

ADVANCING THE RIGHTS OF WOMEN BEYOND THEIR CHALLENGES IN THE NIGERIAN POLITICAL SCENE: A FOCUS ON THE AFFIRMATIVE ACTION

Abstract

This study focused on advancing the Rights of women beyond their challenges in the Nigerian political scene vis-à-vis the affirmative action rule. The specific objectives were to critically examine the concept and indices of women political participation, arguments for minority rule in favour of women, theories on women's interests in the parliament, international concern for women in political affairs, government's response to women participation in politics, Nigerian women participation in politics based on minority rule and affirmative action and impact of women participation in politics. These also defined the scope and limitation of the study. The research design and methodology was doctrinal approach, using analytical and descriptive research methodology. The main sources of data collection were various legal documents and materials, both from the library and internet. For the summary of findings, it was submitted that discrimination against women resulting in their exploitation was traced to so many militating factors not limited to patriarchal hegemony, and that despite these many social ills against women, they still participate in political activities in various forms though in a few number. It was therefore observed among others that the active participation of women, on equal terms with men, at all levels of decision-making is essential to the achievement of equality, sustainable development, peace and democracy. Sequel to these, the researcher made some recommendations which one of them was that the Nigerian government should enshrine the involvement of women in politics in the constitution and this should include all arms and levels of governance be it federal, state or local government area. It was concluded that women on their own should play their roles with all sincerity of purpose and they should be able to give good and qualitative leadership when called upon to take positions of power just like they are expected to do in the home front. Finally, this work is significant to scholars of jurisprudence, feminism and human rights, as well as being relevant to the legal practitioners, politicians and political scientists, as well as the judges/justices in any case relating to women's political rights.

1. Introduction

The exclusion of women in political participation and decision making processes was one inherited by human history. Even when democracy gave rise to ancient Athens in 5th Century BC, the exclusion of women from political participation and decision making existed. The Athenian women had no right to vote or to participate in the democratic process and they were not considered as citizens.¹ Even in European countries, women had neither a right to political participation nor involved in the decision making and public affairs until the beginning of 20th Century.

Therefore, women's franchise right is not recognized in the first wave of democratization (1828–1926) in many of European countries.² As in the case of Nigeria, women's status in the political and public sector is a very recent phenomenon and still their participation is very

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¹M Khadar, *Women Political Participation and Decision Making* (Hargeisa, Somaliland, 2013) 66.

²R Hague and M Harrop, *An Introduction to Comparative Government and Politics* (Hitman Publishers and Co., 2004) 78.

low. They are still largely underrepresented in decision-making positions at all levels.³ They have also not made major progress in attaining political power in legislative bodies. The number of elected women representatives is still low.⁴ More and more women are engaged in formal employment, but are underrepresented in middle and higher management positions. The number of women leaders and decision makers at the various level of the decentralized government structure is still very low.⁵ Therefore for a variety of reasons, women tend to be reluctant to become political candidates, even with the intervention of domestic (like the minority rule)⁶ and international bodies for this cause.

Thus, most legal feminists, political scientists, and jurisprudence scholars have delved into this matter, but with no concentration on this particular topic. Their researches proffer little or no solutions to this quandary. It is therefore, the concern of the researcher in this work to critically examine the ways of advancing the rights and checking the challenges of women in the Nigerian political scene.

2. Women Political Participation

2.1 The Conceptual Foundation

Participation is a development approach, which recognizes the need to involve disadvantaged segments of population in the design and implementation of policies concerning their wellbeing. The **strengthening** of women's participation in all spheres of life has become a major issue in the development discourse. Hence, socioeconomic development cannot be fully achieved without the active involvements of women in the decision making level in all society.⁷

³ Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MoLSA), *Gender Mainstreaming Manual for Labour and Social Affairs Sector* (2012) 86, The participation of women in political decision making positions was recognized as a political right after the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in 1948. Articles 2 and 21 of UDHR stipulate equal enjoyment of political rights without discrimination on the basis of one's sex or any other ground. Even in most of Western States women franchise right is not recognized in the first wave of democratization except in USA, Britain and some European countries. Like many world countries, the majority of women in Nigeria has also been deprived of social, economic and political rights and held low status in the society for much history of the country. They have been denied equal access to education, training and gainful employment opportunities and their involvement in policy formulation and decision making processes have been minimal.

