



REPAIRING A LEAKY BUCKET: STRATEGIES FOR WOMEN'S
EFFECTIVE POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN NIGERIA

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I came first across the troubling theory of the leaky bucket at an Aspen institute leadership seminar . Arthur Okun one of the philosophers studied had in his work 'equality and efficiency: the big trade - off' expressed concern over the relative difficulty in achieving both efficiency and equality in a context where, no matter what you did there will be some loss or waste in resources. The question was how much leakage was tolerable or is ineffectual to affect the desired goal. The leaky bucket is intended as an irony. The metaphor of the leaky bucket derives from an idea of a vessel – a sole apparatus for the delivery of a purpose. It does not matter that it is made of iron, plastic or wood; technically the bucket should be able to deliver on the task but when put to the test it is challenged.

In this context, the leaky bucket is adapted to denote a multiplier leaky effect- the state, society and women themselves as vessels, which are dedicated and nurtured and purpose built to delivery certain needs but fall short of doing so. Imagine the inestimable value of water and you have just one vessel to fetch it with. Drawing water is very hard; it takes energy, time and physical effort yet from the point of extracting this precious fluid to the point of utilisation a great percentage of it is lost. What will be the effect – sheer waste, loss of opportunity, conflict arising from alienation and retrogression. Ideas, opportunities, voice are lost because the vessel is not cohesive.

the adjective 'leaky bucket' is used in the singular form because when all these buckets leak what we have is one big mess. Every failure, ineptness and inability to meet the next objective feeds a collective disappointment and sets us back as one people. The UNDP was spot on when it said a **development not engendered is a development endangered.**

This paper is presented in two parts: the challenges facing women in politics and the tried and still being tested strategies to deal with those challenges. It looks at three locations where we find challenges and the source of the incessant leaking of the bucket of political participation: The State, society and women's organising and the interconnection between the three. The paper draws deeply from 3 recent works; in which I participated; a study by UNIFEM and the Gender and Affirmative Action Coalition (GAA) on the experiences of women in the 2007 elections, an assessment of women and labour in Nigeria and lastly an evaluative writing on women and Nigeria towards the anticipated occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Country.

The three holes in a bucket

The arena of politics is the point of intersection between these three concepts. Politics is not limited to competition in the public sphere such as electoral office in the academia, bureaucracy or judicial and commercial locations. Politics goes on in the private sphere, in the family and in society as well. The same players straddle these different spheres hence the assertion that there is no divide between the public and the private spaces. For this reason that which is 'personal' is 'political' as well. Let us examine the three sites where these holes' reside- the state, society and in women's organising.

The state: Refers to government; its agents and institutions at the federal state and local government levels that are responsible for service delivery for accountability to the citizens. The state and its institutions possess the authority to make the rules that govern the people. It has sovereignty over a definite territory. The state includes such institutions as the armed forces, civil service or state bureaucracy, courts, and police.ⁱⁱ The state in feminist literature it is a male dominated and patriarchal instrument. The state has always had an interest in organising to protect the interest of patriarchy and so it is patriarchal in itself (Mckinnon 1989 as cited in young). So while the state is the

custodian of a constitution that pledges to guarantee the rights of everyone, fewer girls than boys go to and finish school, domestic violence is below the radar of the law still regarded as a domestic issue.

Between rhetoric and reality is a gaping hole, through which precious treasures could fall through. Corruption in the state is a key source of leaks with the result being that schools don't deliver education, hospitals deliver death as women die in childbirth, and more women spend time nursing loved ones at home limiting their access to opportunity to pursue their ambitions. Women invariably subsidize the state where ever it fails to provide the necessary service.

Society is a process removed from the formal processes of governance and rule application. It nonetheless has its own norms and values regarded as standard policy, which shape the behaviour, attitude and space construction of groups within it. Society in this sense is considered the first sphere of political influence, which affects women. It takes the form of the family, organisations and alliances across organisations. For example religion has a perception of what the role of the 'good woman' should be and that did not include political participation until recently when more progressive views began to emerge from the study of the Holy Books of the 2 key religions in Nigeria; Christianity and Islam. The roles assigned to women are roles hidden, unrewarded, unending and performed largely within the confines of the home and below the public radar. While that assigned to men are performed outside the home, more visible and lends itself to more interaction and access to opportunities.

