

## **ACTIVE PARTICIPATION OF NIGERIAN WOMEN IN THE POLITICS AND GOVERNANCE: A REALITY OR MIRAGE?\***

### **Abstract**

*The journey towards the emancipation of women from discriminatory and suppressive societal/tribal norms has finally given the women folk a public and political voice internationally. This is clearly revealed in the increasing number of women getting involved in seeking elective positions in governance and even those already participating in governance. This paper looks at international and regional instruments that recognize and encourage the right of women to participate in politics and the public sphere. Further, the paper looks at Nigerian legislation so far and how they encourage the participation of women in politics and governance. Finally a peek is taken into the actual participation of women in politics and governance globally and in Nigeria.*

**Keywords:** *Active participation, Nigerian women, Politics and Governance, Reality, Mirage*

### **2. Definition of Terms**

Clearly defined, a right is the freedom, power or privilege, due by agreement, birth, claim, guaranty, or by application of legal, moral, or natural principles.<sup>1</sup> Human rights are rights inherent to all human beings, irrespective of nationality, place of residence, sex, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, language or any other status.<sup>2</sup> Political rights are simply those rights that enable a person to participate fully in the process of governance such as the right to vote and be voted for in positions of governance, and participation in public life.<sup>3</sup>

### **3. International Instruments on the Political Rights of Women**

The participation of women in public and political issues generally revolves around their political rights. These political rights are those rights exercised in the formation and administration of a government.<sup>4</sup> Presently, there are several international instruments that recognize and guarantee the rights of women to actively participate in politics and governance. Some of them are briefly looked into hereunder.

**Convention on the Political Rights of Women of 1952:** This Convention came into effect in 1954. So far, about 123 Member States of the UN have signed this Convention. The Convention is the first international instrument recognizing and protecting the equal status of women to exercise their political rights on an equal basis with men.<sup>5</sup> This Convention is the after-effect of the period before and after the Second World War. Prior to the Second World War, very few countries granted women full liberty to participate in government either by voting or being voted for. The preamble of this Convention incorporated Article 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that clearly asserts that *all* people have the right to participate in the government of their country, and to access public service. Article 1 of the Convention clearly stipulates that women shall be entitled to vote in all elections on equal terms

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<sup>1</sup> Business Dictionary, 'What is Right? Definition and meaning.' <https://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/right.html> retrieved on November 10, 2017.

<sup>2</sup> United Nations, Office of the High Commissioner, 'What are Human Rights?' <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Page/WhatareHumanRights.aspx> accessed on May 5, 2017 at 10.13pm.

<sup>3</sup> F Anyogu, *Access to Justice in Nigeria: A Gender Perspective*. (Ebenezer Productions Nigeria Ltd.: Enugu, 2013), p. 296.

<sup>4</sup> USLEGAL, 'Political Rights Law and Legal Definition.' <https://definitions.uslegal.com/p/political-rights/> retrieved on October 31, 2017.

<sup>5</sup> W Langley, *Encyclopedia of Human Rights Issues since 1945*. (Westport: Greenwood Press) pp. 70 – 71.

with men, without any discrimination. Also, the Convention further makes women eligible, without discrimination, to be elected into all publicly elected bodies, established by national law – on equal terms with men.<sup>6</sup> Article 3 entitles women to hold public office and to exercise all public functions established by national law, on equal terms with men, without any discrimination. It can be said that this Convention aimed at removing the social ‘*shackles*’ on women with respect to the free exercise of their political rights.

**International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights of 1966:** this Covenant was adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1966 and became effective in 1976. As of February, 2017, 169 member States had ratified this multilateral treaty.<sup>7</sup> Nigeria ratified this Covenant on the 29<sup>th</sup> of June, 1993. The rights recognized and guaranteed by this treaty are applicable to men and women alike unlike the Convention on Political Rights of Women discussed earlier. Specifically, Article 25 of this treaty provides as follows:

Every citizen shall have the right and the opportunity, without any of the distinctions mentioned in article 2 and without unreasonable restrictions:

- (a) To take part in the conduct of public affairs, directly or through freely chosen representatives;
- (b) To vote and to be elected at genuine periodic elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret ballot, guaranteeing the free expression of the will of the electors;
- (c) To have access, on general terms of equality, to public service in his country.

