

NNEWI WOMEN AND POLITICAL ACTIVISM, 1999-2015

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ABSTRACT

In retrospect, gender issues in politics have attracted interests both locally and internationally across different endeavours especially when it has to do with women. It is arguable that this development of interest could be attributed to the fact that politics forms the bedrock of every society, most especially in the act of governance. Over time, women's pertinence as positive contributors to socio-political development has been globally acknowledged. International and local organisations such as the United Nations, International Women Suffrage Alliance, Women in Parliament Global Forum, Women in Nigeria etcetera, have been at the forefront, emphasizing the need for an all-inclusive gender perspective into the political development strategies and planning of nation-states. The progress made so far, however, leaves a lot more to be desired. This study focuses on general issues that border on gender in relation to Nnewi women (particularly Nnewi-North women) and politics in Nigeria from 1999 up to 2015. Particularly, it examines the roles, contributions and achievements of Nnewi women towards socio-political development in Nnewi and Nigeria at large. The study makes use of the qualitative and quantitative methods of research in analysing historical events. In the course of this research, it was



discovered that these women recorded a low percentage in political offices in respect to politically elected and appointed positions amidst their massive engagements in political activities such as vying for political seats, voting in elections, engaging in election campaigns and what have you. Why? This paper attempts to unearth these challenges peculiar to Nnewi women. Practical solutions will also be recommended to curb such anomalies.

Key words: Women, Politics, Development, Gender Role.

INTRODUCTION

From time immemorial, Igbo women in general and Nnewi women in particular, have made tremendous contributions to the socio-political development of Nigeria. They participated in decision making through the various political platforms available at the time, such as the Village Assembly, women organisations such as the Umuada and Alutaradi. The colonial period witnessed a major decline in the political participation and contribution of these women. As a result of the colonial patriarchal system which emphasized dealings with the male, women became sidelined. However, the post colonial era began to see an increased participation of women in politics once again. The colonial authorities traced the attainment of their political desires to a direct dealing with men alone rather than the inclusion of women in socio-political affairs. One may point out that the level of education of women at the time was a serious limitation to their involvement in politics as the colonial patriarchal system had also discriminated against the women in educational empowerment with their excessive focus on the male folk.¹

Emphatically, the degrading position of women during colonial rule was what partly led to the Women's War of 1929, which marked a significant development in the political history of Igboland as it established relevance of women generally. One could argue that this marked a starting point in the precedent relevant roles women play in the political development of Nigeria. In the

concluding years of colonial rule, some Nigerian women became activists who sought rapid political development of the entire Nigerian citizenry. Amongst such women activists were Mrs Funmilayo Ransome Kuti, Mrs Magret Ekpo, Mrs Adunni Oluwole, *etcetera*. The latter was said to have formed a political party known as The Nigerian Commoner's Party which contributed significantly to women's participation in politics until Nigeria's independence in 1960. This party opposed the rapid transfer of power to Nigerians at the price of dictatorship of some individuals over the others.² Late Funmilayo Ransome Kuti, on the other hand, was another strong representative of the female folk in politics of the early years of Nigeria's struggle for independence. She was known for her campaign against the subjugation of Nigerian women under colonial administration.³ In 1947, Mrs Kuti was the only female member of the National Council for Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) delegate to London to protest against the Richard Constitution, as she was an executive member of the Party at the regional and national level. In London, she abandoned this course and addressed press conference on the impoverished state of most Nigerian women. This act alone was accompanied by great criticism from most of her male colleagues.⁴ She advocated women enfranchisement and education of the girl-child. Her political activism led to her being described as the 'doyen of female rights' in Nigeria.⁵ In 1953, she founded the Federation of Nigerian Women's Society, which subsequently formed an alliance with the Women's International Democratic Federation.⁶ These afore mentioned women activists laid the foundation for the active roles subsequently played by women in the political development of the country.

Historical evidence show that Nnewi women have not been left, out in political activism. Prior to 1999, they played crucial roles in the political affairs of Nnewi town and contributed in no small measure in shaping the political system of Nigeria. Examples of such Nnewi women include Calista Nkiru Adimachukwu, Virgy Etiaba, Christy Ikedife, Rita Maduagwu and Nkoli Okoli, amongst

others, who were known for their efforts in the mobilization of the people of Nnewi to come out *en mass* and vote into power representatives who would govern them, during the 1999 elections and subsequently. The study is aimed at appreciating these women's effort in the political development of Nigeria.