Women are not a homogenous category; significant class variables such as access to education, income, paid employment and credit further stratifies the category 'women' into sub categories such as elite women, working class, and peasant women. Cultural variables such as race and sexual preference can also differentiate women. The singular perception of what women's role should be cuts across class. With elite women the pattern is broken through access to education and the independence that comes with having a means of income. Such women are however expected to balance the roles of income earning and care giving. In addition, the glass ceiling – a perception that women may not advance beyond a certain professional level, still awaits such women, who, despite the quality of their skills and knowledge are sometimes paid discriminatory wages compared to their male counterparts or denied certain positions, which are deemed not suitable for the 'weaker sex'. Women from the poor class therefore suffer **double oppression**; that of poverty and a limiting gender role (WIN 1982).

All women regardless of class, are affected by the sexual division of labour which society imposes upon women, yet, there is a poor awareness of this organic link between all women. So where women are getting better at organising there is no breakthrough yet in elite and grassroots women working together. There have been a few bright spots of this occurring but more is needed to build the needed momentum. Enemies of women's empowerment exploit this gap in creating the perception that 'women cannot work together'. This is totally false.

The political bucket: lessons from the 2007 women in politics experience

We go further to explain just how the state, society and women's organising help to feed the leak in the bucket through an examination of previous studies. The paper reports on two documentations the first in 2003ⁱⁱⁱ, which examined the participation of women in politics in Nigeria and a second in 2007 by UNIFEM and the Gender and affirmative Action coalition to update that research. In 2003, the documentation set out to ascertain the nature of women's agency, their weaknesses and sources of strength with a view to upholding such women as pathfinders for other women. The 2007 study examined key institutions (organisational attitudes, cultures and policies) and agencies (individuals,

consortia across development partner and civil society sectors) alongside the voices and works of women politicians. This perspective made possible an update of knowledge and a better understanding of the operational environment. Issues like the role of political parties, The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), civil society, development partners, which were only examined in part in 2003, were reviewed in greater detail in the 2007 study. In addition to desk research, the studies profiled women politicians through in-depth interview. The women selected included those who were declared winners and those not, those from rich or political family and not so rich families, running mates, women from states different from their spouses.

THE LEAKS: FINDINGS

The old ways are alive and kicking

Statistics show that the systematic elimination of women in the 2003 general elections through a well-orchestrated process of manipulation and pre-determination of the outcome of the electoral process repeated itself in the 2007 exercise. The 2003 elections recorded systematic elimination of women as many of them were schemed out of the primaries. From the records, women contested for only 631 elected positions out of a total of 11,881, and only 1.62% won, which is about 181 of the total positions. There were only 12 women out of 360 members of the House of Representatives, and three women out of the 109 members of the Senate. Women in elected positions at the state level did not fare better.

Preliminary analysis of national and state elections in the 2007 elections show that out of a total of 9,820 contested positions, men were nominated as candidates for 9,214 (94%) and women only 606 (6%) and only 96 in number - a mere 15.84% of the total number was said to have been elected. This is only 1% of the total contested positions. The figures indicate little improvement over 2003. Reports and factual evidences from many female aspirants for elective offices who have been edged out, blocked and intimidated to submission, point to the fact that the entire 2007 elections may have excluded more women than in 2003^{iv}.

In 2007/08^v, therefore, Nigeria has one hundred and nine (109) senatorial districts, yet there were only 9 districts later reduced to 8 represented by women in the Senate an improvement of only five from the 2003 elections. The House of Representative has provision for 360 seats but only twenty five women made it to the House against the twenty who won in 2003.^{vi} In the history of Nigeria, we have never produced a democratically elected woman governor in any of the thirty six states. The state houses of assembly have provision for 990 seats but only 54 women are in the various state houses. There are six female Deputy Governors in the thirty -six states. The position of deputy governor has rightly or wrongly been described as a mere position for 'stooges no better than a spare tyre'.^{vii} Even when women are appointed Ministers, very few are assigned significant portfolios.

