

# REVIEW OF WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION AND PERFORMANCE AT THE 2011 GENERAL ELECTIONS IN NIGERIA

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## Introduction

The marginalization of Nigerian women in politics and decision making is as old as the Nigerian society and actually predates the advent of colonialism in Southern and Northern Nigeria. It is widely believed that the marginalization of women in political participation and decision making processes has been responsible for the exclusion of the interests of women in governance and development paradigms. After gaining independence in 1960, Nigeria was under military rule for 29 years.<sup>1</sup> This gave very limited space for political participation. The first republic (1960-1966) was dominated by men likewise the second republic (1979-1983) and even the third republic (1992-1993). The first republic produced just 1 female senator from the Western region in the person of Late Chief Wuraola Esan.<sup>2</sup> Other notable female activists left their mark in the annals of Nigeria's politics. Thus, in 1961, the Late Chief (Mrs.) Margaret Ekpo contested elections into Aba Urban North constituency under the National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) platform and won, thus, becoming a member of the Eastern Nigeria House of Assembly until 1966. Mrs. Janet N. Mokelu and Miss. Ekpo A. Young also contested elections, won and became members of the Eastern House of Assembly.<sup>3</sup> In Northern Nigeria, however, women were still denied the opportunity to vote and be voted for even after independence. As a result, prominent female politicians in the North like Late Hajia Gambo Sawaba could not vote and be voted for.<sup>4</sup> It was only in 1979 that women in northern Nigeria were given the opportunity, following the return to civilian rule.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The roll call of past military leaders:- General Aguiyi Ironsi January 15, 1966 – July 1966; General Yakubu Gowon July 1966 – July 1975; General Murtala Muhammed July 1975-February 13, 1976; General Olusegun Obasanjo February 13, 1976 – October 1, 1979; General Mohammadu Buhari December 31, 1983 – August 1985; General Ibrahim Babangida August 1985 – August 1993; General Sani Abacha November 1994 – June 8, 1998; General Abdulsalam Abubakar June 8, 1998 -May 29, 1999.

<sup>2</sup>She was the first female senator of the Nigerian Federal Parliament (1960-1965). She entered partisan politics in the 1950s and was a member of the women's wing of the Action Group. Available at <http://www.iwef.org/1.html>. Last visited on May 20, 2011.

<sup>3</sup><http://www.nigerianobservernews.com/03102010/sundayobserver/features/features4.html>. Last visited May 23, 2011.

<sup>4</sup> Id

<sup>5</sup> Id

During the second republic (1979-1983), there was further progress although it also produced only 1 female senator in the person of Late Franca Afegbuwa.<sup>6</sup> A few Nigerian women won elections into the House of Representatives at the national level. Some of these women were Mrs. J. C. Eze of the Nigerian People's Party (NPP) who represented Uzo Uwani constituency in former Anambra State; Mrs. V.U. Nnaji, also of the NPP who represented Isu Constituency in Imo State and Mrs. Abiola Babatope of the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) who represented Mushin Central II of Lagos State. But, on the whole, very few women won elections into the State House of Assembly during the second republic. In the 1990 elections into local governments heralding the third republic, very few women emerged as councilors and only one woman, Chief (Mrs.) Titilayo Ajanaku, emerged as Chairperson of Abeokuta Local Government Council in Ogun State. During the gubernatorial elections, no female Governor emerged in any of the states. Only two female Deputy Governors emerged, namely Alhaja Sinatu Ojikutu of Lagos State and Mrs. Cecilia Ekpenyong of Cross River State. In the Senatorial election held in 1992, Mrs. Kofo Bucknor-Akerele was the only woman who won a seat in the Senate. Very few women won election into the House of Representatives. One of these few was Chief (Mrs.) Florence Ita-Giwa who won the senatorial election in the Calabar Constituency, Cross River State under the banner of the National Republican Convention (NRC).<sup>7</sup>

These women deserve to be mentioned as they operated in a less liberal democratic era with less organized institutional and legal framework at the regional and international levels to latch on to.<sup>8</sup> Nigeria's treaty obligations under the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) requires her to "take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the political and public life of the country..."<sup>9</sup> It should be noted that section 40 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria<sup>10</sup> provides for the right of every Nigerian to participate in public life. The section states:-

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<sup>6</sup> She was elected in 1983 and her tenure was short lived as the 2<sup>nd</sup> republic was overthrown by coup d'etat in December 1983.

