



CONSOLIDATING NIGERIAN DEMOCRACY THROUGH EQUITY AND INCLUSION

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ABSTRACT

In 1999, Nigeria embraced democracy as a form of government and governance. This development came with lots of expectations and anticipation from many if not all Nigerians. 'All' wanted to be heard, to participate in the decision making, at least in things that affect them. Democracy being a politics of number and participation of all (even if it is representative) is expected to be inclusive and equitable in distribution of its dividends. However, one may not be wrong to state that democracy in Nigeria is everything but inclusive and equitable. Many groups, sexes and classes have been made spectators in what they are expected to be 'active participants'. Consequently, this write-up looks at equity and inclusion in consolidating democracy in Nigeria. We looked at the different ways that equity and inclusion is not practiced in Nigerian democracy. Mention will also be made of different groups that are not included in decision making process. Conflict theory was adopted as our tool for analysis. Secondary sources of data collection were used and we proffered possible solution to the identified problem of inequity and exclusion at the end.

KEYWORDS: Equity, Inclusion, Youth, Women, Participation and Democracy.

1. INTRODUCTION

With the return of democracy in Nigeria: May 29th, 1999 precisely, the atmosphere has been punctuated with feelings of hopes and high expectations. These feelings are consequent upon the status quo in the political fields before Nigeria became democratic. There were instances of human right abuse, outright dictatorship, and indeed every form of autocratic leadership (Ezeanya, Ajah, Okpa, Chinweze, Onyejebu, Enweonwu & Obiwulu, 2023; Okpa, Ugwuoke, Ajah, Eshioke, Igbe, Ajor, Ofem, Eteng & Nnamani, 2022). This explains the sentiments of a sense of belonging and a feeling of my-voice-will-be-heard among very many Nigerians. To say the least, there were so many expectations from the democratic process which has made its way into the country's political history. Many who feel they have been side lined in the decision making process of the country; those who feel that their opinion has not been aired; those who feel that they have not benefited from the system of government operational in the country; and indeed all who feel aggrieved with past system of government hope that the democratic government would as much as possible accommodate and make the political field friendly such that all the qualified can participate in the process of nation building through active involvement in the democratic process (Okpa, Ajah, Nzeakor, Eshioke & Abang, 2022).

Man (this is used in the generic sense) ordinarily wants autonomy, freedom and a chance to participate in things that affect him; he wants to be or feel responsible for his life. It goes therefore to say that when this demand is not met, he would not die in silence (Iloma, Nnam, Effiong, Eteng, Okechukwu & Ajah, 2022; Egbegi, Ajah & Ogbonnaya, 2018). Expectedly, any sign of exclusion would send bad signal and he would want to establish or re-establish himself as being important and autonomous. In addition to the above, his productivity would take a nose-dive the moment he is or feels excluded from participation in things that concern his life and well-being (Ajah, Chinweze, Ajah, Onyejebu, Obiwulu, Onwuama & Okpa, 2022). Similarly, equity remains a necessary tool for consolidation of good human relationship. This explains why any form of relationship that is



bedevilled by absence of equity 'dies' before it is 'born'. Any action negating equity is met with equally a stiff and negative reaction. Has Nigeria's democracy taken care of these expectations? We shall find out.

In this piece, we shall see if Nigeria's democracy has taken care of these expectations. We shall also look at how Nigeria's democracy can be consolidated through equity and inclusion. This assumption is a direct consequence of the fact that democracy being a politics of number and participation of all (even if it is representative) is expected to be inclusive and equitable in distribution of its dividends (Ajah, Ajah, Ajah, Onwe, Ozumba, Iyoke & Nwankwo, 2022). Equally important is the fact that when certain groups: sex, age, class, are excluded and made into spectators in things that directly affect their lives, it breeds discord, not-my-business attitude and a sense of non-belonging. Again, for democracy to be what it is, the voice of the people needs to be heard, each of the groups needs to be represented and represented justifiably, and there is the need for participation of all. To help us make this inquiry, we shall look at the meaning of democracy, equity, and political inclusion. Instances of exclusion or insignificant representation of certain groups in the decision making process of the country will also be looked at. For particularity, we shall focus on women and youth exclusion in the Nigerian decision making process from 1999 till date.

2. CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

Democracy

The word democracy has its root in Ancient Greece habited by Athenians. Etymologically, it is a combination of two Greek words: "Demo" meaning "the people" and "cracy" meaning "to rule". When brought together it would mean 'rule by the people.' Democracy can also be seen as a government by the people; a form of government in which the supreme power is vested in the people and exercised by them by their duly and legally elected representatives under a free electoral system. In its Human Development Report 2002, the United Nations Development Program defined democracy as 'a political system that enables people to freely choose an effective, honest, transparent and accountable government.' (Veeramalla, 2004) Abraham Lincoln, the 16th President of the United States, serving from March 1861 until his assassination in April 1865, clearly put it that democracy is the government of the people, by the people and for the people. Democracy is equally a political system that is run and controlled by citizens of the country.