Use of religious, cultural and economic blackmail characterised the political space. A new twist to the 2007 process was the deliberate distortion, hoarding and / or change of information at late hours to disorganize perceived opposition, who are then blamed for their own disenfranchisement because they were not at the 'agreed' venue of the election. As reported by some women politicians in the Niger Delta, strategies which party executives and officers adopted to exclude women included:

- i. Giving the wrong information to women as to when the primaries were taking place
- ii. Odd hours for elections: In some cases, primaries were held at 12 midnight without the women being informed of this.
- iii. Pre election agreement to pay over an agreed percentage monthly if elected.
- iv. Physical, psychological and verbal abuse aimed at demoralising women

Exclusion of women in the 2007 electoral process was not just an inter party affair. Its origins can be found in intra party engagements: From the leadership of political parties where women are largely

absent or relegated to subsidiary role of women leader^{viii} to the decision to substitute the women candidates before, during or after primaries. Yet, citing the example of the PDP the largest party in Nigeria, PDP has a politically correct statement in section 23 of its manifesto thus:

Women are an important group of Nigerians whose participation in national politics has been minimal due to largely cultural inhibition and barriers. The relevance of women and their numerical strength and their multiplier effects in the mass mobilization of the Nigerian for the attainment of educational heights and socio-economic objectives are recognized by the party. Accordingly the party government shall pursue policies and principles enshrined into the Beijing Declaration.

Yet between the declaration and the statistics- a gaping hole peeks.

Gender, Cash and Carry

An understanding of the construct of gender and power is vital to achieving meaningful change in women's political participation. In the new awareness, gender may not necessarily be the sole issue. In the final analysis the battle is really between perceptions of strong and weak. If a woman or man is able to prove that he/she is strong this means running a visible campaign backed up by resources and endorsement from powerful persons and interests, their ambition is more likely to be respected and thus succeed. This is not to say that gender differences are a thing of the past but that it can be minimized when a woman has very strong allies and networks which are most usually male. The importance of the support of "a big man"^{ix} and/or that of being married to one, cannot be ignored. The need to possess male-like qualities is still held as a measure of strength by traditional male structures and institutions. Unlike men, women face a gender specific discrimination if they are not married. In other words, the private lives of women unlike that of men could easily become a public issue. In contrast, someone like the Speaker of the Nigerian House of Representatives Dimeji Bankole who was unmarried when he became Speaker was not stigmatized. Indeed the Speaker was celebrated as the most eligible bachelor in Nigeria!^x

Political Organisations: New wine in old skin?

Political parties are the sole means by which a candidate can offer his or her services to the people through elected office. Factors such as the number of parties, nature of space created as measured by internal democracy, awareness of women's human rights, values of fairness and justice, due process and ideology are what will determine how far candidates are able to go, in actualising the dream of making elective office. The Political party has responsibilities towards the candidate and the electorate. To the candidate, it represents their aspiration, creates and strengthens their links with their constituency, sets the guidelines and principles by which the candidate acts on its platform.

To the electorate it owes political education, organisation, a programme of action on how to deliver effective service to them and a whole culture of organising and service simply by how it treats opposition, and whether or not it keeps its word. More recently, with the increasing culture of violence, analysts are of the view that it is the responsibility of political parties to conduct themselves in a way that keeps the peace rather than breeds violence. The written and unwritten rules, policies and procedures, which a political party subscribes to, will determine the ability of candidates to act so as to realise their mandate on its platform. They also determine the nature of the political process.^{xi}

Experiences of women in both 'big' and 'small', old and new political parties is that the nature of party organising is characterised by capture of space, money, voice and opportunities. Therefore it is one in which it is very difficult for the weak to excel. As the Coalitions for Change (C4C) Gender and Affirmative Action Coalition puts it,

Politicians have perfected the art of capturing power by all means and suppressing opposition, thereby creating an atmosphere that has continued to marginalise women's active participation in Nigeria's political arena. Women continue to be the major casualties in the electoral process, with impediments of patriarchal traditions, culture, god-fatherism, misinterpretations of religion, confusion, violence, intimidation, harassment and the inability to adequately access finance and justice only serving to debilitate their chances, even further^{xii}.