<sup>7</sup> Supra note 5

<sup>8</sup> Today's woman can take advantage of The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 18 December 1979. Available at <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/>. Last visited on May 20, 2011. Nigeria signed CEDAW on 23 Apr 1984 and ratified it on 13 Jun 1985. Available at [http://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtsg\\_no=IV-8&chapter=4&lang=en](http://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtsg_no=IV-8&chapter=4&lang=en). Last visited on May 20, 2011. The African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (AU Protocol) adopted by the 2nd Ordinary Session of the Assembly of the Union Maputo, 11 July 2003.

<sup>9</sup> Article 7 of CEDAW. See also Article 9(1)(a) of the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights on Women in Africa which states that "States Parties shall take specific positive action to promote participative governance and the equal participation of women in the political life of their countries through enabling national legislation and other measures to ensure that that women participate without discrimination in all elections". This is in consonance with Article 4 of CEDAW that deals with temporary special measures to accelerate equality between men and women.

<sup>10</sup> Cap C.23 Laws of the Federation of Nigeria LFN) 2004. Available at <http://www.nigeria-law.org/ConstitutionOfTheFederalRepublicOfNigeria.htm>. Last visited on May 23, 2011.

“Every person shall be entitled to assemble freely and associate with other persons, and in particular he may form or belong to any political party, trade union or any other association for the protection of his interests: Provided that the provisions of this section shall not derogate from the powers conferred by this Constitution on the Independent National Electoral Commission with respect to political parties to which that Commission does not accord recognition”.

The Constitution also provides for non-discrimination in section 42 which states:-

“(1) A citizen of Nigeria of a particular community, ethnic group, place of origin, sex, religion or political opinion shall not, by reason only that he is such a person:-

(a) be subjected either expressly by, or in the practical application of, any law in force in Nigeria or any executive or administrative action of the government, to disabilities or restrictions to which citizens of Nigeria of other communities, ethnic groups, places of origin, sex, religions or political opinions are not made subject.”

From the foregoing, it appears that there is nothing in the Constitution, which excludes the participation of women in politics in Nigeria, yet Nigerian women remain largely under represented in politics in comparison to their male counterparts.

The World Conference on Women (The Beijing Conference) in 1995 articulated 12 critical areas of concern considered as main obstacles to women’s advancement in the Beijing Platform of Action (BPFA).<sup>11</sup> The BPFA is not a list of laws, but a set of principles and strategies for action. The BPFA not only provides guidelines for actions on the part of Governments, Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) and members of civil society, aiming towards eliminating these barriers to achieving gender equality worldwide, but is a powerful statement of the recognition of women’s unequal status globally. One of the critical areas of concern specifically requires States to ‘ensure women’s full participation in power structures and decision making; develop education and training to increase women’s capacity to participate in decision making and leadership; and aim at gender balance in government bodies and the composition of delegations to the United Nations’.<sup>12</sup> This has defined standards of women participation in politics and other national engagement. Since then politically focused women non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have been engaged in various capacity building skills for female aspirants and encouraging voters to vote for women through various voter education programmes. This is imperative given that patriarchy is a recurrent decimal in every facet of the Nigerian life particularly in politics, religion and customs and traditions.

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<sup>11</sup> <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/>. Last visited on May 20, 2011

<sup>12</sup> Id.

