



## WOMEN LEADERSHIP IN NIGERIA: PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

Adesua, Veronica Olubunmi

Department of Educational Management, Faculty of Education,  
Ekiti State University, Ado-Ekiti, Ekiti State, Nigeria.

### ABSTRACT

#### KEYWORDS:

women leadership, human  
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*The number of women in leadership position across the country in this present century have not matched up with that of the male counterpart. Although women are now holding leadership position, it is pertinent to note that, Nigerian women today are still living in a male dominated society as women occupy few leadership positions in the country. This therefore is an issue that needs a critical appraisal. Women are often times described as strong, intelligent and highly supportive of their male counterparts, but they are sometimes still relegated to the background. This paper examines women in leadership positions in Nigeria, it discusses the problems and challenges hindering women from holding such leadership positions, it also examines the prospects derived by women and the nation at large, and it made recommendation on the need for women to be empowered and encouraged to aspire for political leadership and governance position, which is critical to societal and human development.*

### INTRODUCTION

Nigerian women are most times described as strong, intelligent and highly supportive of their male counterparts. Its pertinent to note that having access to leadership positions in Nigeria, is not easy for millions of Nigeria women, but however, Nigerian women has proved to be more than a mere bench warming spectators even in the midst of past and recent challenges.

In Nigeria, there is little doubt that women and girls have made giant strides in leadership positions. Osori (2015), is of the view that there are many inspiring stories of (women) entrepreneurs, academics, professionals and caregivers, but like everything else in Nigeria, there is a wide gap between successes and the not successful. Natsa (2015), explained that the fact that the election of women into elective offices in the 2015 elections dropped, there is a need to look inward towards developing themselves and taking advantage of their abilities as politicians in a male dominated society.

A critical look at the role and level of participation of women in leadership positions in Nigeria, seems to indicate that women at all levels of government in the country seems to suffer under representation, this has been a major issue to tackle, although efforts have been made by some leaders and government to address this issue, despite their active participation in politics, women have nothing to show for their participation, but only rally for success of the other electoral candidates, who happen to be their male counterparts. Therefore there is an urgent need to redefine the role and level of participation of the female folks (i.e. women) in leadership positions across the country.

Very few prominent Nigerians like David Mark (former Senate President) urged that stakeholders should ensure that women are not marginalized in politics and that they should be represented in the National Assembly. Also former Speaker of the House of Representatives, Aminu Tambuwal suggested that women participation in leadership position in the country should be increased through the Independent Electoral Commission (INEC) by allocating more constituencies to women all over the country.

It is unimaginable to note that, in this current decades the right of women are still not protected and trampled upon, it appears that in some cases women still undergo sexual harassment, engage as commercial sex workers, moreover a more degrading issue which needs to be tackled is that of women trafficking, this is another phase of slavery which is still very much rampant across the nation and across the globe and finally the issue of high maternal infant mortality rate among pregnant women.

These are problems and concerns that necessitated a critical appraisal of women who occupy leadership positions in the country, the problems encountered by such women and the prospects derived from holding such leadership positions.

### THE CONCEPT OF WOMEN

The Active Study dictionary (2010), defined woman as a female adult person, a wife, sometimes a fiancé or girlfriend or a lady. The word women is a collective noun used to describe collectively the adult female members of a community. Dorinda (2015), remarked that:

*“women are equal with men in dignity, but different in our feminine nature and identity. Women are icons of self-giving love. Countless women have managed the often herculean task of raising families and making their mark in all areas of society. We have done so with style and grace, rejecting the false concept that we must maim our bodies and destroy our offspring to make a difference in the world “women have talents”, “women have children” (Dorinda, 2015).*

A woman is a female human being. The term woman is usually reserved for an adult, with the term girl being the usual term for a female child or adolescent. However, the term woman is also sometimes used to identify a female human regardless of age. ‘Woman’ may also refer to a person’s gender identity instead of their sex. Women are typically capable of giving birth from puberty until menopause. Throughout history women have assumed or been assigned various social roles. (*Woman-wikipedia, the free encyclopedia <https://en.m.wikipedia>*)

**Etymologically**, the spelling of woman in English has progressed over the past millennium from *wifinnann* to *wimmann* and finally, the modern spelling *woman*.

**Biological symbols** for the planet *venus* is the sign also used in biology for the female sex. The venus symbol also represented *feminity*

**Terminology**: Womanhood is the period in a female’s life after she has passed through childhood and adolescence, generally around age 18.

**Historically**: The earliest women whose names are known include:- Sarah in the old testament who gave birth to Isaac at a very old age (90 years), when all hope seems to be lost to have a child.

- Neithhotep (c.3200 BCE) wife of Narmer and first queen of ancient Egypt.
- Merit-Ptah (c.2700 BCE) also lived in Egypt and is the earliest known female physician and scientist to mention a few.