Political parties were also indicted for the malicious substitution of female candidates for others who are usually male, ostensibly to make room for those with more money to offer the party.

The Electoral Umpire

The declarations of the then Independent Electoral Commission (INEC) Chairman Maurice Iwu, in support of promoting gender issues and its impact on equitable participation of women and men in the electoral process, was lauded by many as a bright spot in an otherwise very controversial institutional firmament. However, this did not translate into fundamental changes for women due to lack of technical capacity of the commission's staff on gender and elections issues and the fact that it could not support the candidates especially the female aspirants whose names were wrongfully removed by their political parties after victories at the primaries. Such issues were regarded as internal to the parties.

The Independent Electoral Commission has been faulted for the rushed preparation and conduct of key electoral activities such as the voter registration process, late conduct and inadequate supply of relevant materials for voter registration, inadequate human resource and materials, malfunctioning equipments and other logistical challenges. It is believed that these challenges fuelled electoral violence and frustrated the efforts of millions of prospective voters across the country to participate in the process.

Office	No Available	No of women in 1999	No of Women in 2003	No of Women in 2007	% Of Women (2003)	% Of Women (2007)
President	1	No Woman	No Woman	No Woman	0%	0%
Vice President	1	No Woman	No Woman	No Woman	0%	0%
Senate	109	3 Women	3 Women	9 women	2.7%	8.2%
House of Representatives	360	12 Women	21 Women	26 Women	5.8%	7.2%
Governors	36	No Woman	No Woman	No Woman	0%	0%
Deputy Governors	36	1 Woman	2 Women	6 Women	5.6%	16.6%
State House of Assembly – Speakers	36	1 Woman	2 Women	1 Woman	5.6%	2.7%
State Houses of Assembly	990	12 Women	23 Women	52 Women	2.3%	5.2%
Cabinet Ministers	Variable	4/49 Women	6/42 Women	6/42 Women	17.65%	17.65%

Source: Unpublished Data for an E-Database on Women's Aspirations and Performance in All Political Parties 2007, Habiba M. Lawal "Overview of Political Participation of Women in Nigeria: Challenges, Triumphs, and the Way Forward, Paper for IRI, 30th March 2004, page 12. In Women marginalisation and politics 2005. **Note:** The number of female Ministers in the current (2010) Federal cabinet is 8 of 41.

PUTTY IN THE LEAK: STRATEGIES FOR ENGAGEMENT

Exasperation is not an option. Women cannot give up. We must continue to find creative ways of addressing the challenges facing us if we are to be taken seriously as political contenders. There have been some strategies, which have been applied; from calling for affirmative action to forging new partnership, some of these are examined in this section.

Rethinking Affirmative Action (AA) as a Consolidation Strategy

Most women politicians have come to the conclusion that in a political system where women may never have a chance to demonstrate their capabilities like men can, affirmative action was the quickest means of bridging the male – female gap in political participation. Affirmative action is not a strange concept to Nigeria. It has been applied as a tool for correcting geo political and social imbalances in the political and educational sectors. Policies such as the Federal Character Act, quota system for schools are examples of affirmative action aimed at generational and ethno political balance. When women's needs are introduced into the equation through gender based affirmative action, the concept of AA becomes problematised and suffers from patriarchal gate keeping.^{xiii}

Another lesson is the search for affirmative action in other locations outside political parties. The objective being the need to demonstrate that there is a critical mass of women who are capable of providing valuable services to their country. Affirmative action is not just needed in political parties. While that is a necessary site, the public service offers opportunities for expanding the space for women. Women activists are therefore pursuing a **gender review of the Federal Character Commission Act**, which at the moment does not recognise gender as a criterion for the equitable distribution of Nigeria's resources.