Democracy could be direct or representative. In direct democracy, all the qualified adults participate in the decision making process. This practice was used by Athenians and Rome at the early stage of democracy. Representative democracy is the modern practice where the people elect some qualified individuals to stand for them in the decision making process. This practice is used when the population of the citizenry makes it impossible for all to participate directly in the decision making process (Ezeanya, Ajah, Ibenwa, Onuorah & Eze, 2022). Of course, the representatives of the people are to exemplify the interest and decision of the people and not their personal interest, they work for the people who voted them in and whose interest they are obliged to represent, and represent well.

Features of Democracy

Majority Rule: It is based on parliamentary majorities.

Representative Elections: The people are allowed to elect representatives to speak for their views and interests.

Multi-party system: Voters have the opportunity to choose from a variety of political parties, representing a wide range of political opinion.

Freedom of speech: No restriction is placed on the right to opinions and express them openly.

Freedom of association: The people are free to organise political parties to take part in democratic life.

Freedom of Assembly: No restriction is placed on the right to hold meetings or organise demonstrations provided those do not violate the rights of others.

Respect for individual rights: The state protects individuals whose rights are threatened by the actions of others.

Respect for Minority rights: Minorities should not have their basic rights violated by the majority, just as their voice and opinions equally count.

Respect for the Law: Citizens who are given democratic rights are obliged to obey the laws that provide these rights.

Respect for Democratic Procedures: Individuals or groups who have grievances against the system should operate within it, seeking to change the law through legal means.

Channels of Influence: Individuals and groups have channels of access to decision makers at every level. (Lednum, 2006).



3. MEANING OF EQUITY, INCLUSION AND CONSOLIDATION

The word equity has its root in the Latin word ‘aequitas’ from aequus meaning ‘equal’. Modern usage of the word means the following: justice according to natural law or right; *specifically*: freedom from bias or favouritism; a system of law originating in the English chancery and comprising a settled and formal body of legal and procedural rules and doctrines that supplement, aid, or override common and statute law and are designed to protect rights and enforce duties fixed by substantive law. (<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/equity>). In addition to the above, The Cambridge Online Dictionary defines equity as the situation in which everyone is treated fairly and equally.

(<http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/equity>).

It can also be viewed as the quality of being fair or impartial; fairness; impartiality

(<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/equity>).

On the other hand, consolidation is the act or process of consolidating, the process of uniting: the quality or state of being united; *specifically*: the unification of two or more corporations by dissolution of existing ones and creation of a single new corporation. To consolidate means to become, or cause something to become, stronger, and more certain, to combine several things, especially businesses, so that they become more effective, or to be combined in this way. (<http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/consolidate>), Inclusion is the act of including someone or something as part of a group, list, etc. It is the idea that everyone should be able to use the same facilities, take part in the same activities, and enjoy the same experiences, including people who have a disability or other disadvantage:

(<http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/inclusion>). Politically speaking, inclusion is the right to political participation and to political representation of all the qualified citizens, including migrants on the same legal basis as host populations thus developing a notion of membership to a city’s population. (Lauren Kitz, <https://www.ndi.org/political-inclusion-of-marginalized-groups>).

From the above, we could re-phrase our topic thus: “Treating everyone fairly and equally in addition to creating an avenue for participation of all the qualified citizenry in the decision making process remains a necessary condition to making our government of the people, by the people, for the people to develop and become stronger, more enduring and firm.” Simply put, our democracy can only grow and develop when the entire qualified are allowed equal participation in nation building through participation in the democratic process. With this in mind, we shall go further to look at the Nigerian experience of democracy.

4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Conflict theory is our tool of analysis for this paper. The theory attempts to understand the deeper causes of disputes between people and between groups. Sociologists like to know “why”? They want to know why societies form and why the conflict in a given society. Conflict theorists ask what are the attributes and causes of dysfunctional societies. Why does conflict arise between humans? They would explain that when human interaction becomes dysfunctional, conflict may ensue (Douglas, 2003). Karl Marx and Max Weber in their separate writings advanced how societies operate. It is their conviction that societies consists of conflicts and that when conflicts are not openly taking place, processes of social domination exists. “In this vision of social order, groups and individuals try to advance their interests over others” (Timothy, <http://www.brooklysoc.org/courses/43.1/weber.html>).

There may or may not be overt outbreaks of conflict or violence. But the policies and ideologies of such individuals or groups portray the real self interests hiding behind them to control and dominate. It is in line with this thought that Karl Marx opines that the world is a place of domination and conflict. He saw class divisions as the most important source of social conflict. Class is one of the dimensions of social structures. Social structure encompasses the interactions of different elements of social life, especially economic, social, political structures as well as belief system; and in fact all aspects of social life. According to this theory, it is the economic factor (substructure) which is the most decisive of all these elements of society and which largely determines the character of other superstructures – political, social, religion and otherwise. Though, that is not to say that the economic structure is autonomous and strictly determines the others. All the social structures are interdependent and interact in complex ways. But it is the economic base which provides the axis around which all the movement takes place, and imparts certain orderliness to the interaction (Ake, 1981:3-4).