⁴ The Report of the Nation-wide Gender Data Capture written by the National Centre for Women Development in July 2009 very rightly concluded that 'Even though there is a gradual increase of female elected and political appointees in 2003 and 2007, the margin is still very wide compared to the requirements of the...*Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and the National Gender Policy*'. Egwurube, J. *Challenges Facing Women Empowerment in Contemporary Nigeria* (Bankwell Publishers, 2011) 142-143.

⁵ Ibid., 67.

⁶C Haregewoin and M Emebet, *Towards Gender Equality in Ethiopia* (2003) 91, For example, the government formulated national policy on women in 1993 with the objective of speeding up equality between men and women, so that women can participate in the political, social, and economic life of their country on equal terms with men, ensuring that their right to own property as well as their other human rights are respected and that they are not excluded from the enjoyment of the fruits of their labour or from performing public functions and being decision makers.

⁷A Endale, 'Factors that Affect Women Participation in Leadership and Decision Making Position' *Asian Journal of Humanity, Art and Literature* (2012) <https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2601782> accessed on 12th April, 2019.

On the other hand, political participation refers to the active involvement and engagement by individuals, both women and men, with political process that affect their lives. The act of active engagements includes voting, standing for office, joining of political party or to taking part in the political campaigns of the political parties and to exert influence in the decision making process through public debates, and dialogue with the representatives they elected or through their capacity to organize themselves or exercise public power by holding public office at different levels of administrations – local, regional, national and international.⁸

Therefore, political participation is understood as a prerequisite for political development. Hence, by improving women's political participation, given that they constitute over a half of the world's population may help to advance political development and improve the quality of women's lives.⁹ In fact, without the active participation of women, and the incorporation of women's perspective at all levels of decision making, the goals of equality, development and peace cannot be achieved.¹⁰

2.2 Indices of Women Participation in Politics

World Economic Forum¹¹ on gender equality world-wide buttresses a 'positive' appreciation of the evolution of women in Nigeria, using four key variables, economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, health and survival and political empowerment. In the area of economic participation of women for example, Nigeria moved from the 125th position out of 142 countries in 2011 to the 55th position in 2014. It occupied an enviable 14th position on the question of wage equality over the same period. On the criteria of health and survival of women, its position equally improved from the 121st to the 109th position over the same period. The improvement was even better in the area of political empowerment for women, from the 121st to the 102nd over the same period.¹²

Women rarely have the same access to resources as men. Mba¹³ affirms that women's power and spheres of influence largely disappeared under the impact of colonialism and Christian religion, which upset existing economic and social complementarities between the sexes. New "customary" laws on marriage created in response to men's anxieties about the independence of women transformed the previously fluid and negotiable relations between them into rigid duties and obligations of wives and women.¹⁴ As Women became field cultivators, commercial vendors and home providers. Also, development plans continued to be formulated and implemented without an adequate understanding of women's contributions to the economy. Women were also absent from formal positions of decision-making and power.¹⁵

⁸Khadar (n1) 40.

⁹N Seyedeh and K Hasnita and A Hossein, [The Financial Obstacles of Women's Political Participation in Iran \(UPMIR, 2010\)](#) 49.

¹⁰ Fourth World Conference on Women (FWCW), "Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action" (1995) <http://www.unwomen.org/~media/headquarters/attachments/sections/csw/pfa_e_final_web.pdf> accessed on 12th April, 2019

¹¹ Global Gender Gap Index, 2020.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ N Mba, 'Women and Politics in Colonial Nigeria' *Paper presented at the Symposium on the Impact of Colonialism on Women in Nigeria* (Women's Research Documentation Centre, Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan, 1989).

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ O W Ogbomo, 'Women, Power and Society in Pre-Colonial Africa', in S. A. Ajayi (ed.), *African Culture and Civilization* (Ibadan, Atlantis Books, 2005) 361.