The signing and ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women by the Nigerian government on the 13th of June 1985,⁷ brought a boost to women's political ambition in the politics of Nnewi, Anambra State, Nigeria. In view of this and recent calls all over the world for women participation in politics, Nigerian women in general, and Nnewi women in particular, began to show keen interest in politics. With the return of democratic rule in 1999, opportunity was created for women to engage in political activism. The efforts and contributions of Nnewi women in politics of Nigeria cannot be overemphasized. Thus the role of Nnewi women in politics from 1999 to 2015 is the thrust of this paper.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The paper adopts the Gender Role Theory and Development Theory. The term "**Gender Role**" was first coined by John Money in 1955, in the course of his study of intersex individuals to describe the manners in which these individuals express their status as male or female. It is usually centred on perceptions of femininity and masculinity, although there are exceptions and variations. Generally, it relies on a set of societal norms dictating the types of behaviours which are considered acceptable, appropriate or desirable for people based on their actual or perceived sex or sexuality. Put in other words, gender roles refer to the cultural expectations according to an understood gender classification.⁸ The specifics, regarding these gendered expectations may vary substantially among cultures while other characteristics may be common throughout a range of cultures.⁹ The World Health Organisation (WHO) defines gender roles as socially constructed roles behaviours, activities and attributes that

a given society considers appropriate for men and women.¹⁰ Gender roles are usually culture specific.

In Igboland, it has been observed that the family is one institution that enacts gendered divisions of labour as it tends to relegate most women to the private sphere and most men to the public sphere. A study of the implication of this normativity of the public/private distinctions between men and women indicates that as long as women's natural social role consist in reproducing a private sphere of family, motherhood and marriage, their access to the public sphere of work, decision making, law making, knowledge production, culture production and politics will remain minimal.¹¹ The case has not been different for women from Nnewi-North Local Government Area of Anambra State Nigeria, either as individuals or as a group/class. Their relegation to the private sphere by the society has indeed induced their minimal access to public political offices. Therefore, the central argument of gender role theory in the context of this study lies in the societal belief on proper roles and responsibilities assigned to each sex – male or female – which have come to relegate Nnewi women mostly to the private sphere of activities and Nnewi men to the public sphere.

Development theory generally connotes how a desirable change in a society is best achieved. While such writer as Martinussen¹² treats Development theory primarily as part of social science emphasizing the influence of classical economic and social thoughts; others such as A.G. Frank¹³, view it (Development theory) mainly as a political ideology which deals with setting agenda, framing priorities, building coalitions, justifying policies amongst others. In the contextual approach to development theory, both political and social contexts count.¹⁴ According to Bjorn Hettne¹⁵, development in the modern sense implies intentional social changes in accordance with societal objectives. Development Theory constitutes an organized intervention in collective affairs according to a certain standard of improvement. This varies according to class, culture, historical context and relations of power. For Development theory to be significant, socio-political



forces must carry it and for it to be carried by socio-political forces, it must match their world view and articulate their interest as well as serve an ideological function.¹⁶ The importance of women in development is no longer recognised by a minority rather by a majority.

In retrospect, prior to the emergence of Women in Development (WID) process during the 1970s, the objective was to improve women's welfare in terms of their conventional reproductive roles. Development projects concentrated on literacy courses, Home Economies Programmes, childcare and family planning activities; but with the onset of WID, the recognition of women in their multiple roles, especially their economic strives, sparked concerns which prevailed the 1990s. The 1990s witnessed a shift to Gender and Development (GAD) which focused more on the political aspects of development rather than the economic aspects in relation to both women and men. Development projects began to view women as active participants in political development rather than passive recipients. Certain policy measures by national and international governments began to take shape emphasizing the need for women's access to political positions, human capacity building trainings and sensitisation, *etcetera*; in order to improve their contributions as well as their capacity to benefit from developmental projects. The idea around GAD was that transformative change most especially in the political sphere, presupposes the empowerment of both gender and this empowerment requires awareness which is fed by knowledge.¹⁷ Therefore in recent times, efforts have been made by parties concerned towards pioneering this conception into the politics of nation-state through awareness creation and sensitizations. The results have been impressive so far as we have witnessed more women from Nnewi-North extraction, participate more in political activities. Nnewi women in politics have played vital roles in the development process in Nigeria. Throughout the 20th century up through the present 21st century, various women in government have made efforts to develop their society through their active

participation in politics. Development efforts have sought a process of growth/progress into an advanced state and have featured Nnewi women voting in elections, campaigning for political parties and mobilizing voters, vying for political positions and what have you. It has also brought about increase in national income and improvement in the general quality of living. All these have contributed to the socio-political development of the country.