Engaging political parties on AA

The approach of women working across party lines is needed to break the cycle of political party capture and zero sum game. This has already started with women pledging to work for women whatever platform they may choose. Engaging Political parties remains valid as they are veritable platforms to increasing women's participation in politics. In demanding affirmative action from parties though we must have clear options on how it can be achieved. Below are some examples of proposals to political parties from the Gender and Affirmative Action coalition.

Twinning: This seeks to address 35% affirmative action implementation for single seat offices which have positions of Vice or Deputy (President, Governors and Chair Local Government). Aspirants to these positions should be an alternation of male and female.

Constituency Based Options: these are legislative offices:

- **One** of the three Senatorial seats in each of the 36 States to return a female candidate.
- House of Representatives Seats: **Three** of the total Federal Constituency seats in each of the 36 States and **one** for the Federal Capital Territory to return female candidates.
- State Houses of Assembly Seats
- Conceding **one third** of the total number of Local Government constituency seats to female candidates
- Councillor seats. Conceding **one third** of the total number of Local Government councillorship seats to female candidates

Appointments: Nomination of party members for appointive positions in all national and international assignments to reflect 35% Affirmative Action

Party hierarchies and delegates: Affirmative Action within party hierarchies to reflect 35% of female members in the leadership of National, State and Local Executive Committees.

Quality vs quantity

It is one thing to want more women in public life but fundamentally we should be concerned about the quality of representation. Building women's capacity to know the issues and speak

knowledgeably about them is key. The WRAPA women's agenda project where women candidates are trained to lead on maternal mortality issues even before they are elected is innovative. The establishment of a gender technical unit in the National Assembly which is a collaboration between government and civil society the GAA platform provides a key resource for feedback and influencing law and policy. Organisations such as FIDA should volunteer to serve and input.

Working with men

Women politicians and their allies have learnt that for affirmative action to be achieved, a reflective, flexible system that recognizes working with allies across gender and social organising is essential. This lends credence to the process, broadens the base of voices speaking for rather than against the issue and increases the probability of its adoption.

A Communication strategy

Hype the gains to sustain them. A communication plan detailing what are the message, the audience and the best messenger and medium is indispensable to expanding women's democratic space. This plan includes the orthodox (print and electronic) and social (twitter, face book, text messaging) media but is not limited to these alone. Making timely, easy to read information available to persons who can act to change outcomes is critical. It is important to follow up, see through and to evaluate a process begun.

Entry points: CEDAW revisited

An entry point which women's group are revisiting is the passage of the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) bill. Nigeria signed and ratified CEDAW since 1985. Several efforts to ensure that this international framework for the protection of the rights of women is domesticated in accordance with Nigerian Laws has met with resistance. It encountered a fundamental resistance in 2007 at the twilight of the legislative tenure, the experience of which has led to a review of approach. Some of the 30 articles of CEDAW particularly articles 6, 9, 10 and 11 which speak to suppression of all forms of trafficking in women, right to citizenship, right to education and right to work respectively, are seen as 'compatible' with the norms and culture of Nigeria. Others, such as articles 12 on family planning and 16, which seeks to eliminate discrimination against women in matters of marriage and family life were viewed as anti establishment, hence the deadlock.

In 2008, five development partners^{xiv} commissioned a research to understand the challenges to the passage of the 2007 CEDAW bill. An analysis of the major gaps showed that proponents of the bill commenced a process of advocacy without a clear communication strategy, or an anticipation of the level of organisation of the opposition. The end result was that the opponents of the CEDAW bill were allowed to frame the public identity of the bill with its attendant political consequence: The bill came to be labeled as anti family and anti God. Another problem was that domestication had been viewed as an end in itself, which it of course is not. Emphasis is now being placed on national claims and human rights, some of which are already passed into law in Nigeria and can be used as a rationale and lever to propel the passage of a bill harmonizing all common positions – both national and international - into one single bill: **A bill on the rights of Nigerian women.**