**Biology and Gender**:- In terms of biology, the female sex organs are involved in the reproductive system, whereas the secondary sex characteristics are involved in nurturing children or in some cultures attracting a mate. In terms of gender, in many pre-historic cultures, women assumed a particular cultural role. In more recent history, gender roles have changed greatly. Traditionally, middle class women were involved in domestic chores emphasizing child care. However, economic necessity compelled poorer women to seek employment outside the home.

In terms of clothing, fashion and dress codes, women in different parts of the world are identified through their choice of dressing and dress codes. This is being influenced by local culture, religious tenets, traditions, social norms and fashion trends some Muslim women for instance wear *hijabs* and other types of clothing as a symbol of modesty and privacy. Afghan women for instance wear *burqas*.

**Culture and gender roles**:- women’s participation in U.S labor force rose from 6% in 1900 to 23% in 1923. These shifts in the labour force, led to changes in the attitude of women at work and allow for the revolution which resulted in women becoming career and education oriented. During world war II some women performed roles which would otherwise have been consider male jobs by the culture of the time. In the 1980’s professional women are still responsible for domestic labour and child care. As people

would say, they have a “double burden” which does not allow then the time and energy to succeed.

Although a greater numbers of women are seeking higher education, their salaries are often less than those of men. CBS News claimed that in 2005, in the United States, women who are ages 30 to 44 percent and hold a university degree, make 62 percent of what similarly qualified men do.

**Literacy**: In South, West Asia and in parts of Sub Saharan Africa literacy rates are the lowest (*woman-Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia <https://en.w.wikipedia>*).

**Politics**: Women are still underrepresented in government in most countries. In October 2013, the global average of women in national assemblies was 22%. (*Woman-Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia <https://en.w.wikipedia>*).

**Science, literature and Art**: Women have throughout history made contributions to science, literature and art. One area where women have been permitted most accessed historically in Europe was that of obstetrics and gynecology. Writing was generally also considered acceptable for upper class women, although achieving success as a female writer in a male dominated world could be very difficult. (*woman-Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia <https://en.w.wikipedia>*).

**Jobs**: globally women fill fewer percent of positions in fields like engineering, science to mention a few. In 1989, Harvard University tenured its first women in chemistry, Cynthia Friend and in 1992, its first woman in physics Melissa Franklin. (*Woman-Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia <https://en.w.wikipedia>*). In Nigeria, the first female to drive a car was Mrs. Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti. Queen Amina of Zaria, was famous for fortifying her territories with eastern walls of Zaria. Madam Ikonna, a lady warrior, who with her compatriot, confronted warrant chief who dared to enforce the abhorrent tax law on women by the colonial masters. That confrontation led to the Aba Women Riot of 1929. Their heroic Act and struggle led to Abolition of unfair tax law in Nigeria.

## THE CONCEPT OF LEADERSHIP

Leadership is one of the basic functions of management which has the attention of many experts world wide; it separates effective leaders from less effective ones. It is a position or a ability to lead a group of people in an organization to achieve an objective. Leadership involves a situation whereby a leader influences groups of people to work willingly in order to achieve the desired goals of the organizations. Ukeje, Anagbogu and Ndu (1993), describes a leader as the individual in the group given the task of directing and coordinating task-related activities. Leadership is essential for creating and sustaining organization, it takes place throughout an organization, in interpersonal relationships in small groups and at the highest position of administration.

Adesua (2014), remarked that leadership in the school is a process whereby an individual (i.e. the principal) coordinates the activities of teachers and students to achieve the goals of the school. Hence, leadership implies the relationships between persons. Ibukun (1997), noted that leadership is required in all organizations. Every human organization, large or small is expected to have leader and followers. He further observed that there is no single best style of managing all human organizations. There must be set goals and objectives, people to lead the follower and finally, there must be conscious efforts to coordinate the activities of the people towards the set goals.

## AN APPRAISAL OF WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP POSITIONS IN NIGERIA BETWEEN 2007-2014

Nwankwo (1982), opines that leadership is concerned with the imitation, organization and direction of the actions of the members of a group in a specific situation towards the achievement of the objectives. Lycey (1995), defined leadership as the ability to influence the behaviour of others to achieve group objectives. He emphasized that many organizations are over managed and under led. The difference being that managers are people who do things right, but leaders are people who do the right things.

Adesina (1990), considered a leader as the person contributing the best ideas in the group or processing maximum knowledge of the group or situation or offering the best guidance. Leadership connotes the ability to get things done with the support and co-operation of other people within the institution, organization or system, it is the process of influencing the activities and behaviours of an individual or a group towards goal achievement in a given situation.