Nigeria's political landscape broadened after General Abdulsalam Abubakar<sup>13</sup> announced his transition to civil rule programme in 1998. Thus, the gender audit of general elections in Nigeria is imperative to enable an assessment of the rating of women in governance through political participation and its impact on democratic governance. It is against this backdrop that this paper seeks to review the participation and performance of women at the 2011 general elections in Nigeria. Section I scans the political terrain since 1999 and its impact on women's participation and performance and assesses whether there has been improvement. Section II examines the roll call of female candidates at the 2011 general elections and in previous elections in the 4<sup>th</sup> republic and makes necessary comparison to enable informed opinions. Section III on the other hand x-rays the reasons for the poor outcomes of women at the polls despite increased number of female candidates who participated in the 2011 general elections. Section IV identifies factors that seem to marginalize a greater number of women from political participation and questions if the factors that strengthen the success of female aspirants should actually be the norm to achieve a level playing field. Section V proposes the way forward and proffers some recommendations to stem the tide. Section VI calls on the government to guarantee security, ensure that violence is addressed, compensate victims/their families, bring perpetrators to justice whilst recommendations of commission of inquiry set up to look into causes of post election violence be implemented to the letter and the report made public.

### **I. The Journey So Far.**

Nigeria's democratic culture is majorly characterized by factors such as: assassinations, lawlessness, illegalities, rigging, oppression, manipulation, marginalization and violence.<sup>14</sup> Other factors include: male dominated party executives, labeling, money politics, and innumerable social, cultural and religious issues.<sup>15</sup> These constitute barriers to women aspiring and contesting for elective positions in Nigeria.<sup>16</sup> The number of women who contested for elective positions at previous elections were significantly low and the brave told tales of how the system edged them out. Quite reminiscent are party intrigues that schemed out Onyeka Onwenu in the Chairpersonship election and Nkoyo Toyo<sup>17</sup> in the party primaries for the House of Representatives elections in 2003. Senator Akwashiki in an interview she granted one of the tabloids described the election that robbed her of her bid to return to the House of Representatives under the platform of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) in 2007 as a sham.<sup>18</sup> This made her to move to the All Nigeria People's Party (ANPP) and got elected into the Senate.

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<sup>13</sup> He succeeded Late General Sani Abacha who died on June 8, 1998.

<sup>14</sup> *Mixed are their blessings in a game of men.* THE PUNCH Friday April 29, 2011 p.6

<sup>15</sup> Senator Grace Bent (2007-2011 Senate year) in an interview she granted SATURDAY VANGUARD, MAY 17, 2008 p.16 noted blackmailing, mudslinging, maligning, character assassination as vices that go with politics in Nigeria.

<sup>16</sup> See DAILY SUN, Friday May 21, 2010, p. 11 where Mrs Oby Nwankwo the Executive Director of Civil Resources Development and Documentation Centre (CIRDDOC) called on political parties in Nigeria to remove all barriers against women's participation in politics.

<sup>17</sup> Former Executive Director of Gender and Development Action. She later became the Presidential Aide on Government and Civil Society Relations. She was later appointed Nigeria's Ambassador to Ethiopia.

<sup>18</sup> SDUNDAY TRUST, October 21, 2007 p. 4

In the 2011 general elections an increased number of Nigerian women defied the odds, 'stepped into the murky waters of politics'<sup>19</sup>, aspired and contested for party's primaries; many lost, yet a significant number compared to previous elections won the party's primaries and contested for elective positions in the various political parties<sup>20</sup> in the just concluded 2011 general elections in Nigeria. Female candidates constituted 9.1% of the total number of candidates who contested election into National Assembly in the 2011 general elections across all the political parties.<sup>21</sup> There were 3306 candidates with men accounting for 3004 (90.9%) and women 302(9.1%).<sup>22</sup> Despite the many female aspirants, only few emerged as candidates and fewer of them emerged as winners at the polls. Unfortunately, the number and percentage of women who were successful at the polls in 2011 was less than the figure in 2007. Whereas, the 2007 figure was higher than the figure in the 2003 general elections; and the figure in 2003 as higher than the figure in the 1999 general elections. In 1999, the overall percentage of women was 2%; in 2003, it was 4% and in 2007 it was 6%.