Nnewi Women, Power and Politics, 1999-2015

Prior to the Fourth Republic in Nigeria in 1999, it would be recalled that the United Nations Declaration of Decade for Women in the 70s and 80s as well as Section 191(b) of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, compelled political parties to remove all barriers, directly or indirectly, that discriminated against women participation in politics. There are historical evidence to show that this had awakened the consciousness, ambitions and interests of Nnewi women in Nigerian politics. These women have made tremendous contributions to socio-political development through their active participation in politics. Participatory democracy can be summarized in terms of its objectives, conceptions of society, the role of the state, the political process, citizen's right as well as participation and the practical problems to which each type gives rise to.¹⁸ Citizen's participation in politics is quite essential since it determines how much power is controlled. Consequently, it has been alleged that the political power that the women folk or the male folk hold in a given society, could be linked directly to their level of participation in the political process.¹⁹

The relative importance of women as positive contributors to socio-political development has long been recognised. The United Nations has over the years worked towards projecting the gender perspective into development planning and integrating them in development at the level of National government of all member-states.²⁰ According to Ochieze²¹ the ideology of equal representation of both men and women in the decision making process is considered a pertinent factor for the proper political

development of any given country. The full involvement of women in politics as members of the legislative and executive arms of government is one method of defending and promoting women's interest in the democratic dispensation. With the formation of women organisations such as the Community Partners for Development (CDP), efforts have been geared towards enhancing women's political representation, creating an enabling environment for good governance in Nigeria; building partnership and coalition between potential women aspirants at all levels, as well as establishing democracy monitoring team, to ensure a more balanced gender representation and good governance.²²

The period under review showed that the formation of political parties paved the way for the involvement of Nnewi women in politics of Nigeria. It is arguable that the roles of these women in political parties served a key determinant of their prospect for political empowerment at the national, state and local government levels. Most Nnewi female political candidates depended on parties for their nominations, electoral support, financial sources, and support during the election campaign; not leaving out the continued assistance they got from these parties even after being elected into office. This probably explains why they were seen playing amazing roles in respect to influencing the membership of most of these parties, as they toured around encouraging other women to join political parties in order to contribute their own quota to the political development of their society.

As at 1999 Federal elections, Nnewi women contributed to the formation and massive recognition of some parties such as the Alliance for Democracy (AD), the All Nigeria People's Party (ANPP), and the PDP but to mention a few. For example, women such as Christy Ikedife and Nkoli Okoli, amongst others, were known for their contributions to the recognition of the Peoples Democratic Party in Nnewi. They made financial contributions and campaigned for the party; mobilizing the masses to be registered as eligible voters, contacting media and public officials in the

recognition of the party, sourcing for members and indulging them in political meetings and discussions.²³ On 29 May 1999, Olusegun Obasanjo was elected and sworn in as President and Commander in Chief of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.²⁴ Subsequent elections within the period under review equally saw such commitment of Nnewi women in politics as they did not relent in their roles, as mentioned above, in bringing about socio-political development in the country.

Through the years, such women organisation as the CDP as earlier mentioned, International Republican Institute, amongst others; in their bid to enhance women political participation embarked on intensive political sensitization programmes, in rural and urban areas by urging women not to end their political participation with only casting of votes and mobilization of voters for their respective political parties. Rather they must also actively participate by vying for political positions/seats. The Democratic Governance for Development Project, implemented by the United Nations Development Project in partnership with the Nigerian government for instance, trained over 2,043 female politicians and candidates in preparation of the electoral processes at both national and state levels within 2007-2015. This made an impact on female political engagement.²⁵ Perhaps, this served as one of the motivating factors that prompted a much more population of Nnewi women vying for various political seats at different levels of government, during the period under review. Examples of such Nnewi women were Mrs. N Ngwube who in 2007, under the platform of People's Democratic Party, vied for her Party ticket to run as representative in Anambra State House of Assembly. Mrs. Ngozi Ubah also contested for the Councillorship seat of Umudim ward I in 2014, under the platform of the APGA. Again, Lady Ifeoma Ofodeme contested for the post of Nnewi Local Government Chairman in 2014 under the platform of the Labour Party, among others. However, it is quite unfortunate that majority of these women's political ambitions ended at only vying for such political posts. More often than not these women do not ascend the

anticipated political seats as a result of election riggings and malpractices, amongst others that are prevalent in the democratic dispensation in Nigeria.

