

A Stock-Taking on the Contribution of Women in Nigeria's National Assembly, 1999-2011

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Abstract

The study appraises the role of women in Nigeria's National Assembly between 1999 and 2011. The data was generated through primary sources and corroborated with secondary materials. Its approach was historical, narrative, and analytical in nature. The study was pillared on liberal feminism and the global advocacy for women's involvement in Nigerian politics. Against this backdrop, it was discovered that women were not watchers but were active participants in the legislative business of the National Assembly. It was also found that women were not adequately represented and were not given principal positions in the National Assembly. Despite their under-representation, they also faced abuse and humiliation by their male counterparts. In order to enhance women participation in Nigerian politics, women's political rights should be protected, including scaling up the implementation of the 35%

Affirmative Action plan. The study also suggests that the politics of verbal assault should be discouraged.

Keywords

Women, Politics, National Assembly, Nigeria

1. Introduction

It is a truism that 'the achievement of democracy presupposes a genuine partnership between men and women in the conduct of the affairs of society in which they work in equality and complementarily, drawing mutual enrichment from their differences' (The Universal Declaration on Democracy, 1997). However, in Nigeria, women have been marginalised in certain aspects of political governance. Historically, this lies in the African culture of patriarchy, male chauvinism, and anarchy. Colonialism further reinforced pre-existing structures of women marginalisation through the kinds of policies that the British government implemented in the country. The overall implication is that colonial policies undermine the rights of women with great implications for Nigerian contemporary politics. Hitherto, there is the exploitation and marginalisation of women in the affairs of development both in the private and public spheres (Abdul, et al., 2011). For instance, women's representation in the National Assembly, especially from 1999-2011 stood at 7.3%.¹ Although few women have been entrusted with higher political positions in Nigeria, they have demonstrated remarkable achievements, as the few cases discussed below reveal.

One is **OKonjo Iweala**, whose exploits in the debt negotiation between Nigeria and the Paris or London Club cannot be forgotten. Her diplomatic efforts brought about the eventual cancellation and forgiveness of Nigeria's debt running into billions of American dollars (Bukar, 2020; Gbamwuan, 2015). Furthermore, because of Iweala's leadership capacity, she has been selected as a board member of several international organisations and companies such as Standard Chartered Bank, Twitter, Global Alliance for Vaccines and

¹ UNDP HDR (2010): "*The Real Wealth of Nations: Pathways to Human Development*". Available at: <http://hdr.undp.org/en/reports/global/hdr2010/chapters/>. Accessed, 28-10-2022.

Immunization (GAVI), and the African Risk Capacity (ARC).² Two is **Dora Akunyili**, who served as the head of the National Agency for Food Administration and Control (NAFDAC) and was instrumental in the relative decrease of fake drugs and food items. Before her administration, more than half of the drugs in the country were counterfeit. Dora dropped this figure from 70% to 10% between 2001 and 2009 before she left the office. Her achievements cannot be forgotten soon in Nigerian historiography. The third is Folashade Esan, who also made viable exploits in her career. She was a core civil servant who grew to the peak of her civil service career and was appointed as the Head of Civil Service of the Federation in February 2020.³ Esan was a competent hand in steering the federation's affairs during her service tenure. On her assumption of duty, Esan quickly spearheaded a reform programme known as the Federal Civil Service Strategy and Implementation Plan (FCSSIP), 2017-2020.⁴ The target of this plan was to do away with the ineffective hands in the federal civil service and also to introduce the digital system in the civil service workplace. With this strategy, it was hoped that economic, social, and environmental sustainability issues would be addressed. The programme was derived from the Economic Recovery and Growth Plan (ERGP) and was consistent with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).⁵

Hadiza Bala Usman, is the fourth example. Being a Managing Director of the Nigerian Ports Authority (NPA), from 11th July 2016 to 6th May 2021 made an indelible mark in revenue generation to the federation's coffers. She achieved this feat by blocking leakages and raising money for the Consolidated Revenue Account running into billions of naira.⁶ These are only a few examples that suffice here. Therefore, the contributions of women to the

² *This Day Newspaper*, (2020). 'Women who will shape events in Nigeria in 2020'. Available at: <https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2020/01/03/20-women-who-will-shape-events-in-nigeria-in-2020/>. Accessed, 15-06-2022.

³ *The Top 10 Magazine*, (2021). 'Folashade Yemi-Esan: Head of Civil Service of the Federation', Available at: <https://thetop10magazine.com.ng/folashade-yemi-esan-head-of-civil-service-of-the-federation/>. Accessed, 15-06-2022.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

socio-economic and political development of Nigeria cannot be overemphasised. Despite such demonstrable achievements, women in Nigeria remain highly marginalised in public realms largely because Nigeria is a traditional patriarchy. Article 42 of the 1999 Constitution prohibits gender discrimination but this is not practicable. For instance, in Northern Nigeria, women's marginalisation is culturally established and capped in Sharia laws. Apart from this instance, a gendered division of labour, disparities between males' and females' access to power and resources, and gender biases in rights and entitlements remain pervasive. Although, Nigeria ratified the Convention for Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1990, the Nigerian Constitution fails to take cognisance of women's discrimination in the political arena. CEDAW has not been domesticated by the Nigerian government. Arising from constitutional lacuna and non-domestication of international treaties, the marginalisation of women in all aspects of life persists. It is against this background that an appraisal of women's role in the National Assembly amidst marginalisation since 1999 and 2011 is made. The paper answers the question, how women parliamentarians play their representation role and what challenges do they face amid a myriad of political and cultural constraints.