By implication therefore, the men who are the purveyors of the economic base of the society become dominant over the youth and women. Democratization is a process which involves not only the provision of socio-economic infrastructures but holding of periodic elections which are adjudged free and fair and representative of the will of the people, security of lives and property, creation of job, respect for freedom of association, freedom of press and the right to disseminate information, effective separation of powers/duties and functions of the executive, legislature and judiciary, respect for the rule of law, accountability and transparency



in governance. It is a global norm that democracy is not an event rather a journey whose destination is democratic consolidation in a state where democracy has become so rooted, so routine and widely accepted and/or legitimized by all actors (Eze, Okpa, Onyejebu & Ajah, 2022). Implicit in democratic consolidation is the issue of inclusion, fairness, equality, popular participation, ownership and legitimacy. Some of the imperfections identified in the system that had constrained legitimacy of the instruments have culminated in seeming alienation of some constituencies which consequently make the state to be unable to meet the basic needs of the people. A citizen's right to political participation is very fundamental because it denotes his/her empowerment for the establishment of democratic consolidation.

Political participation is one of the pivotal variables of democracy that gives credence for inclusion of marginalized groups such as women and youth in electoral process. The political participation of women will be meaningful only if the system is fair, egalitarian, just, inclusive, permissive and guarantee a level playing ground for the acquisition of power. The social exclusion of almost the half of the population of the country from decision making structures counters all basic principles of democracy and fundamental human rights. Democracy derives and thrives on the principle that power belongs to the people (Okpa, Ajah, Eze & Enweonu, 2022). If power belongs to the people and women and the youth are a part, and are excluded from decision making structures, then we conclude that Nigeria's experience of democratic governance rests on extremely shaky foundation.

5. DEMOCRACY: THE NIGERIAN EXPERIENCE

Nigeria's democracy is 16 years old and I want to assume that a 16 year old adolescent is not entirely ignorant of the fact that he is alive; he is no longer an infant. One would not say if our democracy is growing, retarding or being stagnant. Nigeria's democracy has not been able to meet some of the major expectations of most people, at least those who really know what a true democratic government should look like. Democracy as I had earlier mentioned is majority based, just as participation of all (through representation and contesting for elective offices freely) remains one of its major features (Ugwuoke, Ajah & Onyejebu, 2020). However, the Nigerian experience does not support the above claim. It therefore becomes painful to assert that Nigeria's democracy has been domesticated within some quarters such that for anyone to 'participate in the decision-making process' one would need to relocate to such quarters. Majority female and youth have been denied their right of participation because their interest and choices are over looked like they don't matter. More than 70% of Nigerians don't have access to elective positions whereas a certain quarter has been recycling people in elective positions as though Nigeria is a private profit making firm. Elections are rigged with impunity and people are denied their mandate, threatened, intimidated, even killed and 'nothing' happens. Women are made to sing the praises of the never-get-old and ever-recycled politicians we have, while the youth are turned into their tugs, killing machines: those who are used to rig elections. Political offices are occupied by a very few who have sworn never to leave the corridors of power. Consequently, they would do almost anything to maintain the status quo (Ugwuoke, Ajah & Onyejebu, 2020). It has been business as usual because we have the same group of persons being recycled as though they are the only 'capable ones' among the estimated 175 million Nigerians. We shall therefore try to look at the different instances of exclusion starting with the youth.

6. THE YOUTH AND POLITICAL EXCLUSION IN NIGERIA

It is a known fact that Nigerian politics has side lined the youth. This is done both in theory and practice. In the history of Nigerian democracy, the youngest elected senators are Dino Melaye (40yrs) from Kogi State and Mustapha Sani (40yrs) of Niger. Dimeji Bankole, a 37year old Speaker of the House of Representative remains the youngest to have attained that position. Alhaji Aliyu Sabiu, a 32-year-old member representing Mani constituency in Katsina State, also serves as the youngest speaker of the House of Assembly. Apart from these few exceptions, Nigeria's democracy is dominated by 'old men' some of whom are grandfathers. In the light of the above, one would want to ask, what is the place of the youth in Nigeria's Democracy?

However, it is important to state at this point who a youth is. The Nigerian Constitution states that a "Youth is an adult not below the age of 18 and not above the age of 35". The same constitution, Nigeria Constitution of 1999 Section 65 (1) (a), states in the age of candidacy that one needs to be at least 40 years of age to be elected President or Vice President, 35 years to be a senator and 30 years to be a Representative in Parliament. By this very fact, over 130 million Nigerians, including male and female, are 'legally' denied access to some elective positions in the country (Eze, Ajah, Okpa & Ngwu, 2022). However, in South Africa, Constitution Section 47, Clause 1 states that "every citizen who is qualified to vote for the National Assembly is eligible to be a member of the assembly". The age for voting in Nigeria is 18 and above, but the age of candidacy is 30, 35 and 40 respectively. One would want to ask, what is wrong with the Nigerian youth? Why



can't an 18 years and above Nigerians in the parliament? To answer the question, we would need to look at the struggle for independence and the age of those who played very significant roles in it.