The electioneering process served as an avenue through which Nnewi women engaged in the political process of Nigeria from 1999-2015. According to Akinwalere²⁶, electioneering encompasses all the activities that motivate electorates to support candidates in elections. In Nigeria, the electioneering process starts with registration of voters²⁷ in which Nnewi women participated actively in. This is accompanied by awareness programs conducted by different kinds of agencies, especially on the importance of voters' registration. Organisations like the International Republican Institute (IRI), Centre for Development and Population Activities (CEDPA) and United Nations (UN) work with women in Nnewi and other major states and cities to spread the awareness of the need for women's participation and leadership.²⁸ For example, within the period in discourse, Hon. Christy Ikedife was known as one of the Nnewi women who had worked with some of these International Organisations towards sensitizing women on the need for their active participation in politics and leadership of their given community.²⁹

The registration of such parties as the People's Democratic Party (PDP), All Nigeria People's Party (ANPP), Action Congress of Nigeria (AC – ACN), Progressive People's Alliance (PPA), All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA), All Progressive Congress (APC), amongst others, by the Independent Electoral Commission, Nnewi women to come out *en mass* to support candidates of their choice, especially, in the conduct of campaigns and rallies, mobilization of voters and also actively taking part in the voting process. For instance, in 2003 Gubernatorial elections in Anambra State, Nnewi women such as Nkoli Okoli, Ngozi Okonkwo, Caro Agwuncha, among others, under the platform of APGA had thrown their public support for Peter Obi/Virgy Etiaba by contacting the media and public officials on the recognition of the party as well as making campaign contributions to ensure the successful outcome

of the elections in favour of the then new party;³⁰ while Ifeoma Egwudo, Ogoo Nzewi and Christy Ofodile had rallied around Chris Ngige (Gubernatorial candidate) and Olusegun Obasanjo (Presidential candidate) under the PDP.³¹ Virgy Etiaba (the running mate of Peter Obi under the APGA party) was not left out in the campaign efforts/contributions as she campaigned and toured about twenty-one Local Government Areas in Anambra State, informing women that their fellow woman (herself) had come to attend to their needs. Nnewi women had participated in various elections carried out through the years and promoted their political agenda through the various women wings of different political parties. In the light of this, they were seen belonging to the same socio-political groups/platforms, rallying around female political aspirants in solidarity and encourage the electorates to vote for them. It was this support that brought some female politicians such as Lady Ifeoma Ofodeme and Mrs. Ngozi Ubah, amongst others, came to limelight in 2014 during the local government elections in Nnewi-North. Nnewi women such as Ogoo Nzewi, Ragis Okongwu, Ebele Mbonu and Amaka Nzewi, amongst others, campaigned for their favourite candidates. Although, this local government election was declared inconclusive by the Anambra State Independent Electoral Commission (ANSIEC), there were strong rumours that Ifeoma Ofordeme of the Labour Party won the election.³² Nnewi women went ahead to participate in politics through litigation.

In 2003, when the Independent Electoral Commission (INEC) had declared Dr. Chris Ngige of the PDP as winner of Anambra State Gubernatorial Elections, amidst massive rigging, Nnewi women politicians were seen participating in politics through litigation. Mr Peter Obi/Virgy Etiaba and their legal team led by Onyechi Ikpeazu filed a petition at the Election Tribunal, challenging INEC's declaration of Dr. Chris Ngige of the PDP as the winner of the gubernatorial election, Nnewi women occasionally trooped to the Tribunal to show solidarity to APGA and Peter Obi/Virgy Etiaba.³³ A Five-Man-Team, spear headed by Justice

GarbaNabaruma was sent to mediate upon the case³⁴ as the tribunal had to consider about 4000 specimens and examine some evidences which include that of about 500 witnesses.³⁵ Nnewi women were seen attending court sessions, throwing their support behind the Peter Obi/Virgy Etiaba team. They even carried out demonstrations to protest the massive riggings that were prevalent during the 2003 gubernatorial elections. On August 13, 2005, the Tribunal soon found enough evidence to nullify the supposed victory of Dr. Chris Ngige, thus, returning the mandate to the rightful winners, Mr. Peter Obi and Virgy Etiaba whom Nnewi women had voted en mass. Significantly, no Local Government Elections were conducted in the stat between 2003 to 2014 due to inconclusive logistics and uncertainty on party representatives amongst others within Nnewi-North, rather the state government appointed various ward heads as representatives within the ten Local Government Wards in Nnewi-North Local Government Area.³⁶ Again in 2014 when Lady Ofordeme was denied her alleged electoral victory the local government elections of Nnewi North, according to the *Christian Outlook*, the Labour Party candidate – Ofordeme – and 11 others had dragged Anambra State Independent Electoral Commission (ANSIEC) to an Anambra State High Court, following the cancelation of the Nnewi-North Local Government election and the seemingly refusal of the ANSIEC to organise another election or swear in the supposed winner of the said election.³⁷ A large number of Nnewi women trooped the court premises protesting this anomaly. This was another significant avenue through which women had participated in politics.