2.3 Women Involvement in Political Leadership

Instances of minority rule¹⁶ in the Nigerian political scene may be understood in the involvement of the following women:

- (1) Queen Amina of Zaria, was renowned for her series of conquests and political domination of parts of the old Northern states.¹⁷
- (2) Queen Idia of Benin provided an effective military bastion for her son, Oba Esigie of Benin
- (3) Christy Boyo was a political activist
- (4) Funmilayo Ransome –Kuti was a Political Activist in the Western Region
- (5) Madam Tinubu flourished in commercial venture in Lagos.
- (6) Hajia Gambo Sawaba was a political activist in the Northern Region.
- (7) Mrs Kerry was the first woman senator in the then Midwest Region.
- (8) Franca Afegbua was the Second Republic Senator in Nigeria
- (9) Janet Akinrinade (1930-1994) was the Minister of States and National Planning in the 2nd Republic, during the administration of President Shehu Shagari¹⁸
- (10) Hajia Laila Dogonyaro, President of the National Council of Women's Societies (NCWS) and Jammiyyar Matan Arewa (JMA) women wing of the defunct Northern People's Congress (NPC).
- (11) Prof (Mrs) Bolanle Awe founded Nigerian Council for Women Societies (NCWS)
- (12) Prof (Mrs) Grace Alele Williams was the first female Vice-Chancellor, University of Benin¹⁹
- (13) The renown Prof Dora Akunyili was a two time Minister of the Federal Republic of Nigeria
- (14) Recently is the first President of World Trade Organization being a woman, Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala²⁰, and other profound women.²¹

According to Okwuosa²², Babangida took so many affirmative actions and included women in all areas regarded as the exclusive concern of the men. The climax of it all was the establishment of the Better Life for Rural Women Programme of the first lady, Maryam Babangida. Obi²³ maintained that despite the progressive steps by Babangida administration towards promoting women's participation in governance and leadership in Nigeria, the number of women in key policy positions remained low when compared with their male

¹⁶ Minority rule is a system of government in which the governing party of a country represents only a small proportion of the overall population. While the minority rule states the true nature, the affirmative action advocates for more. Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/affirmative_action> 15th June, 2021

¹⁷M Babangida, 'Democracy and the Imperatives of Women's Participation in Politics' in Ayoade et al(Eds) *Women and Politics in Nigeria* (Malthouse, 1992).

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹Egonmwanin, *Women in Development* (Ambik Press, 2002) 91.

²⁰ She has served as a Minister of Finance in Nigeria.

²¹ In other parts of the world, women like Angela of Germany and Ellen-Johnson of Liberia have also made impact in feminism and featured in the monarchical life of Britain, the Netherlands, and the world over.

²²A Okwuosa, 'Women in Democratization Process in Nigeria: Gains and Limitations' in Omoruyi et al(Eds) *Democratization Nigerian Perspectives*, Vol 2 (Hima and Hima Press, 1994) 289.

²³MA Obi, 'Women's Participation in Democratic Governance and Leadership in Nigeria', *International Journal of Studies in the Humanities*(2007) (4).

counterparts. According to Obi²⁴, only three women were appointed out of thirty one members of the federal executive council during the regime of AbdulsalamiAbubakar.

It is remarkably noticed that even though the military regime is shrouded in secrecy, the leaders at the time were pragmatic to involve women in governance. Democratic regime of President ShehuShagari (1979 – 1983) gave more women a noticeable position in governance.²⁵ But from then till now, women involvement in politics have been accorded more attention with the consistent agitations for affirmative action. There has been the National Policy on Women which is aimed at increasing the active participation of women in all levels of governance to such an extent that their inputs in national development would be recognized and appreciated.²⁶ According to Aishatu²⁷ the policy acted as a guarantee for a future full of hope and promise. Following National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS)²⁸ advise that women should be given 30% which later on was upgraded to 40% of all appointive positions. Women, according to Obi²⁹, are now inching for 50% representation in all appointive positions.

3. Challenges of Women in Political Participation

The lives of women in Nigeria have been profoundly affected by remarkable developments since the onset of economic and social decline in the 1970s and 1980s. First is the implementation of the Structural Adjustment Programme in 1986³⁰. Owing to the specific roles and positions of women within the society, they were the worst affected by cuts in social sector spending, where substantial costs were shifted from the state to the household. Therefore, women have been forced to take on an increasing burden of unpaid work in caring for the sick, obtaining food and ensuring the survival of their families more generally.