Fakunle (2009), remarked that the qualities of leaders and the processes of leadership have been considered an important field for study. Leadership is a very vital component that drives all other production factors towards the achievement of organizational goals. She explained further that by general connotations, the definition of leader will probably include the mention of such qualities as intelligence, charisma, enthusiasm, strength, courage, integrity and confidence.

Ordway Tead as quoted by Odumosu (1968), defined leadership "as the activity of influencing people to cooperate towards some goals which they came to find desirable" every leader has the task of bringing in an effective working harmony to school under his charge for the achievement of the objectives. To be fully effective, leadership must be a good model and the organization concerned must have clearly stated objectives in which all concerned can believe, not passively, but actively and passionately.

Having access to leadership position in Nigeria is not easy for millions of women. Over the years, women were under represented in government in governance. Historically, during the pre-colonial times, there are women who have played vital and visible role in governance and have become role model by their engagement and outstanding performances, but such women were very few in number.

Okpara (2014) remarked that some of such women include Queen Amina of Zaria, famous for expanding and fortifying her territories with earthen walls, some of which are still visible in places like walls of Zaria. Madam Ikonna, a lady warrior who with her compatriot confronted warrant chief who dared to enforce the abhorrent tax law on women by colonial masters. That confrontation led to what is there after referred to as the Aba Women Riot of 1929. The heroic act and struggle led to the abolition of unfair tax law in Nigeria. Madam Ikonna's patriotic and courageous act inspired female Nationalist such as Mrs. Margaret Ekpo, Chief Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti, Hajia Sambo Sawaba and many others who fought for political, social and cultural emancipation of Nigerian women.

Results from research revealed that since 1999 there has been little improvement in women leadership, as women are still at the back bench in politics. Awan (2015) explained that there has been low representation of women in all levels of government in the country compared to male leadership in the country. Nigeria falls below average in women representation with only seven percent of women in active politics and in the parliament. This was evident in the 2011 elections where women did poorly with only 32 women elected in parliament out of 469 members.

Results below show the little improvement in women participation since the year 1999.

**Table 1: Comparisons of women participation in 1999, 2003, 2011 general elections.**

S/N	Position	No of available seats	No of women elected and % of total in 1999	No of women elected % of total in 2003	No of women elected % of total in 2007	No of women elected % of total in 2011
1	Presidency	1	0	0	0	0
2	Senate	109	32.75	43.7	87.33	76.4
3	House of REPS	360	123.33	215.83	236.38	267.2
4	Governorship	36	0	0	0	0
5	Deputy Governorship	36	0	25.55	616.6	10.09
6	State House of Assembly	990	121.21	383.84	545.45	686.9

Source: Eme, O.I. and Onuigbo, R.A. (2008).

From the table, there is a clear indication that between 1999 to 2011, few women were represented in government, though there is a slight increase in participation, this increase is not enough, as women representation, this increase is not enough, as women representation is low. Also out of the 360 seats available, the highest number women got was only 26 (i.e 7.2%). Also one can clearly see that the presidential and gubernatorial seats (position) are no go areas for women, while very few women are in the Senate, House of Representatives and State House of Assembly.

Ajayi and Ogbu (2011), remarked that throughout the eight years in office of the former President Olusegun Obasanjo, he appointed only 9 women, including Okonjo-

Iweala, Dr. Obi Ezekwesli, Dr. Kema Chikwe and Prof. Joy Ogbu into his cabinet. His successor President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua now deceased had only seven female ministers, including late Prof. Adenike Grange, in his cabinet, some of them had short stays as he rejigged his cabinet in 2008. The battle for more women in government, covering both elective and appointive positions, predates the Jonathan Administration.

In recent years, there has been a tremendous change because an increasing number of women are being elevated to key positions in government throughout the nation and these women are making positives and meaningful impact and contribution to national development. Despite the recent increase of women in key positions, statistics still indicates

that women are under represented in government of most countries.

Okpara (2014), reiterated that in a world where women form half of the population, just over 20 countries have women as heads of government and heads of state, besides women in leadership positions as ministers, speakers of legislative houses, legislators, ambassadors, governors, majors. During Jonathan's administration a lot of women, struggled to win leadership position, due to the support they received from Jonathan home front, with his wife making it her pet project. (*thelawyerschronicle.com*)

In pursuit of the passion and commitment to improve the overall lives of Nigerian women and give greater support to women empowerment and participation in governance. His Excellency (former President of Nigeria) Goodluck Ebele Jonathan was the first president in Nigeria to appoint 35 per cent of women in Federal appointments. This made women to gain 13 ministerial appointments in cabinet and the appointment of more women as Ambassadors and High Commissioners.

The increased participation of women taking leadership positions in government can also be attributed to Dame Patience Jonathan. As former president of Africa First Ladies Peace Mission, she promoted peace and gender equality worldwide and also encourages all state governors' wife to establish pet projects with an agenda to promote women's empowerment and gender equality in their states.