Apart from engaging in political sensitization and vying for political positions, Nnewi women also monitored the electioneering/democratic process. According to Uzozie,³⁸ democracy monitors are people who observe the democratic development and structures on the ground and ensure that they function according to the laid down procedures and the desires of the people. Perhaps, this was what led various Nnewi women to protest the fact that the then Peter Obi administration had foiled



all attempts at ensuring successful Local Government Elections, being that he preferred the appointment of various Nnewi indigenes whom he perceived to be condescending to his biddings.³⁹ Women such as Nkoli Okoli and Augustina Okoye amongst others condemned this act. In a contemporary society, there exist a huge number of socio-political events that require monitoring in order to ensure political objectivism. These include population census (which is a key determinant in Nigeria's politics), gender integration and attitude of political parties towards women, voters registration, etcetera. Nnewi women have participated actively in these processes. Examples could be seen in their active participation in observing the process of vote-counting during the 2011 and 2015 federal elections, as well as the 2010 and 2014 state and local government elections. Again, their efforts in monitoring the voter's registration process within these periods cannot be underplayed.

Beyond canvassing for votes for their respective political parties and vying for elective positions, Nnewi women participated in politics through mass protest against unpopular policies that affect the womenfolk. A case in point was the imposition of a levy of four thousand, four hundred naira ₦4,400 by the leadership of Agbo-Edo market in 2014.⁴⁰ That they successfully resisted this policy is a manifestation of their capacity to exert changes in certain political decisions which are inimical to their interest and wellbeing.

In the 2015 elections, these women did not relent in their political roles/efforts. Perhaps the most evidential proof of Nnewi women's active political participation at the time was seen in the campaign rallies of 2015 general elections, where women and youths from various Nigerian states/capitals, numbering over 5,000 had staged a mega rally in support of APC presidential flag bearer, Gen. Muhammadu Buhari and his running mate, Prof. Yemi Osinbajo.⁴¹ The rally took place simultaneously in Afikpo Local Government area and Abakaliki - the state capital of Ebonyi – in March, 2015 and saw thousands of women from various

states⁴² (Nnewi women inclusive) being mobilized. They marched through Ebonyi APC campaign headquarters along old Enugu road through major streets in the two cities, chanting songs in support of the APC standard bearers.⁴³ All these revealed to a large extent, the important role Nnewi women played during political campaigns and rallies.

Despite the active roles played by these women in politics at both the national, state and local government levels, available data show a rather poor percentage of women in both elected and appointed offices/positions in politics within the period under review. It is observed that while some party's constitutions provide for 30% affirmative action on paper, this was quite far from what obtained in reality. The party hierarchies of most of these political parties for instance are male dominated. The Board of Trustees and the National Working Committees of parties which were the highest level of decision making bodies were dominated by men and had very few women as members.⁴⁴ This has been presumed to be the chief cause of Nnewi women's low representation, especially, in the emergence as flag bearers of political parties, contesting for political offices as well as their poor representation in appointed or elected offices. Statistical evidence show that Nigerian women in general have about the lowest representation of 5.9% in the national legislature when compared to most other African countries. For example, Uganda has 34.6%, South Africa (43.2%), Ethiopia (27.7%), Cameroun (20%), Niger (12.3%) and DR Congo (8.0%).⁴⁵ For Nigerian women, particularly in areas of political representation in governance the percentage is 7%, the lowest in the world.⁴⁶ Tables 1, 2, 3 and 4, below further buttress the low female representation in elected offices in parliament, at the national, State and the Local Government levels from 1999-2015. See tables below:

Table 1: Nigerian women in the House of Representatives, 1999-2007

Election	Number of	Number of	Percentage of
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Year	Seats	Women	Women (%)
February, 1999	360	?	?
April, 2003	360	17	4.9%
April, 2007	358	25	7.0%
April, 2007	358	25	7.0%
April, 2011	352	24	6.8%
March, 2015	360	20	5.6%