Article 2 referred to in Article 25 is simply an undertaking by State Parties to the treaty to respect and to ensure to all individuals within its territory and subject to its jurisdiction the rights recognized in the present Covenant, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, *sex*, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. By a combined reading of Articles 2 and 25 of this Treaty, the political rights of women to participate in the electoral process and also to participate in governance are recognised.

**Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women of 1967:** this is a proclamation of the views of the United Nations General Assembly on women’s rights. The Declaration outlines and recognizes several rights that *ought* to be recognized and enforced on behalf of women. Specifically, Article 4 dwells of the political rights of women as follows:

All appropriate measures shall be taken to ensure to women on equal terms with men, without any discrimination:

- (a) The right to vote in all elections and be eligible for election to all publicly elected bodies;
- (b) The right to vote in all public referenda;
- (c) The right to hold public office and to exercise all public functions.

Such rights shall be guaranteed by legislation.

As laudable as the above provisions are, they do not have any binding effect. Impressively, this Declaration was a predecessor to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women discussed subsequently.

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<sup>6</sup>Article 2 of the Convention.

<sup>7</sup> OHCHR, ‘Status of Ratification Interactive Dashboard.’ [indicators.ohchr.org](http://indicators.ohchr.org) retrieved on October 31, 2017.

**Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women of 1979:** this Convention got adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1979 and entered into force in 1981. Presently it has been ratified by 189 Member States. Nigeria ratified this Convention on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of April, 1984 but has failed to domesticate same for obvious reasons. The Convention clearly recognized and incorporated the political rights of women in Article 7 reproduced below:

States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the political and public life of the country and, in particular, shall ensure to women, on equal terms with men, the right:

- (a) To vote in all elections and public referenda and to be eligible for election to all publicly elected bodies;
- (b) To participate in the formulation of government policy and the implementation thereof and to hold public office and perform all public functions at all levels of government;
- (c) To participate in non-governmental organizations and associations concerned with the public and political life of the country.

Unfortunately, several attempts towards the domestication of this Convention have met with brick walls at the National Assembly, the last botched attempt being in 2016.

#### **4. Regional Instruments on the Rights of Women**

Internationally, there are few regional instruments that recognize and guarantee the political rights of women and some of them shall be briefly looked at below.

**Inter-American Convention on the Granting of Political Rights to Women of 1948:** this Convention is a product of the International Conference of American States. The researcher is of the opinion that this regional instrument may have informed the birth of the United Nations Convention on the Political Rights of Women. This Inter-American Convention on the political rights of women recognized in its preamble, the fact that women have the right to political treatment on the basis of equality with men as it noted that the principle of equality of human rights for men and women is contained in the Charter of the United Nations. Article 1 of the Convention clearly provided an agreement of the High Contracting Parties that the right to vote and to be elected to national office shall not be denied or abridged by reason of sex. The provision may not be too elaborate or explicit but summarises the political rights of American women.

**African Charter on Human and Peoples' Right of 1981:** this Charter was adopted by the Organisation of African Unity<sup>8</sup> in 1981 and entered into force in 1986. Article 1 of the Charter enjoins member States to recognize the rights, duties and freedoms enshrined in the Charter; and are also to undertake to adopt legislative or other measures to give effect to them. Article 13 of the Charter lists the following political rights for citizens of member States: **1.** The citizen's right of free participation in the government of his country. **2.** The right of equal access to the public service of his country. **3.** The right of access to public property and services in strict *equality of all persons* before the law. Obviously, the African Charter generally protects the political rights of men and women alike while emphasizing the equal enjoyment of the said rights.

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<sup>8</sup>Now the African Union.

## 5. Nigerian Legislation on the Rights of Women

**Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, as Amended**<sup>9</sup> – unlike every other right clearly outlined in the Constitution,<sup>10</sup> the right to participate in politics and governance generally or specifically (for women) is not spelt out by the Constitution. Rather, Section 42 of the Constitution simply outlines the right to freedom from discrimination. Also, sections 65, 106, 131, and 177 merely listed the qualifications for election as members of the National Assembly, members of the House of Assembly, the office of the President and the office of State governors. The question to be answered is whether section 42 of the Constitution is to be read conjunctively with the provisions of Sections 65, 106, 131 and 177 to imply a subtle right of women to participate in politics and governance?