Best Practices

Lessons from elsewhere in Africa and the Common Wealth countries where CEDAW is operational show that the treaty need not be domesticated wholesale. Countries have sifted and identified what is required and can be passed under any other name provided such a bill in essence speaks to the protection of women's human rights. **In addition, a strong alliance across political parties, legislators and executive with religious institutions will have to be built. Driving this process should be a core of women and men committed to consistently chipping away at resistance over a long period of time, preferably through a strong women's movement which has male allies.** They must facilitate creative legislative mechanisms such as careful joint drafting of legislative text based on common position of all supporting groups. However, whatever legislative strategy is adopted it must rest on a broad culture of recognition of women's rights.^{xv} The more strategic path

might be creating inter and intra faith dialogues not just on CEDAW but also the AU Women's protocol and the proposed bill. Arguments should focus on the negative effect of society neglecting the rights of women, counterbalancing that with the positive result which could emanate from affirming women's rights^{xvi}

Development Programming and Donor synergy

Civil society has a key role in ensuring the conditions for rethinking women's rights in Nigeria. Many Civil Society Organisations (CSO) have over the years, shown commitment to devising strategies for leveling the political playing field for women. They have done this through advocating for the creation of equal opportunities for women and men to participate in politics and also remedy the historical disadvantage facing women. Development agencies, International Non-governmental Organisations (INGO), Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and women politicians have all evolved strategies toward challenging the process. 2007 witnessed increased donor coordination with the introduction of the Joint Donor Basket Fund (JDBF), and working across policy divides on the matter of women's election as opposed to 2003.

The JDBF is a particularly interesting concept as it represented an attempt by development partners to pool resources in an innovative way providing financial and technical support, in a concerted effort to strengthen both the demand and supply side of political participation, under the electoral process. This is a strategy, which civil society has constantly advocated. Analysis showed that the JDBF was not without its challenges in terms of off-timing and inadequacy of funding to cover a wide area of women's political needs. However it demonstrated that effective use of resources through a pooling of technical, human and material resources will be indispensable to growing a critical mass of women in public life.

Practical and tangible actions; A women's fund

The question remains how can aid be more effective? it is no longer enough to have activities for general awareness raising. NGOs may need to design parameters that allow them adopt a few candidates – nurture them and give them practical support beyond the design of campaign posters. Support has to be constituency focused with clear delineation of which offices and number of women to be supported with a needs analysis preceding any intervention. This is not to say that the general ground breaking activities such as advocacy towards gatekeepers and others is not important, it is. However women politicians feel that such strategies have created the desired impact what is needed now is a deepening of that engagement through practical support to specific women candidates. One key demonstration of this is the women's fund.

Poverty of financial resources will continue to plague the effective participation of women in politics. Aside from the wasteful culture entrenched by the cash and carry politics at the moment, politicians do need resources for the logistics of enlisting voter support. A useful resource to have at this point will be a small pot of resources accessible to women who have proven ability to participate and deliver. It will also send the signal that women are serious while providing a formidable platform for allies to provide support. Careful strategic planning must however precede such a venture. The decision around eligibility, access, security and replication and a strategy for the communication of fidelity of funds will need to be addressed early.

Starting small and aiming high – the 100 women group

The 100 group is an idea that Nigerian women have revisited more vigorously in the past few years. It pulls together women across class or within a class to organise for women. It presupposes the existence of a shared vision and a common purpose modelled after the UK 300 Group, a Non-governmental collective formed with the aim of increasing the number of women elected to local council and parliament in the UK^{xvii}. In the Nigerian context the innovation is the attraction and invitation to friends of women – men and youth who wish to organise in groups of 100, alongside women. The processes of mobilising, recruiting and training is a critical communication strategy important for building a critical mass of politically sensitized and mobilized women and men. This is essential for increasing women's participation in public life. It provides an avenue for growing a

qualitative crop of knowledgeable women, affirming the values of leadership so that women's leadership can be different from and better than that of men. It will go further to prove the point that affirmative action and merit are not necessarily inimical.

The 100 group has created a place for women to meet and share pains and gains. It provides a necessary support base for women in politics within communities which has produced many of the women in public and elected offices at the state and national levels. By 2000, the 100 women group networks had 105,568 members in 686 women groups. With the build up of momentum around the 2011 elections, the 100 group is at an opportune moment to be seized by the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs under the auspices of the six zonal Women's Political Empowerment offices^{xviii}.