This study contributes to the body of existing literature on gender and politics in Nigeria. This is because scholars have written on the various roles of Nigerian women in politics. Aluko (2011) interrogates the neutrality of gender in Nigerian politics. His study uses the cases of two women Abike Dabiri-Erewa and Erelu Olusola Obada, to prove the capabilities of women in handling sensitive political posts in Nigeria. Abdul et al. (2011) look into the nature and dynamics of women's marginalisation in Nigeria before colonialism to post-colonialism. The authors argued that because women were skewed out of political engineering, they formed political associations to articulate their course. Okpukpara (2010) examines the role analysis of women in Nigeria's National Assembly between 1999 and 2009 against the backdrop of implementing policies that enhances women's welfare in society. Olu and Temitayo (2014) analyse how women are generally marginalised in the scheme of Nigerian politics. Lai (2013) focuses on crucial points to justify why women should be given both elective and appointive posts in Nigerian politics. Damilola (2005) presents a good number of factors for women's low participation in Nigerian politics. Eme et al, (2008) articulate the high level of women's marginalisation in decision-making and leadership positions in

Nigeria with a special spotlight on Enugu state. Erunke and Shuaibu (2013) link the contemporary poor participation of women in Nigerian politics to the Hugh Clifford constitution of 1922 in which women were disfranchised. Eme and Onuigbo (2015) examine how women who contested the 2015 general election in Nigeria fared in the aftermath of the elections. Adewale (2013) discusses leadership crises in the senate from 1999 and 2007. He probes the elements of corruption, intra-elite struggle, and the dimensions of legislative-executive conflict in the determination of the internal power struggle and leadership instability within the Nigerian Senate. Nwanolue and Ojukwu (2012) on their part examine the roles of the Fourth Republic National Assembly in actualizing legislative efficiency and democratic stability in the governance and politics of Nigeria. Therefore, this study paid attention to the role of women in the national assembly between 1999 and 2011. Within this period, few women who were elected to the National Assembly participated actively both in the legislative and oversight functions hence the need to document their achievements and travails. It is on this premise that the study fills in the vacuum left by other researchers.

The study is structured into seven parts with an ongoing introduction. The second part dwells on the research methodology. The third part anchors on an overview of the National Assembly in Nigeria. The fourth part makes analysis of feminism and advocacy for women's rights as a theoretical framework in which the study is pillared. The fifth beames women parliamentarians' contribution to the National Assembly in Nigeria. Special emphasis is on the areas of lawmaking, participation in committees, and constituency projects. In the sixth part, the study examines certain challenges women faced in the National Assembly as a reflection of what Nigerian women are facing in society today. The seventh part is the conclusion and recommendations.

2. Research Methodology

The study made use of primary and secondary materials. The primary materials used were newspapers, government policy documents and publications, and oral interviews. These materials were obtained mainly from the National Archives Ibadan, Enugu, and Kaduna. While oral interviews were conducted with politicians, women parliamentarians, academics, and electorates across the six geo-political areas. To do this a total of 120 people were interviewed, 20 in each geo-political region. Women parliamentarians

were key informants. Secondary sources were extensively used including a desk review of journal articles, chapters in books, and published books. This information was sourced in libraries and on the internet. The research approach was historical, narrative, and analytical. The takeoff period of 1999 was justified on the premise of the democratic resurgence after a long period of military regimes in the country. The terminal period of 2009 also marked 12 years of uninterrupted democratic government in Nigeria which is long enough to document the historical developments in the country.

3. Nigeria's National Assembly: an Overview

The National Assembly is one of the three organs of government in Nigeria). These organs of government perform independent but complementary roles for the smooth management of the administration. Historically, the Nigeria National Assembly was modelled after the British Westminster parliamentary style. Four elements of the Westminster tradition have had long-term effects on the capacity of the Nigerian legislature to engage in policy-making and implementation as Joel Barkan noted:

One, the Legislative Assembly was 'established as a deliberative body rather than as an institution for the making of public policy'. Two, the work of legislative committees, which enabled legislators to effectively oversee government operations, was highly controlled. Three, cabinet ministers were entirely drawn from the ranks of the legislature, limiting checks and balances. And four, the role of the legislature in the budgetary process was minimal since the executive and legislative powers were fused (Barkan, 2009; Akindele, 1990).

As a result of the above, the legislature in the Westminster model served more as an arena for policy debate than a mechanism for the translation of policies into laws. The Nigerian Legislative Assembly in the 1960s conceived its role in line with the Westminster tradition as basically debating policies and questioning the government (Awotokun, 1998). This shaped the way it approached its work; at that time, policy issues were agreed upon within the party, and members of the assembly were not expected to challenge agreed positions or initiate independent policy positions.