**African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (Ratification and Enforcement) Act:**<sup>11</sup> this Act is an adaptation of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Right with some minor alterations. The provisions of this Act on the right to participate in politics and governance with the African Charter are the same.<sup>12</sup> Unfortunately, the enforcement of several rights that are contained in this Act but not contained in the Nigerian Constitution have not been tested litigation-wise.<sup>13</sup>

**Electoral Act of 2010, as Amended:** this Act regulates, inter alia, the registration of voters and political parties in Nigeria. The Act does not spell out the right to vote or participate in governance, either generally or specifically (for women). All the same, Section 12 of the act spells out the qualifications for registration of voters to include Nigerian citizenship, attainment of 18 years of age, being resident in the Local Government Council or Ward covered by the registration centre, presentation of the person to be registered before registration officials for registration and not being subject to any legal incapacity.

From the foregoing Nigerian Legislation, it is only the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (Ratification and Enforcement) Act that clearly spelt out the right of every Nigerian, irrespective of their gender, to participate in politics and governance in Nigeria. Assuming that the UN Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women had been domesticated in Nigeria, it would have spelt out, specifically, the rights of women to participate in politics and governance. There is presently a bill that has been pending before the National Assembly for some time now – the Gender and Equal Opportunities Bill. Section 8 of the Bill clearly spells out the right of women to participate in politics and governance as follows:

Every organ or agency of government, public or private institution, commercial or corporate body, community, or other entity, shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the political and public life of the country and, in particular, shall ensure to women, on equal terms with men, the right to;

- a. participate fully in all political activities, including the right to vote and be voted for in all elections and public referenda, and to be eligible for election to all publicly elected offices and bodies without any restriction, limitation or barriers whatsoever,
- b. participate in the formulation of government policy and the implementation thereof and to hold public office and perform all public functions at all levels of government.

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<sup>9</sup> Cap. C23 LFN, 2004.

<sup>10</sup> I.e. in chapter 4 of the 1999 Constitution.

<sup>11</sup> Cap. A9, LFN 2004.

<sup>12</sup> See Article 13 of the Act.

<sup>13</sup> Such rights include the right to physical and mental health amongst several others.

- c. be given, on equal terms with men and without any discrimination, and without prejudice to the provisions of section 6 of this bill, the opportunity to represent such organ or agency of government, public or private institution, commercial or corporate body, community, or other entity, in any official capacity, or to represent the Federal Republic of Nigeria or any part of the federation at the national, regional or international level, and to participate in the work of international organizations without any restriction whatsoever.

The above Bill was rejected by the Senate on the basis that it was offensive to Christian and Islamic beliefs on the role of women in the society.<sup>14</sup> It is not surprising that this Bill got thrown out by the Senate as there are presently only 21 female lawmakers at the National Assembly comprising 469 legislators!<sup>15</sup> Also, it speaks volumes of the prevalent male chauvinistic mindset amongst the law makers<sup>16</sup> that are bent on preventing the domestication of the UN Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women since its ratification by Nigeria.

## **6. Progress So Far of the Participation of Women in Politics and Governance Internationally**

The right of women to participate in politics and governance has gained global recognition. It has even been observed that countries with increased women's participation and leadership in civil society and political parties tend to be more inclusive, responsive, egalitarian and democratic.<sup>17</sup> Inasmuch as there exist several international and regional instruments on the political rights of women, research reveals an insignificant percentage of women have recognized and are actively exercising those rights. All the same, the political will of women to participate in governance globally is steadily growing. More and more women are getting involved in politics and governance from the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century till date. In 1960, Sirimavo Bandaranaike was appointed the first female Prime Minister of Ceylon.<sup>18</sup> In India, Indira Gandhi became the first female Prime Minister in 1966 till 1977.<sup>19</sup> Elizabeth Domitien became the first female Prime Minister of the Central African Republic, between January 1975 and April 1976.<sup>20</sup> In 1979, Margaret Thatcher became the first female Prime Minister of the United Kingdom till November, 1990.<sup>21</sup> In 1986, Corazon Aquino contested for and became the first female president of the Philippines and in Asia.<sup>22</sup> Between 1988 and 1990, Benazir Bhutto was the first female

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<sup>14</sup>M Payton, 'Nigerian Senate votes down gender equality Bill Due to 'Religious Beliefs.' [www.independent.co.uk/new/world/africa/nigerian-senate-votes-down-gender-equality-bill-due-to-religious-beliefs-a693021.html](http://www.independent.co.uk/new/world/africa/nigerian-senate-votes-down-gender-equality-bill-due-to-religious-beliefs-a693021.html) retrieved on November 1, 2017.