7. NIGERIA, BEFORE AND AFTER INDEPENDENCE

The struggle for independence in Nigeria was fought and won by those who had vision for Nigeria. These 'men' apparently are not in their 50's or 60's not to talk of 70's. They were mostly under 40: Obafemi Awolowo was 37, Samuel Akintola was 36, Ahmadu Bello was 36, Tafawa Balewa was 34, Okotie-Eboh was 27, Anthony Enahoro was 27 and only Zik was in his early 40's, 42 precisely, when they fought for the liberation of Nigeria and Nigerians from the shackles of colonialism. Nigeria's military after independence was equally dominated by the youth who spearheaded several coups and counter coups: Kaduna Nzeogwu was 29 when he led the first ever coup in the history of Nigeria's politics. He was countered by Murtala Mohammed at 28, Theophilus Danjuma at 28, Badamosi Babangida at 25, Nanven Garba at 23, Sani Abacha at 23, Shehu Musa Yaradua at 23. Gowon became the military head of state at 32, Odumegwu Ojukwu fought the Nigeria Biafran War at 33, Obasanjo became the head of State at 37 (6th January, 1976-1st October 1979) Buhari became the head of state at 41 (31st December, 1983-27th August, 1985). Maitama Sule also became an oil minister during the Murtala/Obasanjo administration at the age of 29, Shehu Shagari, Nigeria's President in the second republic was a federal legislator at the age of 30 and a minister at the age of 35. MT Mbu became foreign affairs minister at 23 and Pat Utomi became a presidential adviser at 27.

8. THE YOUTH OF TODAY AND PARTICIPATION IN POLITICS

With the above, one would wonder why statements as: "Nigerian youths are not capable of leading this country..." the exact words of a Nigerian Former Head of State, General Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida, IBB, in April 2010 while being interviewed by the Hausa BBC service as Nigeria prepared for the 2011, could be made in the first place. What is wrong with the youth of these days? I was thinking that the dream of every good father is for the children to grow and take over from him (Okpa, Ugwuoke, Ajah, Eshioke, Igbe, Ajor, Ofem, Eteng & Nnamani, 2022). Why have 'our fathers' made the youth perpetual infants, those who are incapable of directing their own affairs. Ironically, those who are still running this nation started as youth, some of them at 23 in the 60's, but now that they are in their 70's they still do not want to give the youth the opportunity to participate.

Means by which the youth are side-lined

The Constitution: Our leaders have strategically planned the nation in such a way that the youth would have limited access to decision making positions. This 'robbery' of the political rights of the youth has been legalised as the constitution has pegged the age of candidacy at 30, 35 and 40 for the different offices in the nation. However, Austria and France both have the age of candidacy at 18 while Ireland pegs hers at 21. By this very fact, the teeming youth of under the age of 30 cannot participate in vying for elective offices. Thus side lining the potentials of their in consolidation of our democracy.

Another point of interest is how many of our leaders are between 30-40years of age? Statistics shows that out of the 109 senators we have in Nigeria, only 24 of them are between 40-50years of age (50-60 years are 60, 60-70 years are 23, 70 years and above are 2). (<http://cparesearch.org/a-profile-of-nigerias-8th-senate/>) What is 24 out of 109? This explains why our senators spend greater part of their time struggling for leadership of the house, playing party-supremacy game and the likes when they are supposed to be making laws that will benefit the nation. This also lays to rest the question as to why some of them spend greater part of the senate session sleeping. What do you expect when an old man over stresses himself doing what he would have done some 30, 40 years back. Another question begging for answer is: how many laws have the Senate made that has direct consequence on youth empowerment? How many times has the Senate deliberated on issues affecting the youth, I mean the common youth on the street? What has the Senate done in improving the standard of living of the youth? Our education, sports, health care system, recreational facilities and other core issues that affect the youth have not received the same attention as struggle for the leadership of the house has received. Then how do we plan for tomorrow? How do we consolidate our democracy for generations to come?

Economic Means: Leadership positions in Nigeria have turned to mega money making venture (triple M venture). Statistics shows that Nigerian Senators are the highest paid in the world. And then I would ask why they would not be when they are those deciding who receives what and when.