Nigeria's parliamentary government was toppled in 1966, and the military rulers concentrated power on the executive for several years. In 1979 when the military handed over power to civilians, the parliamentary system was replaced with an American-style presidential system following the constitutional changes that accompanied the transition (Heywood, 2007; Edigheji, 2006). Under the new arrangement, Nigeria's Legislative Assembly began to see the passage of laws and oversight as its main function in line with the traditions of the presidential system of government (Lafenwa and Gberebie, 2007). The Nigeria National Assembly was, therefore, modelled as a bicameral legislature after the Federal Congress of the United States of America. Chapter V, Part I, and Articles 47-of The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, of 1999 sets out the functions and powers of the National Assembly and its relationship with the Executive . The National Assembly consists of a 109-member House of Senate, three per state and one from Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja. The House of Representatives has 360 members allotted to the 36 states and the FCT, based on population. Members of the House of Representatives are elected from single-member districts, with elections held every four years concurrently with presidential polls.

The Legislative arm of government is of different forms depending on the kind of function they perform. Baldwin (1989:20) grouped them according to their policy-influencing nature which is; 'policy-making legislatures or active legislatures, policy-influencing legislatures or reactive legislatures, legislatures with minimal or marginal policy effect, and legislatures with no real policy effect or rubberstamps legislatures'. Considering the functions of the Nigerian legislatures, they belong to the policy-making category. They enjoy a significant level of autonomy and cannot only amend or reject measures brought forward by the Executive but can substitute for a policy of their own (Edigheji, 2006). Legislative functions in Nigeria could be better appreciated when at least three levels of broad objectives are put into consideration. These are expressed powers as stated in the Constitution, implied powers that arise as a result of the constitutional extension, and the assumed powers emanating from a lacuna found in the Constitution or better addressed as 'Consensus building'.

From the constitutional standpoint, the amended Nigerian 1999 Constitution state the legislative functions in Article 4. Specifically, the Nigeria legislature is to provide the following functions:

Lawmaking and policy formulation functions, Oversight functions, Investigative functions, Amendment of the constitution and laws, Control of the administration or executive, Representative or constituency, Determination and control of finance (The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, of 1999).

The Constitution stipulates that a bill may originate from the Senate or the House, but the President has to give assent to become a law. Here the principle of checks and balances comes into play. The President is, therefore, obliged to signify that he assents or will not assent to a bill within 30 days. The National Assembly to control the excess or abuse of Presidential powers is given the right to override the presidential veto regarding a bill by a two-thirds majority of members of both houses passing the bill in a joint sitting (Heywood, 2007). The National Assembly also has the power to impeach the President if he or she is involved in a grave violation of the Constitution or a misconduct of such nature as amounts in the opinion of the National Assembly to gross misconduct. The Constitution requires that public spending shall be done only as stipulated by the Constitution or through the Appropriation Act or any other Act of Parliament.

The Constitution in Articles 88 and 89 specifies the oversight powers of the National Assembly. They are 'powers to conduct investigations, to take evidence and summon any person in Nigeria to give evidence and to confirm an appointment to high public offices' (1999 Constitution; Abonyi, 2006). The oversight capacity of the National Assembly seems to have grown significantly since 1999. The Assembly exercises its oversight function concerning the budget, particularly scrutinizing allocations and monitoring expenditures. It has done this by visiting government departments to monitor budget implementation and has challenged the presidency on the non-implementation of the Appropriation Acts. A key element of the National Assembly's oversight role is the conduct of public hearings and committee investigations. The expansion of the committee system, in terms of the number of committees, staffing, resources, and experience has led to inquiries into government activities (Okoosi-Simbine, 2010). An important feature of the Nigerian Legislative Assembly under the presidential system is that it adopts a committee system in performing its responsibilities. There are

four categories of committees: special committees, standing committees, *ad hoc* committees, and committees of the whole house. There are also joint sittings of the two chambers of the National Assembly. The special committees and the standing committees are the life wires of the Assembly. The number of legislative committees in the National Assembly has increased rapidly since 1999.⁷ Legislative committees are expected to play specific roles, including information gathering and dissemination to the public, informing policy debate, contributing to policy agendas, holding government to account, and bringing the legislature closer to the people (Burnell, 2002). However, the committees of the National Assembly have not been entirely effective in discharging these responsibilities notwithstanding their efforts and the internal reforms they have undertaken. The legislative committees require more expertise and enforcement capacity to effectively carry out their responsibilities.