Source: Archive of Statistical data on women in parliament compiled by Inter-Parliament Union on the basis of information provided by national parliaments by 1st December, 2015. <www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif-arc.htm> Accessed 3/10/2018

Table 2: Nigerian women in the Senate House, 1999-2007

Election Year	Number of Seats	Number of Women	Percentage of Women (%)
February, 1999	109	3	2.8%
April, 2003	107	3	2.8%
April, 2007	109	9	8.3%
April, 2007	109	9	8.3%
April, 2011	109	7	6.4%
March, 2015	108	7	6.5%

Source: Archive of Statistical data on women in parliament compiled by Inter-Parliament Union on the basis of information provided by national parliaments by 1st December, 2015. <www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif-arc.htm> Accessed 3/10/2018

At the State level, the National Assembly delegates from Anambra comprises three senators representing Anambra Central, South and North and eleven representatives from Anambra East/West, Anaocha/Njikota/Dunukofia, Aguata, Nnewi-North/South/Ekwusigo, Onitsha North/South, Awka-North/South, Orumba-North/South, Ihiala, Oyi/Anyamelum, Idemili-



North/South and Ogbaru.⁴⁷ With reference to the representatives from Nnewi-North/South/Ekwusigo from 1999-2015, the ongoing argument on Nnewi women's poor representation in elective offices still exists. See table 3.

Table 3: Members of Anambra National Assembly Delegates from Nnewi-North/south/Ekwusigo, 1999-2007

Office	Name	Party	Constituency	Term
Representative	Efobi B. Maduka	People's Democratic Party	Nnewi-North/South/Ekwusigo	1999-2003
Representative	Harry Oranezi	People's Democratic Party	Nnewi-North/South/Ekwusigo	2003-2007
Representative	C.I.D. Maduabum	Accord Party	Nnewi-North/South/Ekwusigo	2007-2011
Representative	Chris Azubogu	People's Democratic Party	Nnewi-North/South/Ekwusigo	2011-2015

Sources: Augustine NwabufoObiora (Federal Constituency Office, Nnewi)

&<http://wikivisually.com/wiki/Nigerian_National_Assembly_delegation_from_Anambra/wiki_ph_id_o> Accessed 4/10/2018

A close look at tables 1, 2 and 3 shows that no female politician from Nnewi graced the parliamentary seats at both National and State levels within the period. However, at the Local Government level, few women occupied the "supposed elected offices". It would be important to note at this stage as earlier established, that from 2003 to 2015, there were no elected seats in the local government level as a result of inconclusive elections, logistic issues and uncertainty on party representatives, amongst others, within Nnewi-North. Rather the state government appointed various ward heads as representatives within the ten Local Government Wards in Nnewi-North Local Government Area.⁴⁸ It was only in 1999 that a successful and conclusive election was conducted and declared.

Table 4: Nnewi-North Local Government Chairmen from 1999-2007.

Name	Office	Term
Hon. Amobi Chikwendu	Chairman	06/'99 – 05/'02
Hon. J. C. Okeke	Chairman	06/'02 – 10/'02
Hon. Martin Okafor	Ag. Chairman	3/10/02 – 14/10/02
Hon. J. C. Okeke	Chairman	14/10/02 – 02/'03
Hon. Deacon Godwin Onyejekwulum	Chairman	02/'03 – 05/'03
Hon. Francis Omo Okeke	Chairman	12/'03 – 04/'06
Mr. John Benjamin U. Aniebue (JP)	Head of Local Government Administration (HLGA)	04/'06 – 02/'07
Hon. (Mrs) Calista NkiruMmiliomaAdimachukwu (JP)	Chairman	03/'07 – 09/'07
Mrs. Chika Vin-Nwankwo Ikelie	Head of Local Government Area	09/07 – 05/09
Dr. B.A. Ezelefeanya	Head of Local Government Area	05/09 – 06/11
Hon. P.N. Ubajaka	Chairman	06/11 – 2013
Hon. Emeka-Odumegwu Ojukwu	Ag. Chairman	2013 -2016

Source: Nnewi-North Local Government Records.