Table 1: Nigerian Senators' Remuneration

Basic Salary (B.S)	₦2,484,245.50
Hardship Allowance (50% of B.S)	₦1,242,122.70
Constituency Allowance (200% of B.S)	₦4,968,509.00
Newspapers Allowance (50% of B.S)	₦1,242,122.70
Wardrobe Allowance (25% of B.S)	₦621,061.37
Recess Allowance (10% of B.S)	₦248,424.55
Accommodation (200% of B.S)	₦4,968,509.00
Utilities (30% of B.S)	₦828,081.83
Domestic Staff (70% of B.S)	₦1,863,184.12
Entertainment (30% of B.S)	₦828,081.83
Personal Assistants (25% of B.S)	₦621,061.12
Vehicle Maintenance Allowance (75% of B.S)	₦1,863,184.12
Leave Allowance (10% of B.S)	₦248,424.55
Severance Gratuity (300% of B.S)	₦7,452,736.50
Car Allowance (400% of B.S)	₦9,936,982.00

Source: *Encomium Magazine* (2015)

Total monthly salary - ₦29,479,749.00 (\$181,974.00). Total yearly salary - ₦353,756,988.00. The average salary of Nigerian worker based on the National Minimum Wage is ₦18,000.00 So, the yearly salary is ₦216,000.=. Comparatively, if Nigerian senator earns ₦353,756,988.= a year, Nigerian worker earns an average sum of ₦216,000.= which means that it will take an average Nigerian worker 1,638 years to earn the yearly salary of a Nigerian senator.

This is happening in a nation where more than 70% of the entire population is living below poverty level, a country where more than 80% of the youth are unemployed, a country where the minimum wage is N18,000, and it is owed for 8 months and above, a country that very many do not have access to good education, health care system and recreational facilities. This is our country. At the end of the day, the youths would be busy struggling to make ends meet, except of course for a very few. The leaders use poverty, unemployment to keep the youth under check. It is only by making sure that we do not have enough job for them that they can come around and employ them as their PAs, thugs, drivers, cleaners, and every other you can think of. In Maslow's hierarchy of need, food, shelter, clothing come first. Invariably, the youths who are still dependent on their parents for pocket money would most likely not come out to agitate that the constitution be reviewed to accommodate more youth in the democratic process. They need to get their three square meals, at least to be alive before they can think of participation in politics. This has also made politics very unattractive to many youth as they believe that it is reserved for the rich and affluent.

Political Parties: Political parties have not done enough in encouraging both the youth and women to participate in the politics. This is so done so that the youth can be used for other purposes that would benefit the party. Most of our political parties do not give any meaningful position to the youth. Even the position of a youth leader is not available to them. Ibrahim Dasuki Jalo, a 52 year old man is the youth leader of APC, Chiza Abubakar, a 60 year old man, was elected the National Youth Leader of PDP. Now the question is, is a 60 year old a youth or is he there as their father, not leader?

In addition to the above, the price of tickets for elective positions in Nigeria is such that only very few youth can afford it. For instance, the PDP has put a price tag of N22 million for aspirants hoping to vie for the party's presidential ticket. This comprises a presidential nomination fee of N20 million and N2 million fee for Expression of Interest. The governorship nomination form is fixed at N10 million with the Expression of Interest Form to be obtained at N1 million. The nomination fee for the Senate is fixed at N4million and N2million for the House of Representatives. The Expression of Interest Form is fixed at N400, 000 for Senate and House of Representatives aspirants. The nomination fee for the state House of Assembly members is slated for N1million, while the Expression of Interest Form is fixed at N200, 000. The party is however not charging female aspirants any nomination fee but they are to pay for the Expression of Interest form as applicable.

The APC on the other hand has placed a price tag of N27 million on its presidential and Expression of Interest form. Incumbent governors aspiring for a second term are expected to pay N10.5 million while party members aspiring for the tickets for the first time will pay N5.5 million. Senators who desire to return to the Red Chambers will pay N5.3 million, while the fresh aspirants will part with N3.3 million. Members of the House of Representatives, who intend to return, will pay N3.2 million, while fresh aspirants will pay N2.2 million. Fresh



aspirants for the state House of Assemblies are to pay N550, 000, while seating lawmakers are expected to pay N800, 000. (Nweje, 2014).

How many honest Nigerian youths can afford these amounts? Or is this not a deliberate attempt to keep the youth away from contesting for elective offices?

We do not want to go into issues of intimidation, threat of credible youth who want to participate in elections. In the light of this, how would an honest and credible Nigerian youth participate in elections?

The Youth: Even the youths are not helping matters as well. This is because some of them allow themselves to be used in stopping fellow youth in participating in elections. They do this by, following the order of our never-get-old politicians, helping in intimidating and molesting fellow youth who want to participate in elections.

9. WOMEN AND POLITICAL EXCLUSION

Democracy in its earliest form as practised in Athens and Rome excluded women and children. However, that particular practice is no longer acceptable since there is greater call for women participation in politics. Again, women have proven beyond all doubt that they are capable of making significant contributions to democracy and its development. Women, classified as weaker sex, are often relegated to the background in matter of politics and other decision-making activities or positions. This stems from the roles assigned to women in the society by the society. Women are given the reproductive role while their male counterparts are given the productive role. Some of our cultural practices have not also been exactly very helpful in this regard as women are more often than not relegated to domestic works while men go out, participate in decision making, and more so in matters that are of direct consequence to women.