4. Feminism and Advocacy for Women's Rights: A Theoretical Framework

This study employs feminism as an approach to analyse women's struggle in legislative politics. Feminism is diverse, competing, and often opposing collection of social theories, political movements, and moral philosophies. It is largely motivated by or concerning the experiences of women, especially in terms of their social, political, and economic inequalities (Atim, 2016:13). Feminism as a political ideology can be categorised into liberal feminism, social feminism, radical/Marxist feminism, cultural feminism, eco-feminism, black feminism, and post-modern feminism, *et cetera* (Atim, 2016;).⁸ Although, liberal and radical/Marxist feminism is of utmost interest to this study. Liberal

⁷ Fashagba, Y. 'The Roles of the Committee System in Enhancing Legislative Efficiency in Nigeria: The Case of Kwara State House of Assembly'. Available on: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/237398671_The_Roles_of_the_Committee_System_in_Enhancing_Legislative_Efficiency_in_Nigeria_The_Case_of_Kwara_State_House_of_Assembly. Accessed, 20-08-2022.

⁸ Feminism Types and Features, available at: <https://study.com/learn/lesson/feminism-types-features-liberal-cultural.html#:~:text=The%20four%20main%20types%20of,Black%20feminism%20and%20eco%2Dfeminism>. Accessed, 28-10-2022.

feminism had its roots in the 16th and 17th centuries in social contract theory.⁹ Liberal feminism promotes the social ideas of liberty and equality (Adam, 2002). In the western world, the idea of liberalism blossomed in the 19th and 20th centuries and has continued to wax stronger in the 21st century. Liberalism jettisons gender discrimination while amplifying equality in the socio-economic and political calculus of a state. On the other hand, radical/Marxist feminism was a 1960's explosive phenomenon against sexism. According to Jaggor and Rothenberg (1993), it was a violent approach against the continued marginalisation of women in all spheres of life in society. The use of liberal and radical feminism to analyse this study stemmed from the fact that there is no justification for marginalising women in politics. This is because women as well have important roles to play in the development of any society hence they should be given equal opportunities.

Following this line of argument is the Beijing Declaration of 1995 which was the fourth international conference on women, with over 46,000 women in attendance across 189 countries.¹⁰ At this conference, the importance of economic and political participation, empowerment, power-sharing, and decision-making for women was encouraged. Also, issues concerning the violent impact of armed conflict on women and children and the plight of the girl child are critical to Women's development and were amplified in this conference as well (Atim, 2016). Critically important, women demanded new partnerships between government and civil society so that they can work together to address common problems.

5. An Assessment of Women in Nigeria's National Assembly

The major business in the National Assembly is lawmaking. For a Bill to be passed into law (whether an executive or a legislative Bill), it must pass through five stages namely; First reading, second reading, committee stage, report stage, and third reading. Other functions carried out in the National

⁹ Internet Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, available at: <https://iep.utm.edu/soc-cont/>. Accessed, 28-10-2022.

¹⁰ UN World Conference on Women, Available at: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/how-we-work/intergovernmental-support/world-conferences-on-women>. Accessed, 29-10-2022.

Assembly are considered oversight and are effectively conducted through the various committees and sub-committees of the two Houses. Therefore, this section explores the roles of women in the National Assembly under the following sub-themes:

Presentation of Bills

Women have presented a good number of Bills in the National Assembly. Some of these bills centred on the emancipation of women and children from the ills of society. Few of these Bills have escaped all the legislative hurdles to become legislative laws. Among these bills is; 'The Violence Against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) Bill 2008'. The Bill was presented to the Senate Committee on Judiciary, Human Rights, and Legal Matters in July 2008 during a Public Hearing on the Sexual Offences (Prohibition) Bill and Public Nudity Bill sponsored by Christiana Anyanwu and Emem Ufot Ekaette respectively.¹¹ What informs the presentation of this Bill was the neglect of various kinds of assault on women and girls' bodily integrity. There is a rising incidence of sexual violence, such as rape, incest, sexual assault, and the like in society against women and girls. Even though there are Criminal and Penal Codes that are established to tackle such ills against women and children but they are fraught with a lot of inadequacies. For example, they fail to take into consideration new forms of violence against women like; gang rape, acid bath, stalking, economic abuse, and so forth. It is against this backdrop that VAPP Bill was initiated by these women parliamentarian during the 6th Senate. Other Bills of similar nature were harmonised and followed up by key actors of the Legislative Advocacy Coalition on Violence against Women (LACVAW), such as WRAPA and FIDA Nigeria. The harmonised Bill was passed into law on the 25th of May, 2015 having met stiff resistance for several years. The Bill got assent before President Goodluck Jonathan left Office on the 29th of May 2015.

Other Pro-Women Bills Presented by women in the National Assembly between 1999 and 2011 are best captured in the table 1 below.

Table 1: Bills Presented by Women Legislators in the National Assembly from 1999-2011.

¹¹ Solidarity for African women's rights on; <http://www.soawr.org/blog/legislative-advocacy>, Accessed 10-10-202.

S/N	Type of Bill	Initiator
1	National Centre for Women Development (establishment) Act Bill	Hon. Fatima Raji Rasaki
2	Maternal and Child Welfare /Health Services	Sen. Olubunmi Etteh
3	Maternal and Child Welfare Health Services Procedure Act.	Sen. Stella Onu
4	Domestic Violence Bill.	Sen. Daisy Danjuma
5	Widows Protection Bill.	Sen. Iyabo Anisolowo
6	A bill for An Act to Establish a Women's Institute of Management.	Sen. Florence Ita Giwa
7	National Institute of Reproductive Health Bill.	Sen. Daisy Danjuma

Source: Legislative Activities for the Senate/ House of Representatives (2009) (commemorating 10 years of Democracy in Nigeria 1999-2009).

