

WOMEN AND POLITICS IN NIGERIA: STRATEGIZING FOR 2015

Eme, Okechukwu I.

Onyishi, Tony

Department of Public Administration and Local Government, University of Nigeria, Nsukka

Nwaoha, Chimaraoke

Department of History, Alvan Ikoku College of Education Owerri

Abstract

For Eme Edith and millions of other Nigerian women, taking part in elective politics is not easy. Women often do not receive the support and mentoring they need to compete with their male counterparts. In turn, many voters do not fully appreciate the benefits of having a mix of men and women in government. As a result, there is currently a low representation of women at all levels of government in Nigeria. In the country's general election in 2011, female candidates fared poorly, with only 32 women elected to the national parliament out of 469 members, which is barely 8% representation. To address this, the paper suggests providing budding female politicians with training and support, complemented by community enlightenment campaigns. With this assistance, Nigerian women, will now be better equipped to participate in forthcoming national and local elections in Nigeria come 2015.

Keywords: Women in Politics, Political Participation, Affirmative Action, National Agenda Policy and Political Strategies.

Introduction

Redefining the role of Nigerian women in political life was the focus of a recent conference held for female political leaders at the national and local levels from the leading political parties and women legislators in the National Assembly. The two-day conference, focused on enabling women to earn positions of leadership within and outside political parties, to be more strategic and effective within those roles, and to raise the profile of Nigerian women as an important voting bloc.

The Senate President, Senator David Mark, recently in Abuja said that women were underrepresented in all political structures in Nigeria. Mark, who was represented by Senator Helen Esuene, said this at the Nigeria Women Strategy Conference, with the theme: "Building Bridges of Opportunity; 2015 and beyond." He said that though women had participated actively in politics in the country, they had nothing to show for their participation except to mobilise for the electoral success of other people.

The Senate president stressed that marginalisation of women could be addressed through the collaborative efforts of men and women. According to him, "*We know that gender disparity in political participation is a global phenomenon and not peculiar to Nigeria alone*" (Mark, 2014:2). He said that the level of women's participation in politics in Sub-Sahara Africa was 20.2 per cent, Asia, 17.9 per cent, Pacific 14.9 per cent and Arab 10.7 in Europe, it is 20.9 (Nordic countries excluded) and Americas, 22.7. Mark (2014) adds that Nigeria as a country falls far below the above regional

averages with only seven per cent female participation in parliament. He enjoined the stakeholders to make concerted efforts to address the continued marginalisation of women in politics. Mark also urged women to strive to rise above rivalry and jealousy that inhibit their collective progress in pursuing their political agenda. He restated continued support of the Senate and the National Assembly in ensuring that women take their positions in politics.

In a remark, Speaker Aminu Tambuwal recommended that INEC should consider dedicating certain constituencies to women in the next delineation of constituencies. He said that the House would support anything required to improve women's participation in politics in the country. He said that the National Assembly shall support every effort aimed at improving the lot of Nigerian women. According to him, the House has passed several laws that are gender sensitive. He added that there was the need for collaboration among members of the House on issues that tend to balance gender in the polity.

Earlier, the Majority leader of the House, Representatives Mulikat Akande-Adeola, said that the conference was aimed at strategizing and preparing women for full participation in politics. She expressed optimism that as from 2015, women's representation in elective and appointive positions, at the Federal, state and local government levels, would increase to 50 per cent. Akande-Adeola said that one of the objectives of the conference was ensuring grassroots mobilisation in favour of female candidates in 2015. The house leader commended President Goodluck Jonathan for sustaining his minimum quota of 35 per cent of women representation in political positions and offices.