In the Igbo culture, women are not allowed to participate directly in decision making because men do that on their behalf. Girl-child also is socialised to accept these roles, to be submissive, stay at home and take care of the house and do other menial works. Boys are socialised to be assertive, domineering, in-charge and in control. As a result of this, women tend to shy away in issues that demand their being assertive, in-charge and to take decision, major or minor. However, this trend is changing as women have come to understand that they can do other things beyond taking care of domestic chores. It is this awareness that has called for greater participation of women in politics. Women empowerment, gender equality campaign, and re-orientation of women have all contributed in waking up the 'sleeping giants' in them. The society also has come to understand that women have leadership qualities that could be very helpful in the development of the society. In most societies women assume five key roles: mother, producer, home-manager, community organizer and socio-cultural and political activists. (Agbalajobi, 2010). It is this new dimension in the roles of women that have generated the 'cry' for greater participation of women in politics.

From 1999 till date, women participation has been everything but encouraging. Women participation in democratic processes through electioneering has not reached the desired height. This is consequent upon the common knowledge that Nigerian politics is male dominated. As a result, women are made to participate by voting more than they are elected. The political field has not been very conducive to encourage more female participation. This is seen in the way elective offices are 'shared' among the anointed ones even elections are conducted. In addition to that, the politics sometimes become very violent and threatening that it requires greater courage to even think of going into the process. Again, the high cost of party tickets also has not been positive in encouraging greater women participation in politics. The list is endless. We shall therefore try to look at past elections in Nigeria from 1999 to 2015 and see how women fared.

Women and Elections in Nigeria

The 1999 Nigerian Constitution Section 41(2) makes it clear that: A citizen of Nigeria of a particular community, ethnic group, place of origin, sex, religion or political opinion shall not, by reason only that he is such a person be subjected to any form of discrimination. The above lays to rest the question as to whether or not any particular group is qualified to participate in elections or not. However, the practice in Nigeria states otherwise as women are not given a level playing ground to participate in elections. From 1999 till date, Nigeria is yet to have her first female president, vice-president, senate president or governor. In 2003 in States like Adamawa, Cross River, Ebonyi, Jigawa, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Nasarawa, Oyo, Sokoto, Yobe and Zamfara, no woman was elected as member of the State House of Assembly. (Agbalajobi, 2010). This point to the fact that women have not been given opportunity to serve in that regard, not that they are not qualified, but they have not been elected. The same trend continues to other elective offices in the country. The following further shows the unequal representation of women in elective position from 1999 to 2015: The National Assembly in 1999 had three (3) (2.8%) female Senators and twelve (12) (3.3%) female House of Representatives members. In 2003, four (4) (3.7%) and twenty one (21) (5.8%) female members were elected respectively into the Assembly. In



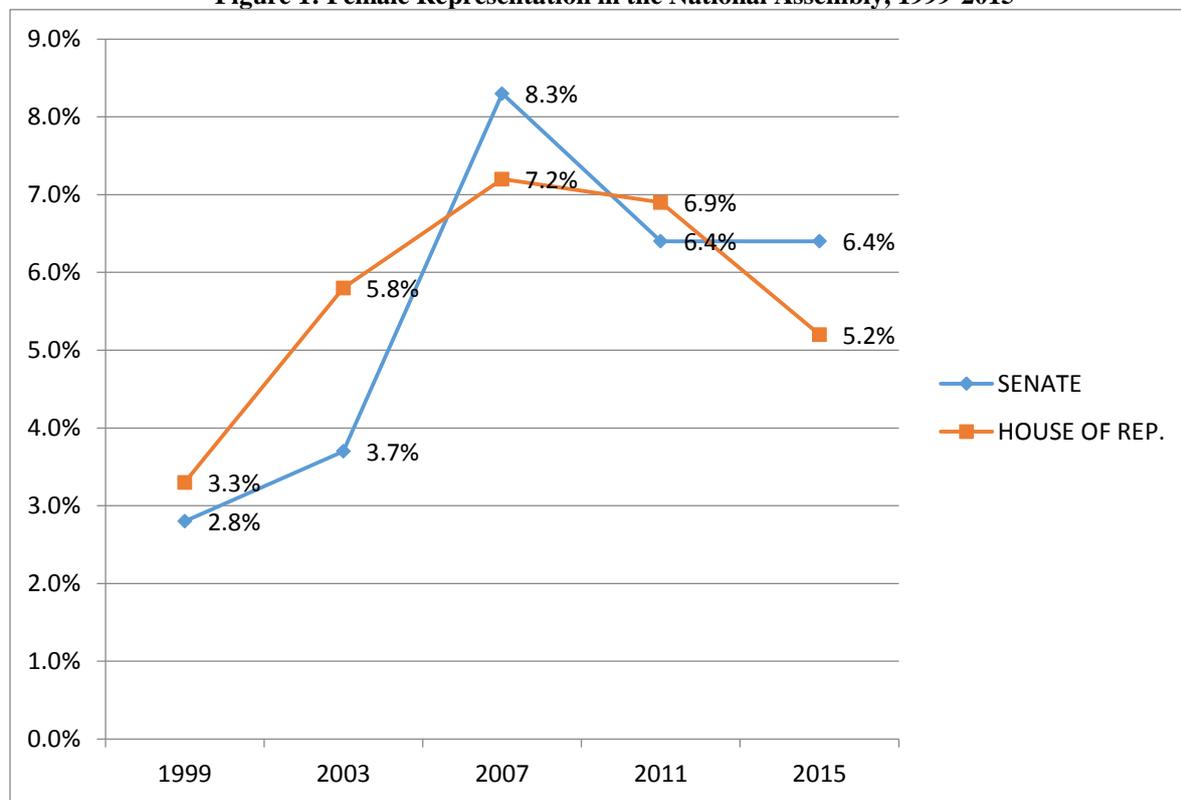
2007 the National Assembly had nine (9) (8.3%) female Senators and twenty-six (26) (7.2%) female members of House of Representatives. In 2011, the National Assembly had seven (7) (6.4%) female members and twenty-five (25) (6.9%) female members in the lower House. In 2015, the National Assembly has seven (7) (6.4%) female members in Senate and (19) (5.2%) female in the House of Representatives. These are presented in the table and graph below: Female Members of Nigerian National Assembly 1999-2015 Year Senate/House of Representatives.