The above table shows that women were active participants in the National Assembly during the period under study. They presented quality Bills that target to emancipate Nigerian women and children from societal ills. Women also presented Bills generally for the development of Nigeria. Gbemisola Rugayyah Saraki for instance presented at least 6 Bills during her single tenure in the House of Representatives namely; National Agency for Occupational Safety and Health (Establishment) in 2004, Nigerian Tourism Development Corporation (Amendment) Bill 2004, Protective Helmets (Mandatory Use) Bill 2004, Legal Aid Council (Amendment) Bill 2004, Existing

Vacancies (Publication) Bill 2005 and Public Interest Disclosure Bill 2005.¹² During her first tenure in the Senate (2007), she sponsored and/or co-sponsored 8 legislative Bills. These include the Skills Acquisition and Development Trust Fund Bill, 2007; Police Tax Fund Bill, 2007; Existing Vacancies (Publication) Bill, 2008; Nigerian Coast Guard Bill, 2008; National Transport Commission Bill, 2008; Anti-Terrorism Bill, 2008; Mortgage Regulatory Bill, 2009; and Labher Act (Amendment) Bill, 2009. A look at the quality of these bills touches on major problems in contemporary Nigerian society. Nigeria is witnessing a rising insurgency that threatens state sovereignty. Unemployment, poverty increase, the spread of communicable diseases, and violations of human rights are conspicuous in the Nigerian state. These are indices to measure state failure and these bills were targeted at solving these hydra-headed problems.

Among the Bills she presented, the Skills Acquisition and Development Trust Fund Bill, 2007 was the first legislative Bill sponsored during the 2007-2011 Senate, and this explains the reason why the Bill is tagged SB. 01 as a serial number. The Bill seeks to establish a Trust Fund whose function as spelled out in Section 5 of the Bill includes the:

Manage and disburse Funds for the acquisition, development, upgrading, and promotion of skills and expertise of persons who are either unemployed or are preparing to join the workforce, for poverty alleviation as well as employment generation by arranging training programs for qualified persons in appropriate institutions.¹³

From the foregoing discussion, it is clear that women were not watchers but rather active participants in the presentation of bills. Most of these bills became laws with great potential to contribute to national development. However, the problem with Nigerian society is the implementation of viable laws. There are well constructive laws that should have transformed Nigerian society into a better place to live but implementation is always a challenge.

¹² See <http://www.nigeriagallery.com/Nigeria/Personality-Profile>. accessed, 31-10-2022.

¹³ Ibid.

This has had negative effects on the development of the country since the democratic resurgence in 1999.

Participation in Committees

In Nigeria's National Assembly, legislative business is effectively done through a division of labour called committees and sub-committees. The formation of committees aims at handling broad oversight functions. Specifically, Committees are empowered to scrutinize bills and the conduct of government institutions and officials. It is on the premise of this understanding that Woodrow Wilson called it 'little legislatures'. The committee system is a checkpoint for a detailed, clause-by-clause examination of the content of a bill. Through committees, Policies are shaped, interest groups heard, and legislation hammered out. There are about 43 Senate committees in the House of Senate and 67 House committees in the House of Representatives during the period under investigation.¹⁴ On this basis, Fashagba asserts that; 'the utility of the committee system transcends the boundary of parliamentary and the presidential systems'.¹⁵ This is because, under the authoritarian regime of the communist state of the defunct Soviet Union, the committee system of organizing assembly into units for efficiency never existed.

In Nigeria, the Constitution in its Article 62 (1-4), and Article 103 (1-3) spell out the nature of committees that can be constituted and for what purpose a committee should be constituted, the procedures for constituting the committees, and the limit of the power the committees may exercise. Against this backdrop, Nigerian women in the National Assembly were active participants in those committees. Some of these women legislators were heads of the committees and they performed amazingly. For example, Iyabo Obasanjo-Bello who represented Ogun Central Senatorial District Chaired the Senate Committee on Health. She was also a committee member on Security and Intelligence, Land Transport, Science and Technology, Education, National Planning, and Inter-Parliamentary Committees.¹⁶ These are very crucial sectors of the nation's economy.

¹⁴ Oral Interview with Azodo, E. Age 42 Years, House Member Representing Aguata Federal Constituency in Anambra State. Interviewed on the 12th of July, 2017.

¹⁵ Opcit.

¹⁶ <http://www.nigeriagallery.com/Nigeria/Personality-Profiles>. Accessed, 20-08-2022.