The conference, hosted by the Women's Democracy Network (WDN) in collaboration with the International Republican Institute (IRI), was led by trainers from around the world with experience in political leadership: Christine Abia Bako, a member of the Ugandan parliament; Deborah Grey, former member of the Canadian parliament; and Michaela Mojzis-Böhm, campaign manager and former General Manager of the Austrian People's Party. The first day of the conference focused on conducting an assessment of the status of women's participation in politics using the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats (SWOT) tool, and reviewing strategies utilized by each of the trainers in their political careers which were successful in combating similar barriers. Grey shared her political experiences over her 15 years of public service, citing that a positive attitude, strength and commitment to her beliefs led her to success. Grey also provided guidance on how women can attain and strive in leadership positions in male dominated parties and legislatures based on her experience as minority leader for the Reform Party in Canada. Bako shared her political experiences, as a woman political leader in Africa, with a particular focus on how she was able to develop effective outreach strategies to increase women's political participation in Uganda, noting that *"the power of being organized is what will win you an election."*⁽¹⁾

This paper seeks to bring it to the fore again within the context the marginalization of women in politics and decision making positions since 1999 and how to overcome the challenges. The first section of the paper clarifies the concepts of marginalization of women in a theoretical format. The second section discusses the position of women in politics and decision making between 1999 and 2011. The third section explores the strategies for improving women's position in politics and decision making come 2015. The fourth section offers recommendations and concludes the paper.

Theorizing the need for Women Involvement in Politics in Nigeria

There are many theses put forward for increasing women's access to political office. Corner (1997) has advanced two kinds of argument. These are the human rights and pragmatic-efficiency based arguments. There is considerable overlap between the two. According to her, in democratic countries right-based theses are difficult to deny (although the Beijing platform

merely noted that women's participation in decision-making is needed in order to strengthen democracy and promote its regular functioning). It is a basic principle in democracy that admits citizens from all works of life should have equal access to participation in decision-making and leadership.

Section 40 of the 1999 constitution confers on all citizens the right to democratic governance. What it means is that men and women have equal rights to participate in the decision making process in Nigeria. Section 77(2) state that every citizen in Nigeria, who has reached the age of 18 years and residing in Nigeria at the time of the registration of voters for purposes of election shall be entitled to be registered as a voter for that election.

The National Policy of Women adopted by government in 2000 has as one of its objectives that the state should ensure that women participation in politics equally like men. The document stresses the need to redress the imbalance in women's representation in the socio-political life of the nation, especially at the decision-making levels of the three tiers of government. It further provides that women can contest for elective posts and be entitled to appointive posts every where, irrespective of their place of origin. One of the implementation strategies for achieving the above is through affirmative action of 30 percent female representation in the legislative and executive arms of government, party hierarchy and structures (National Policy on Women, 2000:2).

In reality, Nigerian Women have the right to vote in all elections on equal terms with men. The right to vote is not dependent on any property or literary requirement. From the above constitutional and policy analysis, it appears that there is nothing in the above, which excludes the participation of women in politics. It has been posited that the emphasis in the Constitution on registration of political parties and party membership as the only vehicle for political ascendancy puts further barriers on women who are denied meaningful participation within the existing political parties (Ezilo, 2004:17).

The pragmatic, efficiency-based thesis for women's participation in decision-making and leadership also start from the recognition that women and men have different needs, interests and priorities arising from their specific roles and decisions. Even when men are aware of and seek to represent these differences, they lack information in the same way that mainstream decision-makers are unable to capture the perspectives and needs of minority cultures or the poor. This failure to incorporate women's concerns in decision making represents a major loss for the society as a whole. Women's needs, interests and concerns are not just those of women themselves; but reflect their fundamental roles as mothers, wives and caregivers.