Second is the increased civil strife, unrests and conflicts. United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM)³¹ notes that most displaced persons and post-conflict returnees are usually women and children. Conflicts and civil unrests have increased violence against women and worsened the social and economic conditions under which they live.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ The period paraded among others Mrs. Oyebola, Mrs. Ivase, Minister of National Planning/Education, and others in the House of Representatives and one in the Senate.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ H Aishatu, *The Cycle of Leadership: How Great Leaders Teach their Companies to Win* (Tichy and Cardwell, 2006) 22.

²⁸ NEEDS, *A NEEDS Document Reprinted by Central Bank of Nigeria* (Abuja: CBN Press, 2004).

²⁹ MA Obi, 'Women's Participation in Democratic Governance and Leadership in Nigeria' *International Journal of Studies in the Humanities*, Vol.4 (2007).

³⁰ The Structural Adjustment Programme implemented in the country in 1983 emphasized demand management and supply-oriented measures narrowly focused on export-led growth and efficiency, often to the detriment of social welfare. The programmes also introduced liberalization of trade regimes and of the financial sector, as well as privatization and reduction in the role of the state in economic life. This drastically affected mostly the women. United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), *The Decade of Review of The Implementation of Beijing Platform for Action* (Beijing, British Council/Nigeria, 2004).

³¹ Ibid.

Third is the AIDS crisis, high and increasing rates of HIV infection and the costs in human lives. United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)³² reports that just over half of the estimated 20 million cases of HIV in Africa are female. Women and girls are particularly vulnerable because of their lack of power over their sexuality and reproductive functions.

Other impediment factors in effective participation of women in politics include **Socio-cultural factors, religious, economic, gender roles-patriarchy, family work and time constraints**, education and training, lack of proper awareness on political activities and women's own factors, **limited access to resources**, traditional practices, and the rest. Irrespective of the existence of many gender-sensitive and gender-responsive institutional mechanisms put into place by public authorities in Nigeria, we believe that the global environment in which Nigerian women live is predominantly woman indifferent.

4. Positive Responses to Women Participation in Politics

4.1 Affirmative Action Argument

Affirmative action refers to a set of policies and practices within a government or organization seeking to increase the representation of particular groups based on their gender, race, sexuality, creed or nationality in areas in which they are underrepresented such as education and employment.³³ Politics is almost everywhere a male-oriented, male-dominated enterprise and female political participation is not as such good as expected. In today's discussion of women's political representation, there are different important arguments. The justice argument argues that women account for approximately half the population and therefore have the right to be represented as such. The experience argument posits that women's experiences are different from men's and need to be represented in discussions that result in policy-making and implementation.³⁴ These different experiences mean that women 'do politics' differently from men.

The interest argument posits that the interests of men and women are different and even conflicting and therefore women are needed in representative institutions to articulate the interests of women. The symbolic argument says that every female politician acts as a role model for all women, regardless of political views or party membership and will attract other women to the political arena. The critical mass argument states that women are able to achieve solidarity of purpose to represent women's interests when they achieve certain levels of representation.

Finally, the democracy argument asserts that the equal representation of women and men enhances the democratization of governance in both transitional and consolidated democracies.³⁵ All of these arguments succinctly deal with the importance of women

³² United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), *World Bank Report, Human Development Report. Any Society Committed to Improving the Lives of its People must also be Committed to Fully Equal Right for All* (Washington D.C., 2008).

³³ Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Affirmative_action> surfed on 15th June, 2021.

³⁴ Norris and R Inglehart '[Cultural Barriers to Women's Leadership: A Worldwide Comparison,](https://www.omicsonline.org/searchresult.php?keyword=parliament)' *International Political Science Association World Congress* <[https://www.omicsonline.org/searchresult.php? keyword= parliament](https://www.omicsonline.org/searchresult.php?keyword=parliament)> accessed 12th April, 2021.

³⁵ Expert Group Meeting (EGM), "[Equal Participation of Women and Men in Decision-Making Processes, with Particular Emphasis on Political Participation and Leadership](http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/eql-men/FinalReport.pdf)" <<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/eql-men/FinalReport.pdf>> accessed on 12th August, 2020.

inclusion in politics. Sequel to this, women need to be included significantly with men in every political sphere.