Another woman who put indelible ink in the National Assembly was Gbemisola Rugayyah Saraki of Kwara North Central Senatorial District. As an active participant in the Senate, she chaired several high-profile committees, including the Senate Committee on National Planning, Poverty Alleviation and Economic Affairs, the Senate Committee on Corruption, and the Senate Committee on Marine Transport.¹⁷ Apart from being the Chairperson of the above-mentioned committees, she also acted as Vice-Chairperson of the Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs and belonged to the following Committees; Media and Publicity, Women Affairs and Youth Development, Environment and Ecology; and Public Accounts. She was also a Senate Committee member on Commerce, Rules and Business, Police Affairs, Intergovernmental Affairs, and Aviation. She plays a very important role in the success of all these assignments.¹⁸

Furthermore, the achievements of Helen Essuene, a Senator who represented the Akwa-Ibom South Senatorial District cannot be easily forgotten. During her time in the Senate, she was the Chairperson of the Senate Committee on Women Affairs and Youth Development and she draws a lot of attention to feminine issues like rape, domestic violence, and 35 percent Affirmative Action *et cetera* (Udefuna, 2015). Her committee was one of the most active Committees in the National Assembly. This is because there is hardly any week that there is no activity for women, youths, or children in the National Assembly. The sound contributions and relentless support of these women saw the various successes recorded during the period under review in the National Assembly.

Constituency Projects

A constituency project can simply mean a project in any community that is nominated into a budget by a particular legislator. Ayogu Eze corroborates this above position when he argued that; "Our role is simply to identify the projects for our constituency while the Executive arm of government will

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ <http://www.vanguardngr.com>. Accessed, 20-08-2022.

identify the contractor to execute the project” (Udefuna, 2015). Ike Ekweremadu justifies the rationale behind the idea of constituency projects to have come up as a result of the need to ensure equitable distribution of infrastructure in every part of the country (ibid.). Although, it has been closely observed that legislators have been collecting constituency projects in form of allowances over the years. These monies are hardly accounted for hence the paucity of projects in various constituencies across the Nigerian federation. It is on the strength of this analysis that most Nigerian masses view the idea as another conduit pipe through which the nation’s treasury is drained.

That notwithstanding, a few women legislators used their constituency allowances to execute tangible projects. For instance, Elizabeth Ogbaga who represented Ebonyi/Ohaukwu federal constituency from 2007–2011 is one of such women legislators. This political Amazon attracted various projects such as:

Oxygen Plants and Mammogram machines to Federal Medical Centre, Abakaliki, free anti-natal care services to pregnant mothers from Ebonyi/Ohaukwu Federal Constituency, construction of several 3-classroom blocks, hand-pump boreholes at Onuenyim Ishieke, Ndiofia Nkaleke, Igweledoha, Ogbala Parish, Effenyim, Oterufie Nkaleke, Ndiechi-Ndiugo Isophumini, Mbeke Isophumini, St. Michael Parish Mbeke Ishieke, Nwonuewo-Effium Ohaukwu, Ogen Ohaukwu, and Umugadu Community Secondary School. She also constructed National Health Care Centres at Izenyi Agbaja in Izzi LGA and Ohagelode... constructed a bridge across the Ebonyi river at Odomoke and Ogene-Abarigwe-Ogwudu-Ano-Unum road in Ohaukwu LGA. She built a computer centre at community secondary school Isophumini Ishieke, provided classroom furniture at Umugadu community primary school, and supplied school desks, tables, and chairs at Ogbaga Primary School, Ohagelode Primary School, Girls Secondary School Ndulo Ngbo, and Mbeke Isophumini Primary School. In addition, she built Rev. Fr’s quarters at St. Michael Parish Mbeke

and provided VIP Latrines at Ohagelode, Ogbaga, and Umugadu primary schools (Udefuna, 2015:649).

The above projects carried out by this woman legislator were meant to better the lives of the local people in her constituency. Indeed, these are parameters to measure the delivery of democratic dividends in any nation in the world.

Another great Amazon of repute who ensures that her communities benefited the constituency funds during her tenure is Gbemi Saraki. She was renowned for constructing blocks of classrooms with toilet facilities for some Public Primary Schools in Ilorin West Senatorial District.¹⁹ She also provided classroom furniture, learning aids, books, and a borehole for each of the Public Primary Schools. Furthermore, she constructed a health centre in Apado, Ilorin-East LGA, kitted with medical equipment and furniture to enhance the quality of medical service to the people.²⁰ Other achievements made by Gbemi Saraki included the provision of hand pump boreholes that supplied drinkable water across the fifty-two (52) Wards in her Constituency. She was remarkable for the renovation of traditional rulers' palaces. The Palaces of the Alangwa Ajagusi, Alangwa Osin Aremu, Magaji Danialu, and Alangwa Opolo in Asa, Ilorin-West, and Ilorin-South were carried out respectively.²¹

Finally, were the exploits of Doris Uboh who represented Ika Federal Constituency in Delta State.²² The lawmaker performed extremely wonderfully. She sponsored the construction of Boreholes in different locations across the Ika constituency like; Umunede, Emuhu, Abavo, Obi-Agbor, and Owa-Alidinma. In the same 2008, she donated free drugs to 15 Health centres, Laboratory equipment to 10 Secondary Schools, across Ika Federal Constituency. The lawmaker presented a good number of seats/tables for teachers and students to different schools including Ogbemudien Secondary School, Omie Primary

¹⁹ <https://www.scribd.com/document/37293180>. Accessed, 20-08-2022.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² <https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2019/09/08/doris-uboh-ogunkoya-bids-politics-farewell/>. Accessed, 21-08-2022.