<sup>15</sup>Lawyers Alert, 'Women and Non-Passage of the 35% Affirmative Action Bill by Nigerian Parliamentarians.' <https://lawyersalert.wordpress.com/2017/08/15/women-and-non-passage-of-the-35-affirmative-action-bill-bb-nigerian-parliamentarians/> retrieved on November 1, 2017.

<sup>16</sup> Which are predominantly men.

<sup>17</sup>USAID, 'Strengthening Women's Rights and Political Participation.' <https://www.usaid.gov/what-we-do/gender-equality-and-womens-empowerment-/addressing-gender-programming/strengthening-womens> retrieved on November 10, 2017.

<sup>18</sup>BBC, '1960: Ceylon Chooses World's First Woman PM' [https://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/july/20/newsid\\_2384000/2784527.stm](https://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/july/20/newsid_2384000/2784527.stm) retrieved on January 10, 2018.

<sup>19</sup> Mythical India, 'Indira Gandhi – First Female Prime Minister of India.' <http://mythicalindia.com/features-page/indira-gandhi-first-female-prime-minister-india/> retrieved on January 10, 2018.

<sup>20</sup> Britannica, 'Elisabeth Domitien Prime Minister of Central African Republic.' <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Elisabeth-Domitien> retrieved on January 10, 2018.

<sup>21</sup> G Witte, 'Britain Will Have First Female Prime Minister since Margaret Thatcher.' [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/british-prime-minister-contest-down-to-two-women-amidst-eu-exit-fallout/2016/07/078499b76e-4390-11e6-a76d-3550dba926ac\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/british-prime-minister-contest-down-to-two-women-amidst-eu-exit-fallout/2016/07/078499b76e-4390-11e6-a76d-3550dba926ac_story.html) retrieved on January 11, 2018.

<sup>22</sup> E Lapar, 'Cory Aquino, the First Woman President in Asia and Symbol of Democracy, Dies.' <http://m.asianews.it/news-en/Cory-Aquino,-the-first-woman-president-in-Asia-and->

Prime Minister of Pakistan and also the first female political leader globally.<sup>23</sup> Dalia Grybauskaitė got elected as the first Female President of Lithuania in 2009<sup>24</sup> and also got re-elected subsequently for a second term.<sup>25</sup> Many other women, internationally, have also left their political footprints in the sands of time. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, an even greater number of women have been actively participating in politics and governance internationally. In recent times, about 20 women are currently Heads of States with different designations in different countries such as Angela Merkel of Germany who is the Chancellor of Germany; former President Sirleaf Johnson of Liberia; Queen Elizabeth of the United Kingdom; Theresa May – the current Prime Minister of the United Kingdom; Jacinda Ardern who is the youngest female world leader<sup>26</sup> and president of New Zealand; Tsai Ing-Wen – current President of Taiwan and Kersti Kaljulaid – President of Estonia.<sup>27</sup>

### **7. Participation of Women in Politics and Governance in Nigeria – The Progress So Far**

In Nigerian politics and governance, some notable women, through their persistence in the face of strong male opposition, blazed the trail. Such persons include Madam Funmilayo Ransome Kuti, Dame Margaret Ekpo, and Hajia Gambo Sawaba amongst a few others.<sup>28</sup> In the 21<sup>st</sup> century more women have shown themselves capable of handling the ropes of the political terrain and governance in Nigeria either as political appointees or elected officials. Such women include Dr. Sarah Jibril, Mrs. Obiageli Ezekwesili, Mrs. Ngozi Okonjo Iweala, Senator Aisha Alhassan, Senator Esther Nenadi Usman, Hon. Uche Ekwunife, Senator Nkechi Nwaogu, Mrs. Oluremi Tinubu, Mrs. Toyin Saraki, Professor Viola Onwuliri, and several others.