4.1.1 **Descriptive (Numeric) Representation Theory**

Descriptive representation deals with widely acceptable share of seats in parliament as an indicator of political inclusion in society for a category such as women. The term descriptive representation denotes representation on the basis of common characteristics and share experience, for instance representing someone based on gender or class can be categorized as descriptive representation of women.³⁶

Women's descriptive representation is albeit slow. Experts expressed concerns about women being brought into governance machineries without being able to make any significant shifts in the status of women or policy frameworks to address women's rights, what is often seen as co-optation.³⁷

4.1.2 **Substantive Representation Theory**

Substantive representation deals with women's interests, gender equality and rational behind women representation. A core idea in this strand of research is that there are certain interests and concerns that arise from women's experiences and that these will be inadequately addressed in a politics that is dominated by men. In research on substantive representation of women, an aspect of politicization is introduced. It is commonly argued that societies will not achieve equality between women and men by simply disregarding gender-related differences.³⁸

In more concrete terms, substantive representation is about the impact of women in decision-making positions, on policy formulation and implementation. Policies can be aimed at gender mainstreaming or can explicitly advance agendas for gender equality in one area of policy. Women's presence has also proven to be important in the formulation of policies on development, sustainable peace, and good governance. Studies have shown that women in decision-making positions play a crucial role in developing meaningful gender mainstreaming strategies, which effectively and authoritatively ensure focus on gender equality in all policy areas. Studies of gender mainstreaming have shown that unless there are key decision-makers and policy actors ready and willing to define gender mainstreaming as a means to achieve gender equality, mainstreaming efforts will not necessarily enhance women's rights.³⁹

Some analysts identify the potential of a Triangle of Women's Empowerment (TOWE), in which women in political positions, both elected and appointed, work with national machineries for the advancement of women and the women's movement to ensure the formulation and implementation of meaningful policies on gender equality. This collaboration has the potential to contribute to the democratization process in struggling democracies and in making stable democracies even more democratic.⁴⁰

³⁶L Wangnerud, 'Women in Parliaments: Descriptive and Substantive Representation' (2009) (12) *Annual Review of Political Science*, 35-42.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸A Phillips, *Multiculturalism without Culture* (Princeton University Press, [2015](#)) 97.

³⁹Ibid. 99.

⁴⁰ Ibid. 101.

4.2 International Response

The international concern for women has gained serious recognition and that in effect has awakened the various governments to the needs of women inclusion in their political and leadership positions. Iman⁴¹ observed that Nigeria's involvement of its women folk to developmental activities assumed visible dimension when the United Nations Organizations declared the year 1975 as International Year of Women. And since then March 8 of every year has been set aside by the UN for celebrating the occasion.

In July 1980, an agreement was reached by all member states that every nation should recognize the need for the involvement of women in nation building. In continuation of this assertion, Egonmwan⁴² stated that Africa's collective appreciation of women's participation in politics found concrete expression in the Lagos plan of action which was the policy voice of African Heads of States and Government in a meeting held in Lagos, April, 1980. It was reiterated that African states is advised to develop policies and strategies for women's full participation in politics and all other developmental activities. Nigeria's response to this was the establishment of National Committee on Women Development (NCWD) and also setting up parallel committee in then 21 states of the federation.

The basic function of this committee was to promote awareness in women, and the Federal Government signed and ratified the *Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women*.⁴³ This Convention otherwise known as CEDAW joined the UN and ECOWAS organizations to compel African Countries to ensure women have adequate representation in politics, access to health care, ensuring proper education and access to credit and loan facilities. In fact the Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognizes the radical equality of men and women in dignity.⁴⁴

Therefore, African women in which the Nigerian women lead the pack, as indispensable transmitters of the family values, need to be politically and all round empowered to enable them attain their optimum goals in life. Some countries that have top the list of gender equality based on ranking are Iceland, Finland, Norway, Sweden, New Zealand and Yemen.⁴⁵ Nigeria is within the middle range and it is trying to toe the line of the tops in gender equality. The continuous, though scanty, involvement of women in international politics is commendable.

4.3 Response from Nigerian Government

Women participation in politics in Nigeria, as observed by Akirinade⁴⁶, dates back to 1928, Aba women riot, and since then Nigerian women have delved into different aspects of partisan politics first by campaigning for men as husbands or candidates of their choice. It is quite easy to use women as campaign tools because they can pull crowd. The 14th century story of Queen

⁴¹AM Iman, 'The Dynamics of Winning: An Analysis of Women in Nigeria (WIN)' in MJ Alexander and CTMohanty(eds) *Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Future*. (New York, Routledge, 1997) 130.