School, Okpu Primary School, *et cetera*. The facilities burst the development of the affected communities. All these are parameters for development and are ways in which people feel the impact of democratic dividends.

6. Challenges of Nigerian women in the National Assembly

Despite the quality contributions of women in the National Assembly from 1999 and 2011, they faced a lot of challenges in politicking in Nigeria. This is because society has underestimated the potential of women hence the perception of the 'Victorian Ideal' (Gbamwuan, 2015). As a result of this problem, women faced a lot of challenges including under-representation as captured in table 2.

Table 2: Women Representation in the National Assembly, 1999 – 2011 (In brackets is the percentage of women elected seats)

Year	1999-2003		2003-2007		2007-2011	
	seats	women	seats	women	seats	women
House of	109	3(2.8)	109	4 (3.7)	109	8 (7.3)
Senate						
House of Reps.	360	12(3.3)	360	21(5.8)	360	23 (6.4)

Source: Ekpan, N.E (2013). 'Men without Women: An Analysis of the 2015 General Election in Nigeria'. International Journal of Arts and Humanities (IJAH), Ethiopia, Vol.7. No.4, p.104.

The above table shows that from 1999 and 2011 general elections were held in Nigeria three consecutive times, namely; 1999, 2003, and 2007. There were 109 seats for the House of Senate and 360 seats for the House of

Representatives. In the Senate Chamber, 3 women were elected in 1999, 4 women in 2003, and 8 women in 2007. This represents in percentage 2.8, 3.7, and 7.3 respectively. In the House of Representatives, 12 women were elected in 1999, 21 women in 2003, and 23 women in 2007. This is also represented in percentages 3.3, 5.8, and 6.4 respectively. This show how women have been marginalised in the two houses during the period under review.

In the National Assembly, the leadership of both Houses was gendered. Within the period under study, no woman was elected as Senate President. The only woman who was given the post of the Speaker of the House of Representatives was Patricia Etteh in 2007 (Gbamwuan, 2015). The Speaker barely a few months in Office entered into a corruption saga by authorising the spending of 628 million Naira (about US\$5 million), on renovations of her official residence and that of her deputy, and the purchase of 12 official cars meant for the House of Representatives.²³ The Speaker could not stand the pressure from male folk in the National Assembly and other walks of life in Nigeria. In the National Assembly, accusations of theft were chanted at her as she tried to speak in the House, and she was escorted out by security as the situation degenerated into a commotion.

Other meaningful Nigerians like the author and academic, Wole Soyinka were among those who called for her resignation. In a letter requesting for her resignation or otherwise face impeachment, Reuben Abati underscores the Speaker's mistakes and failures, thus:

... The Idoko panel pointed out that the tender for the contracts was not advertised, no bill of quantities and drawings was prepared, there was no provision for the expenditure in the 2007 budget, and the companies that were given contracts are illegal entities that are unknown to the Corporate Affairs Commission. You told the panel and Nigerians that the N238 million was meant for the renovation of about eight houses in the Speaker's compound, but the panel found that the contract that was awarded was only for the Main

²³ <http://www.nigerianmuse.com/20070930223815z>. Accessed, 21-08-2022.

House. You told the panel that the Clerk of the House and his team acted on their own. The panel found that you gave written instructions to the Clerk to act as directed by you. The panel added that the basis for arriving at the sum of N238 million cannot be established. And that the House that you want to be renovated was renovated in 2005. What this panel has done is to tell Nigerians that the No 4 Citizen of Nigeria is a liar and a lawbreaker. It is a deep and sharp cut...²⁴

Abati continues his intimidating argument:

... In response you and your supporters have been saying that the panel has not indicted you and that only the House can declare you guilty or not. Some people have also said that the panel has not made any recommendations because it was not given the mandate to do so. With due respect. I will like to put it to you that you have been indicted by the Idoko panel. The legal meaning of indictment is not guilt but that you have a case to answer, in other words, a prima facie case has been established against you. And looking at the proof of evidence, the case is a bad one indeed. You may argue that nobody has accused you of embezzling money, at least not yet.²⁵

Even though the Speaker was indicted by the Idoko panel, however; Nigerians overreacted to this sage. This is because Patricia Etteh was not the first corrupt Principal Officer in the National Assembly. Other members of the National Assembly at different times were accused of one corrupt practice or the other but were not indicted by any panel. For example; In 2004 Uche Chukwumerije alleged that his colleague in the house, Arthur Nzeribe was

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

found wanting. Chukwumerije argued that Nzeribe gathered some other colleagues at his official residence on January 14 with an offer of 5 million Naira for each to mobilize and support the declaration of an emergency rule in Plateau State. (Newspapers, April 4, 2005). However, not ironically, rather than investigate the substance of the allegation, he was suspended for a month for using what the house termed 'unparliamentary language' and bringing the house into disrepute. This convinced us that the allegation was worth hearing. However, other senators waved it off and asked Chukwumerije to apologize to the house (Newspapers, April 4, 2005).