Nigeria is yet to produce a female President or Governor, except Dame Virgy Etiaba who ‘*mistakenly*’ became the acting Governor of Anambra State from the 3<sup>rd</sup> of November, 2006 to the 9<sup>th</sup> of February, 2007.<sup>29</sup> It is common knowledge that since the military relinquished political power in 1999 for democratic governance, Nigeria has never produced an elected female President or Governor. In 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011<sup>30</sup> and 2015<sup>31</sup>, there have been 1, 2, 6, 1 and 5 female Deputy Governors respectively. Amongst the 109 Senators, only 3 were women in 1999, but were 4 in 2003.<sup>32</sup> In 2007, the number of women in the Senate climbed to 9 but dropped to 7 in 2011.<sup>33</sup> In the House of Representatives, out of

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<sup>23</sup>J Perlez and V Burnett, ‘Benazir Hutto, 54, Lived in the Eye of Pakistan Storm.’ <https://mobile.nytimes.com/2007/12/28/world/asia/28bhuttocond.html?refer=> retrieved on January 12, 2018.

<sup>24</sup>BBC NEWS, ‘Lithuania Gets First Woman Leader.’ <https://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/europe/8054053.stm> retrieved on January 12, 2018.

<sup>25</sup>Euronews, ‘Lithuania’s First Female President Sworn in for Second Term.’ <http://www.euronews.com/2014/07/12/lithuania-s-first-female-president-sworn-in-for-second-term> retrieved on January 12, 2018.

<sup>26</sup>She is presently 37 years old. Forbes, ‘Women Who Rule the World: The 25 Most Powerful Female Political Leaders.’ <https://www.forbes.com> retrieved on November 10, 2017.

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup>C O Ngara, and A T Ayabam, ‘Women in Politics and Decision-Making in Nigeria: Challenges and Prospects.’ (2013) 2 European Journal of Business and Social Sciences, p. 50.

<sup>29</sup>F Anyogu, *op. cit.* pp. 301-302.

<sup>30</sup>C O Ngara, and A T Ayabam, *op. cit.* p. 51.

<sup>31</sup>J Agbonkhese and C Onuoha, ‘Woman’s Own Examines Women’s Role as Deputy Governors.’ <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2017/10/woman-examine-womens-role-deputy-governor/> retrieved on January 12, 2018.

<sup>32</sup>Ngara and Ayabam, *op. cit.* p. 51.

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*

the 360 members in 1999, there were just 12 women but the number increased to 21 in 2003<sup>34</sup> In 2007, and 2011, the female members of the House of Representatives were 25 and 26 respectively.<sup>35</sup>

In the State Legislatures throughout the Federation, out of the total 990 lawmakers in 1999, there were only a total of 24 women.<sup>36</sup> By 2003, the total number of female lawmakers in the State legislatures throughout the Federation increased to 40.<sup>37</sup> In 2007 and 2011, the total number of State female legislators was 57 and 68 respectively.

At the Local Government Level, in 1999, 2003 and 2007, there were 13, 15 and 27 Local Government Area Chairpersons respectively throughout the Federation. In 2011, no woman was elected as a chairperson in any Local Government Area throughout the Federation.

As is the case globally, Nigerian women in politics and governance in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is low but gradually rising as more and more women are getting involved. Presently, the following women are leaders at the Federal level of governance in Nigeria: Mrs. Aisha Alhassan – first female Attorney General of Taraba State and current Women Affairs Minister; Khadija Bukar Abba Ibrahim – Minister of State for Foreign Affairs; Amina Muhammed – Minister of Environment; Aisha Abubakar – Minister of State for Trade Industry and Investment; Kemi Adeosun – Minister Of Finance; Zainab Ahmed – Minister of State for Budget and national Planning; and Mrs. Winifred Oyo-Ita - Head of Civil Service of the Federation.<sup>38</sup>At the State level in Nigeria, the following women are currently serving as Deputy Governors – Mrs. Joke Orelope-Adefulire of Lagos State; Mrs. Yetunde Onanuga of Ogun State, Mrs. Cecilia Ezeilo of Enugu State; Lady Valerie Ebe of Akwa Ibom State; and Dr. Ipalibo Gogo Banigo of Rivers State.<sup>39</sup>

From the foregoing, Nigerian women are increasingly becoming aware of their political rights and exercising same. When compared to their counterparts globally, Nigeria women still have a long way to go effectively and actively participate in politics and governance at all levels of government. There is no written law anywhere in Nigeria that prevents Nigerian women from aspiring, vying for and being elected as President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and also Governors of the 36 states in Nigeria. It is all a matter of persistence and determination in the face of challenges they face or are likely to face in politicking. These challenges are looked at hereunder.