⁴²JA Egonmwan, *Public Policy Analysis: Concepts and Applications* (Resyin, 2002) 167.

⁴³ Other international instruments include: UNDP 1995 *Human Development Report*; *African Charter on Human and People Rights*; and the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*.

⁴⁴M Idika, 'The Participation of Women in Politics in Nigeria: A Case Study of the Legislative Assembly and the Executive' *Online Database* <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/317415636_theparticipation_ofwomeninpoliticsinnigeriaacasestudyofthelegislativeassemblyandtheexecutive>12th April, 2021.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶S Akinrinade, Women in Nigeria, *Newswatch*, Special Edition (1990) 30.

Amina of Zaria, has defined a new role for women. Through her bravery and exemplary leadership, Nigerian women became aware of the roles they could play assisting the men in politics.

Dibia⁴⁷ confirming the above assertion stated that Nigerian women have continued to contribute significantly to the wellbeing of the human race and they constitute up to 60% of the total population. Sadly, women have not been recognized in politics even though they have made several efforts to the progress of the nation. Nevertheless, the efforts of the Nigerian government to improve the lot of women was pointed out by Buchanan⁴⁸ that Nigerian government has started operating scholarship scheme for interested female candidates that do exceptionally well in science and other related subjects realizing the need of education in supporting women's active participation in all spheres of life.

For this reason, two technical colleges have been devoted to the enhancement of women development in the country. This is an indication of government policy in the use of mass media to propagate women education. Both the Federal Education Ministry and State Governments seek to encourage parents to send their female children to school. In support of the above, a prominent monarch in Ashiru, Kaduna state, advised parents to see the girl child education as a task to be achieved and a vital issue to the development of society. He used the common adage: "If you educate a man, you educate a person, but if you educate a woman, you educate a society"⁴⁹ to elucidate his point. There are various instruments for ensuring women are not excluded from the government's official policies.

Legal aid and legal literacy, according to Dibia⁵⁰, are the most popular components of government effort to reduce female abuse. He confirmed that the family law centre is a legal services advisory centre offering free legal advice on all family legal problems to low income people. Akande and Kuye⁵¹ have free publications targeting school age children in the hope that they will read it to their mothers while also learning on their own. The legal aid process has made its outstanding success in the case at the Court of Appeal in *Mojekwu & Ors v Mojekwu & Ors*⁵² on customs and practices against women which were repugnant to natural justice⁵³ and against the constitutional right of freedom from discrimination.⁵⁴

With the establishment of the new Ministry for Women Affairs in 2000 by the former President Olusegun Obasanjor, in continuation of General Sani Abacha's legacy, there have been consistent efforts to integrate women into full political involvement. The rationale for women's ministry is that it will encourage women to enter the political labour force and supply a wide range of talents and services demanded by the general public. But, there are still more to be done by concern actors to realize this motive.

⁴⁷R Dibia, *Public Administration, Politics and Change in the Principles of Governance in Nigeria* (Mbeyi and Associates, 2004) 219.

⁴⁸E Buchanan, 'Women Struggle for Change' *West Africa Papers* (1993) 21 – 23.

⁴⁹JC Ashiru, *Celebrating the Fourth World Conference on Women* (UNIFEM, 2009) 65.

⁵⁰Dibia (n34) 221.

⁵¹J Akande and P Kuye, *Nigeria Family Law Project in Empowerment and the Law; Strategies of 3rd World Women* (Washington DC: OEF International, 1986) 120.

⁵²(1997) 7 NWLR 283 as against the decision in *Akinnubi v Akinnubi* (1997) 4 NLR (Pt 484) 144; and *Uboma v Ibeneme* (2001) 14 WRN 31.

⁵³*Ukeje v Ukeje* (2001) 14 WRN 31; and the latest case of *Umedi v Chibunzi* (2020) 10 NWLR (Pt.1773)

⁵⁴CFRN, 1999 as amended, s.42.