In recent times a lot of Nigerian women across the nation have been noted for their remarkable leadership contributions and role in governance. Nigeria is no doubt blessed with influential women who have affected the country and its image in one way or the other. They cut across all spheres in the country from the political arena, to business sectors. These are women who stand out in their fields or by virtue of the position they occupy (*io.wp.com/thetreatjou*).

The most notable among such great women include the following:

Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, Late Prof. Dora Akunyuli, Diezani Allison-Madueke, Dame Patience Jonathan, Obiageli Ezekwesli, Stella Okoli, Faridah Waziri, Justice Aloma Mariam Mukhtar, Stella Odua Ogiemwonyi, Senator Chris Anyanwu, Florence Ita Giwa, Zainab Maina, Folorunsho Alakija, Erelu Abiola Dosumu, Bola Shagaya, Bukola Elemide, Nnenadi Usman, Justices Mary Odili, Hon. Mulikat Akande Adeola, Justice Binta Murtala Nyako, Abike Dabiri Erewa, Senator Abiodun Olujimi and Barristar Raji Rasaki

The contributions of some of these women will be reiterated.

Ngozi Okonjo Iweala (former minister of finance, former world bank VP, and one of the most influential women in the world)

Diezani Allison Madueke (former minister of petroleum and Natural resources, an MBA, Cambridge graduate)

Senator Ita Giwa - Nigeria woman in politics

Late Professor Dora Akunyili (former director of NAFDAC)

Abike Dabiri - have defied all odds to get to the top.

Dame Patience Good luck Jonathan-former president of Africa's First Ladies Peace Mission and initiator women empowerment and gender equality.

Senator Abiodun Olujimi – former deputy governor of Ekiti and Senator of the Federal Republic of Nigeria representing Ekiti South Senatorial District.

Senator Raji Rasaki representing Ekiti Central Senatorial District.

Presently, women make up 49% of the Nigerian population and nearly one out of four women in sub-Saharan Africa is a Nigerian. Nigerian has the lowest number of female parliament in sub-Saharan Africa and ranks 133<sup>rd</sup> in the world for female political representation. Only twenty percent of enterprises in the formal sector and only eleven point seven percent of board directors are occupied by women. Although, the country has made some progress to bridge this gender gap in areas like primary school enrollment rate, gender equality. Statistics revealed that there is still so much work to be done. (*ogboonanwamaka.wordpress.com*).

### **CHALLENGES FACING WOMEN STRIVING FOR LEADERSHIP POSITIONS IN THE COUNTRY**

As earlier pointed out in this study, having access to leadership position is not easy for women when taking part in elective politics due to the following challenge, or problems:

- Women lack support and opportunity to compete favorably with their male counterparts.
- Voters failed to understand the importance and benefits of having mixed gender in government. This has led to relatively low representation of women in all levels of government in the country compared to male leadership.
- Osori (2015), explained that the abysmal social development indices on violence against women maternal infant mortality, economic empowerment, access to justice, girl child education and structural discriminatory practices means that the latter group is the majority so we must focus on trying to raise more women and girls up and out.
- Nigeria has the highest rate of maternal mortality in the world, but the good news is that the numbers are decreasing. Nigerian women have proved to be more than a mere bench warming spectator even in the midst of competition and challenges.
- Lack of adequate laws on sexual violence combined with lack of access to contraceptive/family planning.
- In many pre-historic culture, women assumed a particular cultural role.
- In more recent history, gender roles have changed greatly.
- Traditionally, middle class women were involved in domestic chores emphasizing child care.
- Economic necessity compelled poorer women to seek employment outside the home.

### **Prospects**

The involvement of women in leadership position in Nigeria has its own prospects.

- If women are empowered and encouraged to aspire for political leadership and governance position, it would contribute to societal and human development.
- Involving women in leadership position helps to strengthen democracy in the country.
- Everyone (women inclusive) would have equal right and opportunity to take part in leadership and decision making.

- Women are a major capital projects in the nation, involving them in leadership position would reduce unemployment rate.
- Women possess high leadership qualities and skills, if given the chance, there is the tendency that they will perform better than their male counterparts. This makes them a great asset to the nation. Quoting Gail Blanke, he says “Don’t just stand for the success of other women, insist on it”.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- Girl child education should be encouraged. There should be parental support for girl child education across the nation.
- Grassroots education should be encouraged.
- Government at all levels and NGOs should take adequate steps on how to increase women in leadership positions through conferences, seminars, workshops and rallies.
- Campaign against all forms of dastardly acts e.g. child abuse, girl-child prostitution *et cetera*.
- Government should create a safer, more equitable environment for women and girls to thrive.

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