## **8. Challenges Encountered by Women While Participating in Politics and Governance**

Irrespective of the international, regional and national instruments that exist in empowering and encouraging women to participate in politics and governance, women, globally, are lagging far behind their male counterparts. Over time, women have shown themselves to perform better than their male counterparts when they assume leadership positions. All the same, there are still several factors that militate against the effective participation of women in politics and governance generally. Some of these factors are discussed below.

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<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> J Buari, 'Meet Buhari's Leading Women.' <https://www.naija.ng/885818-must-read-seven-women-rule-nigeria-together-president-buhari-htm> retrieved on November, 2017.

<sup>39</sup> Daily Trust, 'Meet Nigeria's Female Deputy Governors.' <https://www.dailytrust.com.ng/news/general/meet-nigeria-s-female-deputy-governors-/21541.html> retrieved on November, 2017.

**Poor Encouragement of Women in Party Politics:**<sup>40</sup> in reality, Nigerian women are not given sufficient encouragement like equal opportunities as men in the political terrain. Sometimes, political parties subtly discriminate against women in conducting their affair/meetings. The womenfolk are remembered in party politics when their support in elections is need as they are sent to reach out to market women and similar groups. It is doubted if women are given equal opportunities as the men to preside over party meetings or freely air their opinions during such meetings. All these, with all due respect, are construed by the researcher as deliberate attempts to humiliate and frustrate women into losing focus and excluding them from active participation in politics. For instance, the ungodly timing of political meetings<sup>41</sup> and serious politicking which involves a lot of traveling automatically exclude mostly married women from active participation in politics. Also, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, no political party in Nigeria has ever presented a woman as its flag-bearer in gubernatorial elections throughout Nigeria. The best position women have ever been allowed to aspire to occupy the position of the deputy governor. If it were not for the crisis that once occurred in Anambra State, Dame Virgy Etiaba would not have become the first and last female *acting* Governor in Anambra State. At the presidential level, Mrs. Sarah Jibrin, in 1998, contested alongside former President Olusegun Obasanjo in the PDP presidential primaries but lost woefully as she had only her own vote. She defected to the Progressive Action Congress where she became the first woman to contest elections in Nigeria in the presidential elections. She still lost to Obasanjo.

**Rough and Suicidal Political Environment:**<sup>42</sup> The political terrain in Nigeria is rough, suicidal and fraught with brutality, maiming, assassinations, threats, blackmail, intimidation, humiliation, and suchlike. All these are usually used by mostly men to scare the womenfolk from active participation in politics in Nigeria. Also, the use of political thugs before, during and after elections and the attendant insecurity such as destruction of lives and properties that characterized a typical electoral process in Nigeria makes politics undesirable for most women. Indira Gandhi, the first female Indian Prime Minister was assassinated when her political guts could no longer be tolerated.<sup>43</sup> Benazir Bhutto, the first female Pakistani Prime Minister was also assassinated on the 27<sup>th</sup> of December, 2007 while leaving a campaign rally.<sup>44</sup>

**Discriminatory Cultural and Religious Practices:** In Nigeria, for instance, women<sup>45</sup> are discouraged from being vocal and participating in public life from their childhood through adulthood by their parents, guardians and other relations. This stems from the misconceived cultural and religious belief that being quiet, reserved, submissive and shying away from the public are true qualities of a virtuous woman. Sadly enough, the womenfolk grow up to see exercising their political rights as diminishing their character as virtuous women. Also, women in many parts of the world like Africa, are raised to believe that the menfolk, even if a baby boy, are superior to women. They are further stereotyped into certain roles in the society like caring for and raising the children in the family while the men who are deemed smarter are groomed to assume leadership positions in the public and political terrain. Some religions teach that women should not be seen outside the home while others teach they can be seen but

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<sup>40</sup>U P Nwabunkeonye, 'Challenges to Women Active Participation in Politics' <http://www.hrpub.org> accessed on November 1, 2017.