4.4 Impact Felt

According to Haque⁵⁵, ensuring women's political participation is essential to bring legitimacy to government and establish democracy in its real and practical manner, as validity and trustworthiness of democracy can be in question if females, who are above 50% of the population, stay marginalized or segregated from the political and public institutions in the society.⁵⁶ In addition to this, the degree and level of women's representation in the government has considerable and significant impacts on the lives of the people in any operational political and public milieu.⁵⁷ Therefore, , increasing women's representation and participation in the political and public decision making positions is significant, according to Melesse and Ojulu, in the following ways:

Is a question of democracy, democratic process, and equality as well as a question of political and civil rights that has been guaranteed by the international organizations' (UN) agreements, treaties, covenants and conventions;

Facilitates more changes and pave the way for more spaces to women; calls for the efficient, maximum and equitable utilization of human, financial, material and information resources by all human beings;

Avoids the questions that would be raised about the legitimacy of the democratic process and decision making authorities;

Can allow women to address their basic problems and needs in the community;

Andensures the openness (transparency), real fight against rent-seeking (mainly the recently rampant corruption), accountability, political commitment, political leadership, and political responsiveness of the existing national, regional, zonal/districts, and local levels political democracy, democratization process, and governance of the governments and political institutions, and promotes peace and democratic development in any country as a whole.⁵⁸

Moreover, without greater representation of women in parliamentary and executive positions as well as in the judiciary, it is difficult to achieve participatory, accountable, and transparent governance which can ensure political, cultural, social and economic priority goals of the wider society. Besides, every human being has the right to participate in decisions that define her or his life. This right is the foundation of the ideal of equal participation in decision-making among women and men. This right argues that since women know their situation best, they should participate equally with men to have their perspective effectively incorporated at all levels of decision-making, from the private to the public spheres of their lives, from the local to the global.⁵⁹

⁵⁵M Haque, 'Citizen Participation in Governance through Representation: Issue of Gender in East Asia', *International Journal of Public Administration* 26: (2003)569-590..

⁵⁶Ibid.

⁵⁷P Panday, '[Representation without Participation: Quotas for Women in Bangladesh](#)' *International Political Science Review* 29: (2008) 489-512..

⁵⁸A Melesse and O Ojulu, '[Assessment of Gender Equality in Ethiopia: The Position of Ethiopian Women's Political Representation from the World, Sub-Saharan Africa and Eastern Africa Ethiopian Civil Service University](#)' *Journal of Law, Policy and Globalization* (2014).

⁵⁹R Miranda, '[Equal Participation of Women and Men in Decision-making Processes: With Particular Emphasis on Political Participation and Leadership](#)' *Online Database* <<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/eql-men/FinalReport.pdf>> accessed 20th August, 2020.

In respect of equality principle, women's equal participation in political life plays a pivotal role in the general process of the advancement of women. Women's equal participation in decision-making is not only a demand for simple justice or democracy but can be seen as a necessary condition for women's interests to be taken into account. Without the active participation of women and the incorporation of women's perspective at all levels of decision making, the goals of equality, development, and peace will be a utopia.

5. Conclusion

5.1 Summary of Findings

This study has made vigorous attempt to critically examine the rights of women beyond their challenges in the Nigerian political scene vis-à-vis the minority rule phenomenon. The study started with the historical dimension of women, their non-inclusion in political activities even though they have shown interest prior to colonization. Basically, the challenges of women in politics go beyond patriarchal hegemony, international response to minority rule was also highlighted as it activates the African nations vis-à-vis Nigeria to action.

Nevertheless, a lot is still expected because the gap between men in politics and women in politics is still very wide. However, it was observed that despite the discrimination and many social ills against women, they still participate in political activities in various forms. The study also observed that there are some great women who were involved in politics long ago in Nigeria and those who are still in political activities and renowned offices, irrespective of the inhibitions against them.

5.2 Recommendations

Sequel to the foregoing, some recommendations can flow from the findings of this study as follows:

- (1) The National Assembly should amend the Constitution of Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 to explicitly define the distinct roles of women in Nigerian politics.
- (2) Ministries of Education in federal and states should discourage in totality any discriminatory policy in academic environment that is against women, whether in admission, employment, promotion, or appointment.
- (3) The discrimination against women should be made a punishable offence in the Nigerian legal system.
- (4) Every member of the public should encourage any woman politician to spur her up towards her political aspiration and good performance in office.
- (5) The executive arm of government should do better to promote affirmative action against the minority rule phenomenon.
- (6) NGO's and the media should be committed to activities that motivate women to be confident in their capabilities.
- (7) Women should encourage their fellow women to be credible and focused in their political interest and all walks of life.