Table 2: Female Members of Nigerian National Assembly, 1999-2015

YEAR OF ELECTION	SENATE	HOUSE OF REPS
1999	3 (2.8%)	12 (3.3%)
2003	4 (3.7%)	21 (5.8%)
2007	9 (8.3%)	26 (7.2%)
2011	7(6.4%)	25 (6.9%)
2015	7 (6.4%)	19 (5.2%)

Source: <http://www.inecnigeria.org>

Figure 1: Female Representation in the National Assembly, 1999-2015



Source: <http://www.inecnigeria.org>

Out of 11 candidates for the office of the presidency, in 2015 only one is a woman, Oluremi Sonaiya of Kowa Party. Similarly, out of 11 running mates only one is a woman again – Obianuju Murphy-Uzohue of ADC (Sani, 2014).

In the 29 states where gubernatorial elections held this year, the representation of women seeking the office of governor and deputy governor was 87 out of the 380 candidates (22.9 per cent) running for the positions. (Adesuwa, 2015). No woman made it to the governorship position and only 4 became deputies. This, without a second thought, is poor representation of the highest order. In the wake of all these, one would ask: what is the problem with women and getting to elective offices in Nigeria?

Possible Causes of Women Failure in Politics in Nigeria

Cultural Barriers: Some of our cultural practices have not encouraged women participation in politics. Women are socialized to being receptive, homely and mostly concerned with house chores. This particular role



distribution and biological division of labour has kept women away from active participation in elections and elective offices. Often, they are cajoled and made to stay away from politics describing it as only meant for men. In addition, since women are not allowed to participate in decision making process in our traditional settings, they are not seen as being capable of leading or being qualified for the rigours of Nigerian politics.

Women Idea of Politics: Some women have serious phobia for violence and related issues. Consequently, since some of them, and even some men have equally this misunderstanding of politics, perceive politics as a dirty game, full of violence and uncertainty, some women decide to stay out of politics to avoid getting caught in the middle. Also, the belief that men are more rugged and strong enough to deal with the rigours and hassles of politics has also kept women away from political activities. The violence recorded in Nigerian politics, the blackmailing, and the killings and so on have not also been very helpful. Instead of being active participants in elections and democratic process they seem to be more comfortable with being passive, observers and what I may term 'supporters' club' who sing the praises of the 'daring men' involved in battle for supremacy in the battle field.

Poverty: As stated earlier, the cost of participation in politics in Nigeria is very high. Not very many honest Nigerians can participate in politics because of its exorbitant nature. Women on the other hand could find it a little harder to cope with the expenses as they have access to some financial aids as men do. In addition, not many persons would be ready and willing to sponsor women during elections as their chances of winning are very slim as compared to men. Evidently, men would have more access to sponsors and other financial grants for that purpose than most women would do. Following this, women political ambitions have been seriously hampered by economic constraints.

Gender Roles: Since women are socialised that their responsibility is more of reproduction and taking care of homes, there seems to be a conflict of ideas and intention when women opt to participate actively in politics. This is stemming from the fact women, as believe by greater part of the society, as supposed to be at home, taking care of the children and supporting their husbands whose primary responsibility it is to go out there and make money for the family. Production is therefore the primary obligation of the man of the house. Women seeking to participate in politics are seen as going outside their confines or jurisdiction. In addition, there is this belief, which I want to believe to be erroneous, that women are more emotional than men and therefore incapable of taking certain 'hard decisions' that elective offices demand of their holders. The thinking that women may not be as firm and stout as men in dealing with certain difficult situations associated with politics.

10. CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATION

We have in this paper, attempted the discussion of equity and inclusion in consolidating democracy in Nigeria and found out that youths and women are mostly excluded as the political field is not level for all to participate due to variegated constraints as discussed. We therefore reiterate that, the task of nation building is for all and not for some. Besides, Nigeria is for all of us, youth and women inclusive. Therefore, if we really do want to grow as a nation, we need to allow all participate and contribute his quota in nation building. Politics is not only for old men as some have taken our Senate and House of Representatives as retirement homes. Let us imitate other developed nations: Obama Barack became president of the United State at the age of 47, Stephen Joseph Harper of Canada became president at the age of 47, John Dramani Mahama of Ghana became president at the age of 54, Dilma Rousseff of Ukraine became president at the age of 49. Where are our 40-50 years olds? Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner of Argentina, Dilma Rousseff of Brazil are examples of women who have shown their strength of character in leadership.

11. POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS TO THE DEPLORABLE STATUS QUO

Need for the Future: There is this adage in land: *anaghi amu aka ekpe na nka*, which means that one does not learn how to use left hand at old age. In variably, if our country aims for greatness in the nearest future, then the youth as a matter of imperative are to get seriously involved in politics and electioneering. It is only through that means that they would be able to learn the act of leadership and the needed qualities. In addition, the strength of any country is her youth. Invariably, if our youths are kept out of politics, it means that sooner or later, our democracy would suffer more that it is already suffering. We are told that the future belongs to the youth and they are not adequately prepared to take charge of the future which belongs to them. The youth have a lot to offer this great nation. This explains why I am pained why I see our able and capable youth wasting their youthfulness on things that would benefit us little or nothing at all. Most of our youths stay idle, and of course when they are not gainfully employed, they would in one way or the other get themselves busy. hat they might be doing is what I cannot say but most times, they do not pay, not the individual, and not also the nation in general.



Re-structuring of our educational system: Bad system begets bad products. Some of our leaders have decided to making political offices some 'oil well' instead of doing what they were elected to do in the first place. Little attention is paid to our youth and their development which has led to lots of inadequacies in our system. We do have very many steadfast and dedicated youth. The strength of character of some of our youth leaves more to be desired, some of them do not even have access to basic education, the educated ones are predominantly unemployed, the employed ones hardly make ends meet with the meagre salary they are paid. At least the minimum wage is N18,000 while our senators and other political office holders are buying choice property in the most expensive countries in the world. It is only when we pay attention to our youth that they can face the challenges of discovering their potentials and making use of them in nation building through democratic process.

Also, most of our youths do not even know what is expected of them. Of course, they are not taught. Political orientation and awareness is done only when elections are around the corner. Some of them are schooled in how to rig elections for as small as a monthly allowance of ₦10-50,000. Even the desire to participate in politics is killed and buried in as much as they get their daily bread. On the other hand, there is urgent need to educate the girl-child especially on her role in nation building through participation in politics. Women, all over the world have shown that they are equal and capable of leading. As a matter of fact, some women leaders have shown that they have the wherewithal to lead their people to greater height. In addendum, women could be better organisers and managers. This is seen in the way and manner they manage and run their homes. And I want to believe that a country is a bigger family. It is only when we educate our women; re-orient them that they can live up to their potentials and talents. There is equally the need to change the orientation that women are 'good only in house chores' because their sex does not by any means make them less human.

Changing our Orientation of Politics: Our politics is more of a battle field where the winner gets it all. The way and manner we practice our politics does not encourage fairness and equity. Besides, the greed, selfishness and quest to hold on to power for a life time has made our politics very unattractive to many honest and decent Nigerians, women and youth inclusive. There is need to see political offices as call to service in which case, no one forces his way to services. If that is done, it is no longer service but business. The violence, blackmailing, backbiting, murder and politics of hate/discord/acrimony and tribe/religion should be avoided if we are to advance and grow as a nation. It is only if we have a relatively fair and violent free democracy that we can have more persons desiring to participate.

Need to look at Constitution: Our law-makers are to look at this particular issue of age of candidacy. This is because we have great potential in our youth and women who are under 30 who can make meaningful contributions to our democratic process. Besides, other nations like France, Ireland all have 18 and 21 as their age of candidacy respectively. In my opinion, we are not doing better than they are doing in their politics. Our sister country South Africa equally states that any one who is eligible to vote can be voted for to the parliament. It is important we get our youth and women involved in politics since democracy is for all, and by all. Even if we cannot get to 18years as the age for candidacy, we can use 25 since at that stage, one is already a full grown adult.

Poverty and cost of Participating in Elections: There is an urgent need to look at how best we can make our politics modest in expenses. It is a call to service and not some 'coronation or title taking'. At the end of the day, the poor gets the highest hit. Our youth remain in poverty and our women remain observers since they cannot afford the huge sum needed to participate in election process. Political parties should also make it a point of duty to see to it that they encourage youth and women to participate in elections by bringing down the cost of party tickets. Elections are not only for money bags. This explains why someone would spend all his life savings and even go borrowing to get to a particular political office. When one gets there, your guess is as good as mine. And who suffers...the economy and the youth with women. At least let us learn from other countries whose politics does not need to make one go borrowing, have god-father with whom they will be sharing the state or local government allocations. It is only when we make our politics simpler and more modest that we will have more honest, decent, dedicated and purpose driven leaders in leadership positions.

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