<sup>41</sup> Mostly late in the night when reasonable person ought to be in bed after a busy day.

<sup>42</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> L Charlton, 'Assassination in India: A Leader of Will and Force; Indira Gandhi, born to Politics, Left Her Own Imprint in India.' <http://www.nytimes.com/learning/general/onthisday/bday/1119.html> retrieved on January 13, 2018.

<sup>44</sup> O B Jones, 'Benazir Bhutto Assassination: How Pakistan Covered Up Killing.' <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-42409374> retrieved on January 13, 2018.

<sup>45</sup>Ngara and Ayabam, *op. cit.*

not heard. All these unhelpful cultural and religious indoctrinations are enough to discourage women from exercising their political rights. In December 2015, women were permitted for the first time to vote and be voted for in the elections that held within that period in Saudi Arabia, unlike women in other parts of the world.<sup>46</sup> During the said elections, female candidates were prevented from talking to male voters.<sup>47</sup>

**Limited Financial Resources/Back Up:** Politics, at any level in Nigeria is not cheap venture. Familiarizing with the electorates before elections and wooing them is very expensive and needs great financial involvement and meaningful monetary back up for success in most cases. About 90% of women in Nigeria currently live below poverty line.<sup>48</sup> The outrageous sum nomination forms are pegged at are beyond the reach of many Nigerian women. This hugely trims down the number of women interested in vying for political positions. Only the few that can meet up or have political *godfathers* join the race.

**Erroneous Perception of Women in Politics:**<sup>49</sup> Given the general perception of who a ‘virtuous’ woman is, the few women who defy all odds to swim in the ‘murky’ waters of politics are viewed as unscrupulous, proud, loose, domineering and rebellious instead of being celebrated as being courageous, determined, focused, liberal and ambitious. In Nigeria, it is erroneously believed that most successful women slept their way to the top. Female politicians are viewed in the same light. Research reveals that during election campaigns, male political opponents use the alleged loose moral standing of these women against them and often insult them directly in public.<sup>50</sup> Thus, they are often subjected to public ridicule and are socially stigmatized by both men and women. This negative labeling; derogatory names; abusive language and expressions to describe Nigerian women in politics discourage many of them from active participation in the nation’s politics.<sup>51</sup>

## 9. Conclusion and Recommendations

Having looked at international and regional instruments above, it is obvious that the right of women to actively participate in politics and governance has gains international recognition. Also, these political rights are slowing but gradually being exercised by women internationally. Nigerian women too are not left out as more and more women are gradually and actively participating in politics and governance. In 2011, there was this clamour for 35% affirmative action – i.e. increased active participation of women in politics and also involvement of more women in governance. Former First lady, Dame Patience Jonathan raised so much awareness about this during her husband’s tenure. It is the author’s opinion that 35% is not enough – women have equal rights as men and should be actively involved in politics and governance as their male counterparts. Participation in politics and governance by Nigerian women could be said to have been a mirage in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Century. The story is different now; it is more like a reality. The following are recommended to aid and encourage the active participation of Nigerian women in politics and governance:

Enactment of the Gender and Equal Opportunities Bill: Section 8 of this Bill on the political rights of women is the quite elaborate and lucid. When compared with the African Charter on Human and

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<sup>46</sup>M Pearson, ‘Polls Open in Saudi Arabia, First time Women Allowed to Vote.’ <http://edition.cnn.com/2015/12/12/world/saudi-arabia-women--vote/index.html> retrieved on January 13, 2018.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> Ngara and Ayabam, *op. cit.*

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

Peoples' Right (Ratification and Enforcement) Act, which is the only law in Nigeria that clearly spells out the political rights of Nigerians, it is quite liberal. The said Bill clearly spells out the political rights of women in a manner that encourages the generality of Nigerian women to come out from their shells to actively participate in politics and governance. Efforts should be made to massively create awareness of the existence and recognition of the political rights of women. This can be achieved through television and radio jingles sponsored by government agencies, NGOs and professional bodies like the Nigerian Bar Association and the Federation of Women Lawyers<sup>52</sup> and such like. There is need for criminalisation of discriminatory social, cultural and religious practices that emotionally and psychologically suppress women from actively participation in politics and governance. Additionally awareness of same should be created when codified.

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<sup>52</sup> FIDA.