Another case was the Speaker of the House of Representatives Dimeji Bankole. He was alleged to be at the centre of the N5.2 billion Rural Electrification Agency scam but he was not indicted nor impeached (Olufemi, 2012). The 7th National Assembly dropped the corruption charges against Patricia without any explanation to Nigerians while she was no longer a member of the Green Chamber. The point to note here is that while the Nigeria's National Assembly has been marred with severe corruptions to the level that it has been tagged as the third most corrupt institution in the country,²⁶ cases of women and men with similar corruption scandals are handled differently with more strictness on women side.

Another example to demonstrate how women were marginalised in the National Assembly was an attempt in 2011 to elect Mulikat Akande as a female speaker of the House of Representatives to no avail (Olufemi, 2012). The intensity of women's marginalisation in the National Assembly can also be gleaned from the ranks of principal positions given to women. They were given lower posts like the minority whip, the deputy minority whip, and so forth. Patricia Etteh was selected as Deputy Chief Whip between 1999 and 2003 in the 8th Senate. Biodun Christine Olujimi was the Deputy Minority Whip (Olufemi, 2012). Similarly, in the House of Representatives Binta Bello was the Deputy Minority Whip. These were the only women that occupied principal positions in the 8th parliament and they were all deputies. The implication of this is that women were marginalised in the National Assembly since the resurgence of democracy in 1999 and 2011.

²⁶ Final Report (June 2003) Institute for Development Research, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria IDR, ABU Zaria.

Apart from marginalisation in Principal posts by their men counterparts in the National Assembly, Verbal abuse, assault, and battery of women became a pattern in Nigeria's democratic dispensation. This indeed is a reflection of the numerous cases of abuse that women face daily in our society. Women lawmakers faced such embarrassment and abuse; they were humiliated physically and verbally. For example, in October 2004, Isa Mohammed who represented Niger West Federal Constituency slapped the Chairperson of the Senate Committee on State and Local Government Iyabo Anisulowo. She represented Ogun West Federal Constituency. Iyabo was slapped over the alleged misappropriation of N1.2 million Senate Committee funds in a heated debate that ensued (Aziken, 2004). Other instances of such assaults were at the state level where Funmi Tejuoso was also physically assaulted at the Lagos State House of Assembly complex (Aziken, 2004). The latest instance of verbal abuse was in the 8th National Assembly where Oluremi Tinubu was abused by Dino Maleya.²⁷ Maleya said; 'Look this is not Bourdillon (referring to the famous Lagos residence of Tinubu's politician husband). I will beat you up ... Impregnate you and nothing will happen'.²⁸ That act attracted total condemnation by other members of the Senate, the APC leadership, and all well-meaning Nigerians. The humiliation and abuse of women lawmakers in the National Assembly explain why the Gender and Equal Opportunity Bill has been rejected for implementation by both green and red chambers dominated by men in this present 4th Republic.

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

Women are important players in the socio-economic and political engineering of any nation. This paper has documented a few of the great contributions some of the women in Nigeria have had to the service of society and the nation. It started by appreciating notable roles of such women like Okonjo Iweala, Dora Akunyili, Folashade Esan and, Hadiza Bala Usman in socio-economic sectors and then dealt with women in the Nigeria's National

²⁷ <http://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/206833-untold-story-senators-dino-melaye-remi-tinubu-closed-door-clash.html>. Accessed, 21-08-2022.

²⁸ Ibid.

Assembly. The paper has shown that women such as Christiana Anyanwu, Emem Ufot Ekaette and Gbemisola Rugayyah Saraki have champion the struggle for women emancipation by tabling the bills, in the National Assembly, that eventually have elevated the status of women in the society. Moreover, women parliamentarians have been of great service to the electorate's development endeavours.

The paper has also revealed that, despite the demonstrable role played by women, women parliamentarians in Nigeria's National Assembly suffers from underrepresentation, marginalisation in principal positions, abuse and biased treatment, especially during handling of corruption scandals of similar nature between men and female leaders of the National Assembly. All these impact negatively on women participation in Nigerian politics.

The paper concludes that, most of the observed challenges can be mitigated by opening more opportunities for women representation in the National Assembly so that to balance the number with their men counterparts. In this regard, the 35% Affirmative Action should be strengthened to have a considerable impact on the political landscape of the Nigerian state. It should encompass the legislative houses, executive arm, party hierarchy and structure *et cetera*. This could be achieved by sharing political offices based on a quota system between men and women. For we to have the aforementioned quota and equal representation of women and men in the affairs of political schemes, there should be total commitment to gender equality, and respect for rule of law in party affairs and across the society as well. Furthermore, the political culture should be reorientated to eliminate authoritarianism, male supremacy, high violence, and intimidation of womenfolk. The National Assembly should provide adequate legislations that could enable women to participate freely and equally in politics and decision-making. If these are done, are likely to increase women confidence to contest political posts, and also avail of sensitive political positions. With more women in political forums, the nation stands to benefit from their service, as some of the cited cases have revealed.

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