus the political inequalities experienced by women are symptoms of inequalities which pervade all spheres of their lives. In short since politicking is an expensive venture and it believed that a strong economic base is necessary before anyone can participate, the economic powerlessness of the women has political implications.

The Nigerian Experience: 1999-2010
According to Akanle and Olutayo (2012), women still play a minor role in the high level political and economic decision making in most countries.
including Nigeria. They are marginalized and grossly underrepresented in those areas of public life where important decisions which affect their lives are taken. Women in Nigeria have not achieved much political empowerment through electoral process. In Nigeria, the 35 percent affirmative action is still far from realization while even poverty eradication programmes favour men against women though women experience poverty in real term more than men. There is no doubt that, in the most recent political dispensation (1999-2011), women remained behind the men hence marginalization of women under the contemporary Nigeria’s political agenda. In other words, despite the agitation for 30% representation of women in decision-making positions, the representation still remained marginally low. For instance, between 1999 and 2007, there were eight (8) women federal ministers under the Obasanjo’s administration. However, out of the 11,881 electable positions during the 1999 elections, only 631 women vied, while a mere 1.62% won (just 181 of the total positions available). In the 2003 elections three (4) women won at the senate, while out of the twelve (12) women that won the federal house of representative seats in 1999, only 7 were returned.

Also, with the April 2007 elections, there were a total of 1,200 women aspirants to 1,532 offices. Of these, 660 of them won at the primaries while only 93 eventually emerged as winners. They include 6 deputy governors, 9 senators, 27 national representatives and 57 in the various states house of assembly. The 2007 elections was a very significant one which will still be in the memory for every Nigerian. It is a year that witnessed the first Nigerian female speaker in the House of Representatives, in the person of Honorable Patricia Olubunmi Etteh from Osun state, who unfortunately and disappointedly was dropped after few months as a result of trumped up charges of over inflation of the contract fees for her official accommodation.

Table 1: Women in Elective Political Positions in Nigeria 1999-2011

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<tr>
<td>President</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senate</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>3(2.8)</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>4(3.7)</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>98(8.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>House of Representative</td>
<td>360</td>
<td>7(1.9)</td>
<td>360</td>
<td>21(5.5)</td>
<td>360</td>
<td>27(7.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Governor</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State House of Assembly</td>
<td>990</td>
<td>24(2.4)</td>
<td>990</td>
<td>40(3.9)</td>
<td>990</td>
<td>57(5.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Government</td>
<td>710</td>
<td>13(1.8)</td>
<td>774</td>
<td>15(1.9)</td>
<td>740</td>
<td>27(3.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Councils</td>
<td>6368</td>
<td>69(1.1)</td>
<td>6368</td>
<td>287(4.2)</td>
<td>6368</td>
<td>235(3.7)</td>
</tr>
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From the table above, The April 2011 elections saw women lose some of the ground they had begun to grip after 1999. It suggests a sort of regression from the obvious progress that followed the return to democracy in 1999. Only 9% of the candidates for the National Assembly elections in April 2011 were women. Only 13 of the 340 candidates who contested on behalf of various political parties for the office of governor were women. A mere 909 of the 10,037 candidates for available seats were women (9.06%). only 27 women were elected to the 360 member House of Representatives, Nigeria is now ranked 118 out of 192 countries in terms of gender parity. The low 6.9% representation of women in Nigeria's House of Representatives is significantly below the global average (15%), and far behind South Africa's and Rwanda's representation (43% and 56% respectively). Nigeria's 63 registered political parties have failed to deliver gender parity in political representation at national level.

Methodology
Qualitative research is an empirical research whereby the data are not in the form of numbers but words. Qualitative research enables the researcher to have a better view of the socio-cultural infrastructures and social relations dynamics and trajectories that may impact the subject and object of study. One particular advantage of this method is that it has a much wider range of possible empirical materials and would use multiple data sources. Also, the interviewee would be able to express herself fully and there would be no predetermined response, rather it permits people to provide information using their own terms, meanings and understanding. It is a good way of assessing people's perspectives. The in depth interview (IDI) was adopted and ten women politicians were selected for the study cutting across different age groups, political parties, economic status and educational background. Oyo state was used as the case study.

Findings
1. When vying for elective posts all respondents agreed that the contestants have to first show interest and then declare to the party members that she/he is interested in the particular post, then write to the ward. If accepted, then the local government and the party executives would screen her by asking for the curriculum vitae, which would be assessed among other factors that may include:
   i. Being a dedicated and active member of the party.
   ii. Attending political meetings and rallies
   iii. Contributing time and funds to political campaigns
   iv. Holding public or party office
   v. Fulfilling registration exercises
   vi. Partaking in voting exercises.

2. She ought to be accepted by party members (both men and women).

3. She has to appeal to the women separately and tell them her intention. This is due to the problems of domination, marginalization and exploitation faced by them.

4. She must have good educational qualification of least secondary school certificate, depending on the post she is vying for.

5. She must be wealthy or at least have someone to sponsor her.

   Ironically, the men do not go through a lot of screening like their female counterparts, rather money and their connections speak for them. By what politics involves in this context, it is very difficult for a woman to scale through. According to an interviewee, this is because of

   "Aggressiveness, money, unscrupulous or indecent acts which Politics is involved in."
women do not believe in squandering money, they feel what it involves is devotion, but in the real sense, in most cases you can hardly jump over what has been aforementioned otherwise you may never rise”.

When it comes to sponsorships, the women interviewed agreed that the women do source for funds by themselves. The party, which is male dominated, does not sponsor them. Sometimes they get sponsorship from the public or party members, at other times they borrow money. The men on the other hand according to a respondent,

“do help themselves because politically and economically they are stronger which thus enriches them”.