Ideally, representative of groups with specific interests and perspectives should participate directly in decision-making process and leadership to ensure that both the agenda and issues to be considered and the decisions subsequently made incorporate their views. It is untenable that any specific interest group could be systematically excluded from direct participation in decision making on the grounds that others can "speak" for them. Since women and men play different roles in the society and therefore have different needs, interests and priorities, it follows that women also cannot be adequately represented in decision making by men (Corner, 1997:4). Corner (1997) adds: an Australian woman politician recently pointed out that it was only when women entered the Australian parliament in significant numbers that issues such as childcare, violence against women and valuation of unpaid labour were ever considered by policy makers. As a result of these issues, entering the agenda, Australia now promotes family-friendly employment policies, including work-based childcare. It also recently undertook a nationally representative survey of violence against women; collects time allocation data and is now using that data to incorporate the value of unpaid work in national policy-making,

CFCR (2005:7) summarizes the two theses in the following words:

1. It is unjust, illegitimate and undemocratic to exclude women from the political process,

2. The views of 50 percent of the population cannot be ignored;
3. Democracy must be inclusive of the diverse perspectives of the values of women as well as men in arriving t decisions and carrying forward any strategy; and
4. Women's political rights are an integral and inseparable part of their human right.

It is against this background that Nigerian women have agitated for greater access and representation of women in politics and decision-making.

Women in Political and Public Sphere (1999-2011)

Whilst in the 1999 general elections there were only 3(2.75%) female senators namely Chief (Mrs.) Florence Ita-Giwa who won on the platform of ANPP representing Cross River State South Senatorial District; Mrs. Stella Omu who won on the platform of PDP from Delta State and Hajiya Khairat Abdul Razaq (now Hajiya Gwadabe) who also won on the platform of PDP representing the Federal Capital Territory. But during the 2003 elections, the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and the All Nigerian Peoples Party (ANPP) among other parties waved nominations fees for women aspirants to enable them run and win elections. However, these efforts did not help in increasing women's participation rather party leaders used it against women. Women participation in political life is mainly as praise singers, fundraisers, party supporters and mobilizers.

In the words of (MClosky 1972:263), "in a democracy, participation is power". But it is possible to confine social categories to levels of political participation, which has no pertinence in the polity. There is a sense in which women are limited to a narrow range of participation in the public sphere. Once decision-making transcend the level of voting, there tends to occur diminution of women's presence (Nwosu, 2006:6). This is captured in the thesis of Lovenduski (1992:610) that there operates a law of increasing disproportion that the higher we ascend the hierarchy, the fewer women we will find. This is simply a product of male-centered social relations, which begins from material relations among men whereby the dominant class make up the rich versus the poor, and at another level, it is men versus women. Though the foundation of dominance is material, the social culture reinforces the phenomenon of women's subordination (See Enloe, 1993, Seidler 1990 and Cockburn, 1991).

In 2003, political space in Nigeria was liberalized and this has created more opportunities for the participation of women in politics. However, from results of research by women groups since 1999 has not shown much significant improvement in the position of women in politics in Nigeria. Party programmes and manifestoes are yet to articulate women issues. The unfavorable political arena characterized by thuggery, monetization of politics and entrenched patriarchal attitudes have discouraged many women from participating in politics.

The analysis below by Iheduru (2010:48) captures the frustration of women in politics in Nigeria. In 1999, only 12 females (against 978 males) were elected into the state assemblies; three females out 109 senators, and only 13 females in the House of Representatives as against 347 males. The female speaker of the Benue State House of Assembly was quickly impeached and removed from the position. By 2003, there was a slight increase from 39 females in the State House of Assembly as against 951 males; while females members of the House of Representatives grew to 21 against 339 males, and four females became senators. Only 86 of the 833 persons appointed into boards of parastatals in 1999 were women, just as women constituted only 11.9 per cent of ambassadorial appointments. The 2007 general elections led to significant improvements, but its flaws have continued to threaten the political position of Nigerian women. The first women elected speaker of the House of Representatives was later impeached for financial improprieties, incompetence, and tyranny. One of the eight female senators (7.34 per cent of the 109-member Upper House) was removed by the courts last week. Yet, six women were elected deputy governors, including that of Plateau State, a first in all of Northern Nigeria.