Although the number of female candidates increased for most of the elective positions, there was only 1 female presidential candidate in the person of Mrs Ebiti Ndok of the United National Party for Development. It is doubtful if she eventually voted given issues she had with the administration of justice system. It should be noted that Sarah Jubril<sup>23</sup> was a presidential aspirant under the platform of the People's Democratic Party (PDP). She lost at the party's primaries. For a review of Sarah Jubril's performance at the PDP's presidential primaries by this writer visit <http://baobabwomen.blogspot.com/2011/02/womens-political-participation.html>;<http://www.learningpartnership.org/blog/2011/03/politics-sarah-jibril/>.

There were 4 female vice-presidential candidates, namely y were Rose Yakubu of the African Renaissance Party (ARP), Kadijat B. Abubakar of the Better Nigeria Progressive Party (BNPP), Binutu Fela Akinola of Fresh Democratic Party (FRESH) and Bilikisu Ismo Magogo of the National Transformation Party (NTP).<sup>24</sup> At the time of writing this article the writer was unable to verify if their parties also adopted President Goodluck Jonathan as a consensus candidate, suffice it to say none of the 4 big political parties<sup>25</sup> had a female presidential, vice-presidential or governorship candidate.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Supra note 14.

<sup>20</sup> There were 63 registered political parties for the 2011 general elections in Nigeria. The list is available at <http://www.inecnigeria.org/political-parties/>. Last visited May 19, 2011.

<sup>21</sup> *GENDER ISSUES*. An Occasional newsletter of National Coalition on Affirmative Action (NCAA), an umbrella organization of over 100 NGOs across Nigeria working on women's rights and affirmative action. VOL 1 No 2. p. 10.

<sup>22</sup> Id.

<sup>23</sup> Sarah Jubril started her presidential ambition in 1992. She was an aspirant in the defunct Social Democratic Party (SDP). 6 years later, she contested on the platform of the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) but lost the presidential ticket to Chief Olusegun Obasanjo. In 2011 she contested again and lost to President Goodluck Jonathan.

<sup>24</sup> Supra note 15 p. 8

<sup>25</sup> The 4 big political parties were the People's Democratic Party (PDP), Congress for Progressive Change (CPC), Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN) and the All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP).

<sup>26</sup> 13 political parties outside the big 4 had female governorship candidates. See note 31 for list of parties with female governorship candidates.

## II. The Roll Call

Whereas, there are 36 governorship seats less than 36 states were due for governorship elections at the April 26, 2011 governorship elections. This was due to the fact that some governors did not commence their term on May 29, 2007 as they had to wait for a court order to declare them winners of the 2007 governorship election.<sup>27</sup> The court's decision was pronounced some years after other governors took their oath of office. Consequently, their 4 year tenure started running on the day they took their oath of office which was not May 29, 2007. Amongst these States were Edo, Ekiti, Osun and Anambra States.<sup>28</sup> Governor Peter Obi's second term as governor of Anambra State started running in 2010 because he took the oath of office as governor in 2006, in respect of the governorship election he contested in 2003, only after the Court of Appeal declared him winner of the election in 2006. He won a second term in the 2010 governorship election in Anambra State. Consequently, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC)<sup>29</sup> did not conduct elections in such states.