In most cases, according to another interviewee

“When a woman shows interest in a particular post their male counterparts quickly nominate someone to hijack the post and sponsor him. Hence, though a lot of women do show interest in contesting for a post in any election, due to funds, they drop out halfway. And since the men are everywhere, they always get themselves fixed up.”

Another respondent though agreed to some extent that the women do source funds themselves, in her own case, her husband and children sponsored and supported her, in some cases according to her. This implies, according to some other respondents, that

“The men do sponsor the women when they see how active and dedicated you are they would help.”

This, they further stated is

Also dependent on the leader you are following and the post being contested for; for the party takes over to make sure you win. If you are chosen as a candidate, it is important to get the party leader to accept, though in most cases the men do buy the post.

It is also important to state that, majority of the women agreed that in spite of the role of most non-governmental organizations (both international and indigenous) play a vital role in encouraging women to come out of their shells and contest election or at the minimal be active in politics, they claimed that these NGOs do not give them any financial support which is one of their major barrier.

Another major barrier, in the words of another respondent is:

“The money spent on media or poster, if used to mobilize women or sponsor female contestants a lot of women who fall out along the way would be reinstated and be able to contest and there would be a high representation to women holding political offices.”

To digress a bit, it is worth mentioning that the interaction of cultural, traditional, political and economic factors do undermine women's participation in politics. Women do face a universal problem arising from sex-based discrimination, due to the excessive maleness of the society. According to one of our respondents:

women suffer not only from the poverty of the society, they are also the greatest victims of exploitation by a society predominantly ruled by men. There are certain prevailing religious norms, the political structure of the society, economic constraints and attitudinal
factors both from the male, the society (sic) and even the women themselves which often makes politics a 'no-go' area and act as formidable barriers even for daring women willing to tread the dreaded paths to political officer these traditionally gender based attitudes, we can state, are hostile for they give rise to sex disparity to the detriment of women. Thus, they tend to limit women's access and control over all spheres of life.

Education, they all claimed, is an important factor determining or affecting gender participation in politics though with different dimensions. It was realized that to be a political activist does not necessarily mean you should be well read. Rather, within the political context, they go through a sort of political education where the initial steps of being a good and successful politician are being taught. Also, the tactics and secrets of politics are explained during this process. According to a respondent:

education has helped women to plan, cope and provide caution to societal cultural barrier. Education, per se, is not empowerment, but that which empowers is the gender sensitive one. It is not only important but necessary to have the basic education to enhance them. Nevertheless, we still have talented ones who have requisite needs which politics requires or demands even in illiterate women. But the fact still remains that not being educated at all will always remain their constrain

To them,
Better educated women are more likely to be politically active, to be employed, and likely to avoid situation of conflict.

We should however note that these problems of lack of education, ignorance, religious prejudice, obsolete ideas about women's place at home and in society still tell on their position and therefore their low level of consciousness have made them very vulnerable to the manipulation of the politicians and other dominant groups in the society.

Economically, women are being marginalized. It was assumed that men are the main, if not solely responsible for economic growth. Women, if considered at all are assumed to contribute very little. Though active, they rarely own the means of production which, in turn, has adverse effects on their social, economic and political position in society. Thus economic powerlessness of the women has political implications. Mrs. Ikumelo Jaiyeoba buttressed this fact when she stated that

Since politics is money and money is politics, the two are inseparable. Women, as a result of their positions in most cases are bought over by their male counter parts to vote and also campaign for them. It is only a very few of them who know their rights and can keep their heads to resist such temptation.

This is why, according to a respondent: more women campaign for male contestants and do vote than contesting themselves or voting for the womenfolk.

Consequently, women economic empowerment is fundamental to the enhancement of their participation in Politics. Of central significance however, is the transformation of societal values engendered through the socialization processes in which males are more valued than females.

Conclusion
The Nigerian situation reflects low participation and underrepresentation of women in the power structure or distribution since the colonial era and has been significantly low even after independence.
Gender, Political Participation and the Feminization of Poverty in Nigeria

The domination of the male reinforces patriarchy. The political economic structure also reflects male dominance. Though the government seems to be interested in the welfare of the women especially in helping to reduce their poverty level, thus gender and the empowerment of women have given rise to a spate of discussion, research gender empowerment and movements or organizations. For instance, women because of their subordination by men in contemporary Nigerian societies have been agitating for their empowerment. A lot of programmes are being put in place by different first ladies as their "pet projects" to help eradicate poverty.

These various groups do differ in their feminist ideology, composition areas of emphasis, strategies and their scope of operation. But the various problems faced by women can be effectively addressed only when a significant proportion of women hold public offices and are given opportunities to initiate and execute public policy and legislation. That is, in spite of all these, women have not yet been translated into occupying any significant position and even the 30% representation stipulated by the United Nations.

Though the Millennium Development Goals (MDGS) represent an extremely important set of commitments to reduce some major aspects of poverty, one of the major shortcomings in the current formulation is that it does not make any explicit mention of the gender dimensions of poverty. The marginalization of Nigerian women in political affairs and decision making is as old as Nigerian society and predates the advent of colonialism in Southern and Northern Nigeria. Indeed pre- and post-colonial traditional cultures and European culture were deeply rooted in patriarchy. The normative systems they independently produced were male-biased and dominated. The marginalization of women was also evident in all other spheres of life such as the family, economic, social, labour and other relationships. It is widely believed that the marginalization of women in political participation and decision making processes has been responsible for the exclusion of the interests of women in governance and development paradigms.

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