The above table indicates that Calista N.M. Adimachukwu and Mrs Chika Vin-Nwankwo Ikelie, were the only females who occupied the chairmanship and Head of Local Government seat, respectively, from 1999-2015. However, despite this low representation of Nnewi women in political offices, a few of them who have graced these political seats have contributed immensely to the development of Nnewi, Anambra State and Nigeria at large. For instance, during the time of Hon. (Mrs) Calista Nkiru Adimachukwu (Mmilioma) as Chairman Nnewi-North Local Government Area, she established Pipe Borne Water at Lagos Line



and “Ogbo Osis” in Nkwo Nnewi market as well as at Maria Regina High School, Okwuani and St Monica Primary school, Umuezena, Nnewi.⁴⁹ According to Gozie Akudolu, the New Auto Spare Parts Association (NASPA) Chairman, “Mmilioma has continued to assist the traders in times of need, especially on security and sanitation. The four gates she constructed for the four major entrances in the market are there for everyone to see. Equally, she has pledged to assist us in checkmating of erosions that is threatening a section of the market...”⁵⁰ Her administration had assisted the market community in restoring electricity, put in place drainage systems as well as restoring peace and tranquillity in the market⁵¹ amongst others. The traders in Nnewi North Local Government have also expressed their joy over the rehabilitation of the link roads in the market during Calista Adimachukwu’s tenure as chairman. The then Chairman of the Agbo-Edo United Traders Association, Mr. Godwin Ulasi disclosed that bad road network hindered business in the market, adding that all efforts made in the past to attract government attention in this regard proved abortive despite the fact that these traders paid all levies to government on regular basis. Mmilioma’s time in office restored their hopes in government with the contributions she had made to the development of the area so far. In his words, he described Hon. Adimachukwu as a God-sent and a virtuous woman who did what men could not accomplish.⁵² Perhaps, her efforts in bringing about development had implored *Nzuko Ora Nnewi* (Nnewi Town Union) to forward an appeal letter to the then Governor, Peter Obi on 13th August 2007 to graciously consider and approve the present chairman (Mmilioma) and her team to be allowed to serve the people of Nnewi North Local Government Area for a further term of office, since she worked for the interest of Nnewi people.⁵³

Dame Virginia Etiaba when declared Governor, within the interim Peter Obi was impeached over allegations of financial misconduct and abuse of office, made tremendous contributions to the society at large. At first, as Deputy Governor, Etiaba had assisted Governor Obi in bringing about development in Anambra



State but with his impeachment by the Anambra State Legislature on 2nd November, 2006, Etiaba was sworn in as Executive Governor of Anambra State.⁵⁴ During this period, she launched the Anambra State Environmental Marshal Corps (ASEMC) and the Community Environmental Watch Committee (CEWC) amongst others. This was aimed at environmental cleanliness, crime reduction, employment and poverty alleviation as the force provided enforcement and compliance monitoring activities in all major streets of major towns in the state. Over 1000 job opportunities were provided through these platforms. Etiaba also signed the Anambra State's Child Rights Bill into law as governor and flagged off *Suba Kwa Igbo* mantra – an attempt aimed at stopping Igbo Language and culture from sliding into extinction. The philanthropic Dame VirgyEtiaba Foundation which she had set up was seen as an altruistic effort to cater for widows, orphans, the physically challenged, prisoners and the less privileged.⁵⁵ By 9th February, 2007, Governor Peter Obi returned to Office after being cleared of the allegations, thus Etiaba returned to her duty as the Deputy Governor of Anambra State. These women's efforts at development cannot be over-emphasized and should be applauded.

The State Government however, made efforts to see more representation of Nnewi women in politics by according political appointments to other women politicians in Nnewi. For example, women such as Hon. Mrs Calista Adimachukwu was appointed a board member of the Anambra State Universal Basic Education (ASUBE) from 2007-2011. Lady May Anadu was appointed Supervisor for Education in Nnewi-North Local Government from 2011-2013. From 2013-2014, Lady Ileka Beatrice and Ngozi Ubah were also appointed Supervisor for Environment and Supervisor for Education/Social Welfare respectively, within Nnewi-North Local Government Area. These women contributed to the upgrading of the educational system to standard through rehabilitation and reconstruction of schools in Nnewi; maintaining of personal/public hygiene through environmental cleanliness/sanitation and ensuring adequate security and

compliance from Nnewi indigenes, amongst others, for a sustainable development of the town. These political appointments, served as an avenue to showcase the relevance of women generally as positive contributors towards development in diverse areas they find themselves.