There were 348 governorship candidates contesting elections for governorship seats across the Federation. 13 (3.7%) out of the 348 governorship candidates were women and they contested in 10 states namely Benue, Delta, Ebonyi, Enugu, Imo, Kano, Kebbi, Kwara, Oyo and Plateau. Their names and parties were "Emilia Uba, Omaliko African Democratic Congress (ADC); Victoria Azaber Pausu, All Progressives Grand Congress (APGA); Dame Gloria Obi, African Democratic Congress (ADC); Princess Esther Nwodo-Agbo, People's Redemption Party (PRP); Nkechi Offor, African Liberation Party (ALP); Scolastica Emerole, Action Party of Nigeria (APN); Okoronkwo Precious, Better Nigeria Progressive Party (BNPP); Ihemadu Nkemdika, Fresh Democratic Party (FRESH); Hajia Musa Yakassi, Action Party of Nigeria (APN); Hauwa Mohammed, African Democratic Congress (ADC); Gbemisola Saraki-Fowora, Allied Congress Party of Nigeria (ACPN); Dada Fatima, Mega Peoples Progressive Party (MPPP); Paullen Tallen, (Labour Party)".<sup>30</sup> None of these women were successful at the elections which means that to date Nigeria, is yet to produce a female executive governor of a State except for the brief period that Dame Virginia Etiaba held forth for Governor Peter Obi of Anambra State when he had some political challenges that led to Dame Virginia Etiaba being sworn in as governor. Dame Virginia Etiaba was the deputy governor to Governor Peter Obi.

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<sup>27</sup> The Electoral Act provides for contestants to challenge the outcome of elections at election tribunals and the Court of Appeal is the apex court in respect of election matters.

<sup>28</sup> The list may not be exhaustive. However, at the time of writing this article only result of 26 governorship elections in respect of 26 states were available on INEC's website. Election was conducted on April 26, 2011. The States were Jigawa, Nasarawa, Ogun, Enugu, Yobe, Lagos, Kano, Kwara, Imo, Oyo, Gombe, Akwa-Ibom, Abia, Borno, Rivers, Katsina, Benue, Ebonyi, Kebbi, Zamfar, Niger, Delta, Plateau, Taraba, Kaduna and Bauchi. Available at <http://www.inecnigeria.org/gubernatorial-election-winners-2011/>. Last visited on May 20, 2011.

<sup>29</sup> INEC a permanent body created by the Constitution to organize Federal and state elections in Nigeria. Available at <http://www.inecnigeria.org/about/>. Last visited on May 20, 2011.

<sup>30</sup> *Women at War*. DAILY SUN, Monday April 25, 2011 p.

It appears some parties agreed to adopt female deputy governorship candidates. 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.<sup>31</sup> 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).<sup>32</sup>

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,<sup>33</sup> Ibrahim Mantu who was once Deputy Senate President, Fidelis Tapgun<sup>34</sup> and the incumbent governor Jonah Jang.<sup>35</sup> 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,<sup>36</sup> Aisha Jummai all of PDP. Others include Christiana N.O. Anyanwu,<sup>37</sup> Joy

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<sup>31</sup> The parties were Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), All Nigeria People's Party (ANPP), National Conscience Party (NCP) and People's Democratic Party (PDP).

<sup>32</sup> She served as the Lagos State Commissioner for Women Affairs before the party adopted her as the deputy governor candidate for the 2011 governorship election. She replaced Mrs Adebisi Sarah Sosan who is the outgoing deputy governor for the incumbent governor Fashola who was re-elected as governor. One may question why ACN changed the deputy governor candidate for the 2011 governorship election since the team performed from 2007-2011.

<sup>33</sup> He served the first term as governor from 1999-2003, he was re-elected in 2003 but was impeached in November 2006.

<sup>34</sup> He was elected governor during the 3<sup>rd</sup> republic under the platform of the Social Democratic Party (SDP). His tenure was scuttled when General Ibrahim Babangida annulled the June 12 Presidential election in 1993. This led to a spate of crisis, general Babangida stepped aside in August and handed over to an Interim National Government (ING) led by Chief Earnest Shonekan. The 3<sup>rd</sup> republic was eventually sacked by General Sani Abacha in November 1993.

<sup>35</sup> Mixed are their blessings in a game of men. THE PUNCH, Friday April 29, 2011 p.6

<sup>36</sup> She was Minister of Finance in the Olusegun Obasanjo administration.