In the House of Representatives, the number of women in the 306-member body actually plummeted from 21 (5.83 percent) in 2003 to 15 (4.17 percent) in 2007. More revealing also is the proportion of women who actually sought election at various levels during the 2007 elections. Of the 486 persons cleared by INEC to contest the April 14, 2007 gubernatorial pools, only 58 women (11.93 per cent) scaled through with 15 of them vying for the governorship seat. No woman emerged as governor-the only instance of a female governor in the history of Nigeria being the case of Dame Virgy Etiaba who acted as governor for three months in 2006 in the troubled Anambra State when the substantive governor was impeached. She was replaced by a male deputy in the just concluded 2010 elections. Forty-three women sought the deputy governor slot with only six of the 15 women (16.67 percent) eventually reaching this goal.

The president and vice-president positions still remain no-go areas for women, with the number of female presidential aspirants (all in inconsequential political parties) dropping from two in 2003 to just one in 2007. Five women (four of them Muslims), however, sought the vice presidency, again in puny parties. Since the early 1990s, many African countries have successfully implemented both voluntary and mandatory gender quotas in their legal systems and party platforms. However, voluntary quotas depend on the strong will and commitment of the party leadership to promote women in politics. President Olusegun Obasanjo's affirmative action policy that led to women constituting 15 per cent of all his appointments came close to this trend, while Umaru Yar'Adua's promise of 30 percent of appointments into his cabinet to women remained a pipedream. Public institutions and government in general lose respect and legitimacy in the eyes of the public by failing to pay by the rules.

Consequently, there was generally an increase in the number of male governorship candidates that had women as their deputies. At least, four parties in Lagos State chose women to contest as deputy governors (Eme,et.al,2008). In 1999, only Lagos State had an elected female deputy governor in the person of Mrs Kofoworola Akerele-Bucknor although she was later removed and replaced by Femi Pedro, a man as a result of party intrigues probably informed/influenced by patriarchy. In 2003 the number of deputy female governors increased to 2 (5.5%), in 2007 it increased to 6(16.6%). The 2011 general elections produced only a female deputy governor in the person of Mrs Adejoke Orelope Adefulire of Lagos State who contested under the platform of Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN)(The Punch,2011).

Some of the female candidates contested against heavy weights. A case in point is Plateau State where Paullen Tallen (Labour Party) contested against political heavyweights such as Joshua Dariye who was governor from 1999-2006 (Eme,el.tal,2008), Ibrahim Mantu who was once Deputy Senate President, Fidelis Tapgun () and the incumbent governor Jonah Jang(). Senator Gbemisola Saraki-Fowora (ACPN) who contested for the governor's seat in Kwara State had ethical and religious issues to contend with in addition to contesting against the PDP's candidate which also pitched her against her brother who is the incumbent governor of the State also of the PDP.

Quite a number of women won their parties' primary ticket for the National Assembly and the various States' Houses of Assembly. In Lagos State all the female candidates from ACN won at the polls in the election into the National Assembly and the State House of Assembly. Women contested for only 7(17.5%) seats out of the 40 seats at the Lagos State House of Assembly. Adamawa State which had 23 women vying for political offices managed to produce only three female winners, they include Hajiya Aishatu, Mrs Wale Fwa and Mrs Wilbina Jackson.

Out of the 109 Senators who emerged winners at the 2011 polls, only 7 (6.4%) were women. The successful candidates are Nkechi J. Nwaogu, Mrs. Helen U. Esuene, Nenadi Usman, Aisha Jummai all of PDP. Others include Christiana N.O. Anyanwu (Irabor,2011), Joy Emordi both of APGA and lastly Chief (Mrs) Oluremi Tinubu of ACN. The notable casualties included Senator Iyabo Obasanjo-Bello, Senator Daisy Danjuma and Kema Chikwe. The decrease in the percentage of female candidates that won at the polls is disturbing given the increase in the

number of women who contested and the figure dropped significantly when compared to the performance of women in previous elections.