Families, network and a strong constituency

For every woman who has made tremendous headway in political participation, there has been the unwavering support of family especially spouses where applicable. This is not achieved in a short span of time it emerges from a conscious nurturing of the well of goodwill of friends and associates who spread an endorsement of the aspirant or candidate by word of mouth and visible support. The label of 'prostitute' will less likely stick on a woman with spousal or dynastic support. Similarly the new strategy of women working across political party reform need to strive to be in the party leadership where decisions are taken.

Intergenerational organising

There are too few women in the political arena right now and unless we take a serious view of intergenerational organising we face extinction on the political field. Women are yet to deliberately recruit younger women from tertiary institutions, community organisations. In looking towards the future, raising a critical successor generation of politicians is a logical direction. Some of the women profiled had literally cut their political tooth at the foot of their fathers. They revere these men who cultivated a political path for them. Can mothers also begin to nurture their daughters and sons? The space must be expanded for women in the home first before it can be expanded in the public sphere.

Proportional representation

Proportional representation (PR) is a mode of election that will allow for inclusivity and ensure that every vote counts. There are different forms of it. The Uwais panel on electoral reform recommended both first past the post - where there is only one winner for every place contested as presently obtains in Nigeria and a form of proportional representation. Drawing from the GAA submission to the national assembly on the matter, it assumes that a percentage number of new seats and constituencies will be agreed and each participating party would submit to INEC a list of beneficiaries. It is also anticipated that an agreed percentage of those on the list would be women who should be listed first or in a male / female - zipper alternating fashion.

Seizing Policy moments: A New INEC

The review of the Electoral Act, has given rise to a new leadership and new ideas. There is a new voter registration exercise planned for November 2010. There are clear guidelines which have already been shared with political parties part of which forbids them from substituting candidates as the chair of INEC professor Attahiru Jega said during his recent conversation with the political parties^{xix}:

..In Section 33 (of the 2010 electoral act), no political party shall be allowed to change or substitute its candidate whose name has been submitted pursuant to Section 32 of the Act, except in the case of death or withdrawal by the candidate. This eliminates the old practice of substitution of candidates arbitrarily or on the nebulous ground of "cogent and verifiable reasons."

This is new freedom from the past where candidates were changed at will. These are now new opportunities. How ready are we to mobilise women to register and vote credible candidates, not those who hoodwink them with a measure of salt and rice.

Conclusion: The women's leadership compass

In summary we have 5 key guides in our pathway to women's political empowerment:

1. *Leading the change we want to see:* Let us be in the forefront, speaking and demonstrating commitment to women's empowerment through our work. No one will do the job for us. We have to adopt a perspective of herstory. Herstory is a clear value statement which connotes writing history from women's perspective. It is a term that seeks to reclaim the story of communities, countries and events from the perspective of women. Herstory is an approach that celebrates the lives of women. It does not discountenance history it only seeks to represent all facets to it.
2. *Women and men working together:* We have to create a core of defenders of women's votes across gender, towards 2011. The fact that more women are now comfortable with AA is an important victory to be kept in view. It means we are less likely to speak disparately on the strategy. More women and male legislators between 2003 and 2007 have been heard to speak in favour of AA. Lets document and affirm women's experiences and keep a database of women ahead of opportunities.
3. *Increasing quantity and quality of women:* Development Partners, women themselves and civil society agents need to commit for the long haul to growing a rich base of women politicians. Women's political path can only remain open when designed as a process and not as an activity. This requires a long term perspective to planning. While such a plan may view elections as a milestone, it must not be motivated by election cycles. A sustainable plan should be driven by a conscious principle to cultivate a critical mass of women over a period of say 20 years.
4. *Partnerships, Building Social Capital:* An ability to convert human relations into social capital is a key strength of women. We have very strong community skills, which can be transformed into social capital for constituency building. A strong support base, which is made up of powerful individuals and structures across generations, gender, class and ideology, with loud voices and influence is indispensable to the political advancement of women in politics.
5. *Testing Policy and law:* By themselves they cannot deliver change but they can create an enabling environment. We need FIDA to test the laws and policies. For example, we have a national gender policy which commits to 35% affirmative action yet today on the average we have 8% women's representation in public life. Why?