Emordi both of APGA and lastly Chief (Mrs) Oluremi Tinubu of ACN. The notable casualties included Senator Iyabo Obasanjo-Bello, Senator Daisy Danjuma<sup>38</sup> and Kema Chikwe.<sup>39</sup> 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 Kure<sup>40</sup> (Niger State), Grace Bent (Adamawa State), Joy Emodi<sup>41</sup> (Anambra State), Eme Ufot Ekaete (Akwa Ibom State), Patricia Akwashiki (Nasarawa State), Iyabo Obasanjo-Bello (Ogun State), Nkechi Justina Nwaogu (Abia State).<sup>42</sup> In the 2003 elections there were 4(3.67%) female senators. 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.

The drop in the number of successful female contestants is worrisome. Senator Grace Bent an indigene of Ilesha, Osun State, South West Nigeria but married to an indigene of Adamawa State and elected into the Senate in 2007 under the platform of PDP, could not pick the ticket at the party's primaries in 2011. First timers like Prof Dora Akunyili could not sail to the senate as she lost to Dr. Chris Ngige whilst Ms Jumoke Akinjide<sup>43</sup> also lost in Oyo State. Whereas another first timer Chief (Mrs) Oluremi Tinubu won the Lagos Central Senatorial seat under the platform of Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN). Chief (Mrs) Oluremi Tinubu is the wife of one of the chieftains of CAN, Asiwaju Bola Ahmed Tinubu.<sup>44</sup> 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.

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<sup>37</sup> Ace television reporter; publisher of the TSM (The Sunday Magazine)

<sup>38</sup> Her husband, Lt-General T.Y. Danjuma, retired as the Chief of Army Staff during the Obasanjo led military regime. T.Y. Danjuma has held top advisory positions to previous and current civilian presidents in Nigeria. He was the Minister of Defense at the time Daisy Danjuma first contested for senatorial seat in Edo State, her state of origin. He was Chairman of the then Presidential Advisory Committee inaugurated by Goodluck Jonathan in March 2010 when Goodluck was Acting President in 2010. He Hails from Takum Local Government Area in Taraba State.

<sup>39</sup> Federal Minister of Aviation and later Nigeria's Ambassador to Ireland.

<sup>40</sup> She is the wife of the governor of Niger State (1999-2007).

<sup>41</sup> She was the first Igbo woman to be elected into the Senate when she won the senatorial election in 2003.

<sup>42</sup> Nine 'queens' of the Senate. SUNDAY TRUST, October 21, 2007 p.5

<sup>43</sup> Daughter of Chief Richard Akinjide (S.A.N.) of the 12 2/3 fame. Chief Akinjide was the Attorney General of the Federation and Federal Minister of Justice in the 2<sup>nd</sup> republic 1979-1983. Chief Richard Akinjide was a member of the ruling National Party of Nigeria (NPN) in the 2<sup>nd</sup> republic.

<sup>44</sup> Asiwaju Bola Ahmed Tinubu was the governor of Lagos State from 1999-2007.

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%).<sup>45</sup> Worst still is that some of the identified change agents especially as regards the tenacity with which they supported the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) (VAPP) Bill before the National Assembly lost at the polls. A case in point is Honourable Binta Garba. Notable winners included Honourable Beni Lar of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) who is the daughter of Chief Solomon Lar who was governor of Plateau State during the second republic and also one of the chieftains of the PDP.

### **III. Reasons for Poor Outcomes at the Polls**

Generally speaking the voting pattern at this year's general elections defied previous trends in many States and even at the presidential elections. It does appear that there was a general departure from the norm that hitherto characterized outcomes of previous elections. The 2011 general elections could be described as the year of "the mighty fallen".<sup>46</sup> Many politicians who had hitherto determined who should win at the polls were of no relevance during this dispensation given the outcomes of the various polls. There was indeed the whittling down of the influence of political god fathers as their candidates performed woefully at the elections. The 2011 general elections seem to be saying quoting Tony Marinho "godfathers must step aside and let development gallop forward carrying Nigeria to the greater heights. The age of political independence for political aspirants is now".<sup>47</sup>