In the 2007 general elections, 9(8.25%) female candidates won the senatorial seats. They were Gbemisola Saraki-Fowora (Kwara State), Christiana Anyanwu (Imo State), Zainab Kure⁴⁰(Niger State), Grace Bent (Adamawa State), Joy Emodi (Anambra State), Eme Ufot Ekaete (Akwa Ibom State), Patricia Akwashiki (Nasarawa State), Iyabo Obasanjo-Bello (Ogun State), Nkechi Justina Nwaogu (Abia State). In the 2003 elections there were 4(3.67%) female senators.

It is believed that any candidate in Lagos State contesting under the platform of ACN should consider the election a walkover because Lagos is a profound and traditional stronghold of the ACN. The writer expresses concern whether this actually gives room for the most suitable aspirant to vie for party's primaries, win the primaries and contest election given the influence of 'god fatherism' in Nigeria's politics. Female performance in the House of Representatives election was no less different from that of the Senate. A significant drop of successful female candidates was also recorded.

Out of the 360 available seats women won only 19 (5.27%). This is an abysmal drop in the light of the success recorded in 2007, 2003 and 1999 where the figures were respectively 27(7.5%), 21(5.8%) and 12(3.3%). The table below captures the position of women in electoral positions between 1999-2011.

Table 1: Comparism of Women Representation in 1999, 2003, & 2011 General Elections

S/N	Position	No of Available seats	No of Women Elected & % of Total in 1999	No of women Elected & % of Total in 2003	No of women Elected & % of Total in 2007	No of women Elected & % of Total in 2011
1	Presidency	1	- 0 %	- 0 %	- 0 %	0 %
2	Senate	109	3 2.75%	4 3.7%	8 7.33%	7 6.4%
3	House of Representative	360	12 3.33%	21 5.83%	23 6.38%	26 7.2%
4	Governorship	36	- 0%	- 0%	- 0%	0%
5	Deputy Governorship	36	-0%	-2 5.55%	-6 16.6%	1 0.09%
6	State Houses of Assembly	990	12 1.21%	38 3.84%	54 5.45%	68 6.9%

Source: Eme, O.I. et al (2008), "Marginalization of Women in Decision-making and Leadership Positions in Nigeria: Focus on the Enugu State Legislature", *African Journal of Education and Development*, Issue 2, Pp 56-76

From the above analysis, no woman was elected as governor of any state of the federation. We only had few women as members of House of Assembly across the polity and members of the National Assembly. In states like Adamawa, Cross River, Ebonyi, Jigawa, Kano, Katsina, Oyo, Sokoto, Yobe, and Zamfara, no woman was elected as member of the State House of Assembly. In states where women were elected as members, they were very few. How can this trend be reversed? The next session will examine the relevance of Affirmative Action with particular reference to gender quota.

Improving Women Participation in Politics: Gender Quota Option

Affirmative Action is not new in Nigeria. At different historical periods, different forms of affirmative action have been implemented with diverse ends in mind: providing redress for ostensible injustices, preventing domination and protecting vulnerable sectors.

One of the earlier forms of affirmative action was practiced in the 1930s when Nigerians embraced “Africanisation” or “Indigenisation”. The aim was to integrate indigenous people into the civil service and in other sectors where they had been previously excluded.

In the 1960s, Nigeria embarked on an indigenization policy called “Nigerianization” to prevent the domination of the civil service by expatriates.

The Nigerian Enterprises Promotion decree of the 1970s was promulgated in order to prevent a monopoly by foreigners in the Nigerian business world. The decree aimed to encourage indigenous exporters and to place more business under the control of Nigerians.

Another example of affirmative action was the Northernisation policy of the Northern People’s Congress, which gave preference to Northerners in the sphere of employment.

More recently, the concept of ‘federal character’ has been applied in an effort to even out the distributed of appointments and allocations relation to states and geopolitical location. The intention has been to do this in such a way that ‘there is no predominance of persons from a few states or from a few ethnic groups or other sectional groups’ (s.14, 3 of the 1999 Constitution).