Factors Militating against Women's Participation in Politics

Women issues: More often than not, Nnewi women are seen as the architect of their own political misfortune. The pull-down-syndrome associated with some women as a result of their jealous inclination is one of the challenges facing women's political ambitions.⁵⁶ Women are said to be their own worst enemies. An article by Women in Higher Education pointed out that relationships are central to women's lives and they expect their relationships to be on a level playing field. So when something – anything affects this balance, such as promotion amongst others, it raises feelings of insecurity arising from their jealous and competitive inclinations towards one another.⁵⁷ Sophia A. Nelson in *The Woman Code* ⁵⁸ had traced the origin of this anomaly to childhood. She posits that women from the time they are little girls were taught to compete with one another to be prettier, smarter, or better than others. Thus, they often grow up with the view of other women as threats and would engage in whatever means possible just to excel at all cost; even if it means working against other women's ambitions.⁵⁹

Gender role dispensation: In Nnewi, descriptions of everyday life reveals the family as an institution that enacts gendered divisions of labour as it relegates most women to the private sphere (home keeping, motherhood etc.); while most men are relegated to the public sphere (politics, decision making, work). A study of the implication of this prescription indicates that as long as women's natural social role consist in reproducing a private sphere of family, motherhood/home keeping, their access to the public sphere of



work, decision making/law making, knowledge/culture production and politics will remain minimal.⁶⁰ The study recognises this to be another militating factor against Nnewi female politicians.

Other factors include financial constraints and low educational attainment. With respect to the former, the pathetic culture of high cost of election forms, campaigns and what have you, pose a great challenge for most Nnewi women in furthering their political ambitions. Ofordeme, had shared her experience of spending millions of her life savings as a banker in election campaign during her contest as a Local Government Chairman⁶¹ – an amount which most Nnewi women would consider quite exorbitant to spend on politics. Of course, one could find very few women in Nnewi who may have such amount or be willing to spare such huge sum on political campaigns and whatnot. In respect to educational poverty, most parents hesitate to send their female children to school believing she would be eventually married out of the family. Moreover, some Igbo believe that if the girl does not go to school, she still has the opportunity of being trained by her husband while some have nursed the fear that too much education of the girl child could jeopardize her chances of getting married.⁶² So the female child is encouraged to marry early. To buttress this point, S.T. Anuma in “Education as a Forward Looking Strategy for the Nigerian Women”,⁶³ reported that recent data in Southeastern States like Enugu, Ebonyi and Anambra, attributes over sixty percent (60%) of female school dropouts in secondary schools to early marriage. The foregoing has turned out to be a challenging factor to the actualization of women’s political ambitions as records have shown that majority of women from Nnewi who engage in politics are illiterates.⁶⁴ Even though these notions are gradually being swept under the bus with the impressive increase in female population in primary, secondary and tertiary education in recent times;⁶⁵ it will however, take a while before these young women can grow up to become future female politicians.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Although the prospects for Igbo women in politics remain bright in the current democratic atmosphere, the somewhat imbalance in gender representation have to a large extent – judging from tables 1, 2, 3, and 4 – reduced the political roles played by these women between 1999-2015. Comparative analysis of election results within the period under review in Nigeria show that elective positions still elude women despite their huge investments in mobilization, advocacy, voting, lobbying, and many others. It is impressive to observe that women public consciousness has improved significantly in the Fourth Republic, as more women have put themselves forward in virtually every position to be contested for in the current political dispensation unlike the situation previously.⁶⁶ Women political consciousness was particularly fascinating and impressive within the period under review, most especially, in the 2015 general elections. But this does not translate increased number of Nnewi women in the political offices as expected. However, the few who were elected into office within the period under review such as Virgy Etiaba and Calista N. Adimachukwu amongst others contributed immensely to the development of Nnewi, Anambra State and Nigeria at large through various development projects they initiated.

The paper observes that the low representation of these women in respect to politically elected and appointed positions is as a result of the various challenges they face in the political sphere. It is in line with this that the study recommends thus: the sensitization of masses on the need to adapt a flexible gender role dispensation; education of the girl-child and total eradication of notions that portray a woman's role starts from the kitchen and ends in 'the other room'. The study further recommends the reorientation of the female child from the onset, to shun their differences with one another and desist from shaming or terrorising themselves. They need to understand the need to raise each other up and show empathy either in private or public. In other words, this paper encourages the full implementation of Nnewi women's political empowerment and development, within

the diverse parties and bodies involved in governance, as enclosed in Nigeria's National Gender Policy, in order to witness an increased female representation in politically elected and appointed offices. Until both gender interests are well represented in politics, political peace and harmony which is necessary for accelerated growth/development will remain far-fetched.

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