African Women's Decade 2010-2020: Advancing Gender Equality will we be celebrating a more effective bucket? Fixing a leaky bucket demands an understanding of the material it is made of, ingenuity as to which material will close the hole and hold for a while. You cannot throw away the bucket remember because it is the nature of buckets to leak after a while. Women have huge potential to take on the state and change society's perception of women. After all, culture is an evolution of a way of life deriving from the experience of a people. Women possess a strong voice, energy to organise, strong instinct, incredible knowledge and organising skills, which can used to great advantage. Let's build upon our strengths. What unites women far outweighs what divides us.

I thank you for your attention.

Endnotes

ⁱ Arthur Okun The Brooking institute Washington DC 1875 in the Aspen Institute reader July 2010

ⁱⁱ [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/State_\(polity\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/State_(polity))

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- ⁱⁱⁱ See Jibrin Ibrahim and Amina Salihu (eds) *Women Marginalisation and Politics in Nigeria* OSIWA, Global Rights and CDD 2004, Nigeria
- ^{iv} Analysis from UNIFEM data, 2007
- ^v The outcome of some the 2007 elections were decided in 2008 hence the 2007/ 2008 link
- ^{vi} Please note that the outcome of election petitions pending before the tribunals may affect these numbers
- ^{vii} The former Governor of Anambra State, Emeka Ezeife at the conference on Role of Deputy Governors in Democratic Governance.
- ^{viii} Women leader being the head cheer leader in mobilising women for rallies and election day. The Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) brought a progressive twist to the office in 2003, when it created a slot for a ‘woman leader’. This a position reserved for a female member on the executive with powers same as other members of the executive. It is an affirmative action designed to ensure that the executive has at least a female member.
- ^{ix} The concept of a big man basically refers to someone with the resources and political connections to support a candidate. Of course women could be “big men” although in reality men are the ones likely to play such a role.
- ^x Kole Shettima’s narrative on Halima Tukur in UNIFEM Study on women, marginalisation and politics in Nigeria, People and Passion Consult unpublished, December 2008
- ^{xi} Angela Odah and Okello Occuli in *Women, Marginalisation and Politics II* in UNFEEM study People and Passion Consult 2008
- ^{xii} Coalitions for Change (C4C) supports a Gender and Affirmative Action Coalition, which created a platform for engaging the constitutional and electoral process called GEM - The Gender, Electoral and Constitutional Memorandum (GEM) . The quotation is from the GEM submission to the Presidential Electoral Memorandum Committee, June 2008.
- ^{xiii} The history of Affirmative Action in Nigeria can be traced to the pre-independence era with the Quota System’ introduced into the 1954 Federal Constitution to correct the disparity between the North and the South. the idea ‘was renewed in 1975 under the General Murtala Muhammad regime and renamed the “Federal Character Principle”’.
- ^{xiv} The Department for international development of the United Kingdom Government (DFID), Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), The Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA), OXFAM GB and United Nations Fund for Women (UNIFEM).
- ^{xv} Ayesha M. Imam ‘Adopting Women’s Human Rights Legislation in Nigeria’ A synthesis analysis and report drawing on Studies by Banke Aderimisi, Abiola Akiode- Afolabi, Ayo Atsenuwa, Asma’u Joda and Itoro Eze – Anaba, Chidi Odinkalu, Na’iya Sada, Fatima L. Adamu and Bilkisu Yusuf. Funded by DFID, UNIFEM, CIDA OSIWA and OXFAM GB
- ^{xvi} Ibid page 5
- ^{xvii} Abdela, Lesley, Shevolution, “Men and Women Working in Partnership” Training Handout 15
- ^{xviii} Election herstory: Women’s Political experience in Nigeria Gender and affirmative action Issue based project DFID Coalitions for Change Programme 2009.
- ^{xix} Opening Remarks By The Honourable Chairman, Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) At The Interactive Consultation Between INEC and the National Leadership of Nigerian Political Parties held on Wednesday, 18th August, 2010