This is the most widely practiced contemporary form of affirmative action in Nigeria. Although its intention is laudable, the practice of federal character has been discriminatory. People who reside in states that are not their ‘states of origin’ have often been marginalized as a consequence.

At the international level, the first major affirmative action favour of women was taken in 1946 by the United Nations. A Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) was set up and this has monitored developments across the world in relation to women’s status and well being. The UN Decade for Women was later launched in 1975 to prioritize issues concerning women and girls in the context of development.

The following year the United Nations established the voluntary fund for the UN Decade for Women, in order to implement the objectives of the Decade. In 1985, the General Assembly gave the organization an expanded mandate to bring together a group of UN agencies as the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM). UNIFEM’s mission was to promote the economic and political empowerment of women in developing countries.

In 1986, the UN General Assembly also proclaimed the right to development, a right that would enable each individual to realize his or her potential as a human being.

Affirmative action strategies include practices such as the use of quotas. The latter are mechanisms for filling a given percentage of seats or places by disadvantaged categories of people, in this case, women. Like affirmative action in general, the main idea behind quotas is that explicit, affirmative mechanisms are required to increase women’s representation in politics in order to address their serious under-representation in politics in order to address their serious under-representation in this sphere. The aim is that women should thereby constitute a certain proportion of the members of a body, whether this is a candidate list, a parliamentary assembly, a committee or a government.

Use of the quota system means that the burden of recruitment is not placed on the individual women but on those controlling the recruitment or nomination process. Today, quotas aim at a proportion of at least 30%, which is thought to constitute a ‘critical mass’. Quotas may be applied as a temporary measure, until the barriers to women’s political participation are removed.

The character of affirmative action, particularly the use of quotas for women, has provoked considerable scholarship and debate. Questions have been raised about the ways in which gender based affirmative action programmes may enhance women’s participation in politics. Many have also been hostile to the use of quotas for women in this sphere.

One of the ways in which quotas are often dismissed is by casting them as ‘reverse discrimination’. The assumption here is that quotas work against the principle of equal opportunity for all, since women are given preference. What is not acknowledged here is that

quotas for women do not discriminate but rather compensate for actual barriers that prevent women from fair participation in politics.

A second way in which the use of quotas is challenged is by arguing that quotas are undemocratic, since voters should be able to decide who is elected. However, it is not primarily the voters who decide who gets elected. Rather, it is the parties that control the nominations and selection process.

In general, the use of quotas implies a shift from one concept of equality to another. The prevailing concept of equality is that of 'formal equality', which is embedded in the classic liberal framework. Equality is thought of here in terms of competition 'competitive equality' and this requires 'equal opportunity' for all. What is required, in this conception, is to remove the formal barriers, for example, by giving women voting rights. The rest is up to the individual women.

These days, a different concept of equality has emerged. This is the concept of substantive equality, or 'equality of result'. Substantive equality is viewed as more relevant, the argument being that equality does not come about simply because formal barriers are removed. Complex patterns of hidden obstacles remain, as well as the more overt forms of discrimination. These combine to prevent women from being able to participate in politics. Quotas, as one form of affirmative action, are thus a means towards achieving equality of result.

Ghana was the first African country to introduce gender based affirmative action through the use of quotas for women in the 1960s. At the time, a law was passed by the then President, Kwame Nkrumah, to enable the nomination and election of at least ten women to the then National Assembly.

Today, there are at least 56 political parties in 24 countries that make use of quota systems, according to the Inter-Parliamentary Union. In countries such as Uganda, Tanzania, India, Italy, Argentina and Brazil, quotas are prescribed by the Constitution. In Namibia, Nepal and Belgium, electoral law requires political parties to field a prescribed number of women on the grounds of representativeness. Elsewhere, political parties such as the ANC have imposed a quota on themselves, in response to women's pressure within the party. The quota system in South Africa is voluntary and operates on a party basis. In 1994, the quota for women on the party list was 30% but this was increased to 33% of the 1999 list. This increase was a concrete indication of the ANC's commitment to the democratic principles of gender equality and inclusiveness (Egwu and Afolabi 2005:13)

In 1998, the most notable examples of the successful use of quotas to increase women's political participation were found in the Nordic and Scandinavian countries. Sweden had 40% of its members of parliament who were women. For Finland and Denmark, the proportion was 34% compared to Norway's 38% and Iceland's 25%.

In South Africa, women held 27% of the 400 Parliamentary seats in 1998. The quota system in South Africa is voluntary and operates on a party basis. The ANC's quota for women in its list proportional representation system is used for nominating party members to the electorate as candidates. Once the 2004 elections were held, 131 women were elected altogether, comprising 32.8% of the 400 seats available.

The African country with the highest proportion of women in the national parliament is Rwanda. In the 2003 elections, 48.8% of the members of the Chamber of Deputies were women 39 out of 80. The proportion in the Upper House was 30% with 6 women elected out of 20 seats. Rwanda's quota system combines a constitutional provision (Article 76); a quota of 24 seats in the Chamber of Deputies chosen by electoral college with a women only ballot; and a system of women's councils and women only elections at sector and district levels (Egwu and Afolabi, 2005:14)

For quota systems to be used effectively by political parties there must be a clear policy of quota implementation that is actively followed. Quotas must be embedded in the nomination and

selection processes from the very start. Quotas will not be filled if they are only discussed at the least stages of elections.

Effective quota systems help to actively recruit women into the state, into parliaments and into political parties. Quotas have also been established as a crucial first step toward the creation of a critical mass of women who can influence policy and decision making effectively.

Strategies for 2015

Women should use the SWOT analysis conducted by them and their parties to identify specific strategies they could use to develop an effective communication strategy within their respective political party, and also to identify strategic alliances across different political parties and organizations to be able to challenge their male folk come 2015. Women should also remain focused on the importance to remain authentic in politics, develop a political message, motivate party members and supporters and engage party decision-makers at all levels to be able to mobilize across party and religious lines. For instance, women politicians should inform voters using SMS messaging about issues of importance. Again women politicians should also make efforts to meet politicians from other countries at international forums, to learn different strategies that are used in different countries to be able to achieve success come 2015.

Having established keen interest in building inter and intra-party strategic alliances, should plan on how to develop and benefit from strategic alliances by first building a foundation of mutual interest and trust. The importance of building an alliance around an upcoming event, pointing out that as the next elections in Nigeria are in 2015, the women have eighteen months to build a coalition, develop a platform, conduct outreach to increase women's participation, and ultimately bolster women's ability to be a significant voting bloc.

In building this alliance there are several points to keep in mind as they build their strategic alliances: focus only on the issues that everyone can agree on, claim victories even when they are small, build on each of these victories as each one is a significant step and focus on building and protecting the credibility gained from victories.

Women should build a series of collaborations between women politicians, WDN and IRI in order to increase women's political capacity in Nigeria. The Nigerian Women Inter party Forum should be launched now to offer a platform for women beyond conferences, town hall meetings and political gatherings to share experiences, network, advocate and lobby for political space for women within and outside the political parties. The necessity of this platform should be to empower and encourage aspiring women politicians for political leadership and governance positions, which is critical to societal and human development.

Conclusion

The various obstacles and challenges identified can be addressed by both political and legislative commitment. The review of the 1999 constitution must state specifically the principles and methodology of affirmative action as exemplified in Uganda, South Africa and Rwanda. Affirmative action and quotas have been used across the globe to address the need to close the gender-gap in political-bureaucratic development. Nigeria can benefit from these "best-practices".

Despite unprecedented human development efforts, a widespread inequality between genders still persists in access to political terrain. This is as a result of decades of neglect to focus on gender issues. Gender mainstreaming has become the catch phrase for narrowing the gender-gap and should provide the significant impetus for political development that will correct generations of social injustice in gender relations in Nigeria.

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