Nevertheless, it does appear that patriarchy, religion, vote buying, ethical and cultural issues, as well as lack of resources/funds were the underlining reasons for the poor performance of women at the polls and awareness by the electorate that they have the final say on who should represent them through their ballots and not necessarily through imposition of candidates by political god fathers. Gbemisola Saraki-Fowora's father, Dr. Olusola Saraki, the Senate majority leader in the second republic has been a determining factor in Kwara State politics as he has been responsible for the installation of most of the governors in the State as far as the second republic. Dr. Saraki single handedly dictated who the governors will be.<sup>48</sup> The beneficiaries included Adamu Attah, Cornelius Adebayo who were second republic governors 1979 – 1983; Shuhabbah Lafiaji, the late Mohammed Lawal and Bukola Saraki who were governors in the third and fourth republic.<sup>49</sup> Nevertheless, she lost at the senatorial polls despite the fact that her father imposed her on the party.

Gbemisola's political misfortune is not unconnected with the fact that some concerned citizens including her brother, Bukola Saraki, who is the incumbent and out-going governor of Kwara State having completed 2 terms (2003-2011) seriously opposed the

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<sup>45</sup> The 12 members in 1999 were:- Barrister Iquo Minimab, Mrs. Patience Ogodo, Lola Abiola-Edewor, Patricia O. Etteh, Dorcas Odujinrin, J.F Adeyemi, Binta Garba Koji, Gbemisola Saraki, Florence Aya, Linda Ikpeazu, Temi Harrinnan and Mercy Almona Isei.

<sup>46</sup> A phrase borrowed from 2 Samuel 1:19. The Holy Bible. Authorized King James Version.

<sup>47</sup> THE NATION, Tuesday May 10, 2011 back page.

<sup>48</sup> *Women at War* DAILY SUN, Monday, April 25, 2011 p. 41.

<sup>49</sup> Id.

attempt by their father Dr. Olusola Saraki to impose Gbemisola as the governorship candidate in Kwara State under the platform of the People's Democratic Party (PDP). To ensure his daughter actualizes her ambition, a new party, Allied Congress Party of Nigeria (ACPN), was formed and Gbemisola was picked as the governorship candidate for the party. She lost to the PDP's candidate. Furthermore, Gbemisola's loss is also not unconnected with patriarchy and influence of religion as some religious leaders in the State seriously opposed the emergent of a woman as governor in a predominantly Muslim society where the Emir has its sphere of political influence. It is believed that this may clash with State protocol where a woman is the chief executive as State protocol may run counter to the idiosyncrasies of fundamentalists.

In Ogun State, the influence of Chief Olusegun Obasanjo the former head of state<sup>50</sup> and one of PDP's chieftains could not guarantee his daughter Senator Iyabo Obasanjo-Bello victory. She contested for the senatorial seat under the platform of PDP. Her victory was not to be as ACN regained control of the State which they lost to PDP since 2003 general elections. Furthermore, the face off between the out-going governor Otunba Gbenga Daniel and Chief Olusegun Obasanjo further jeopardized Iyabo's victory at the polls. A divided house further paved the way for ACN's victory in Ogun State. In Oyo State, Ms Jumoke Akinjide the daughter of Chief Richard Akinjide (S.A.N.) of the 12 2/3 fame and Attorney General of the Federation and Federal Minister of Justice in the second republic 1979-1983 also lost at the senatorial election in Oyo State.

The Honourable Minister of Women Affairs Chief (Mrs) Josephine Anenih in an interview she granted one of the tabloids<sup>51</sup> blamed the poor performance of women on lack of internal democracy in most of the political parties. This is true with regards to women's participation at the party's primaries as the number of women who scaled through the party's primaries was very low compared to the number of women who aspired. Sarah Jubril for instance had just one vote which she cast for herself at the PDP's presidential primaries. It is believed that PDP's primaries was profoundly guided and guarded.

Popularity of the candidates also determined outcome of elections and not necessarily the platform the female candidates contested election. The election into the Senatorial seat in Anambra State is apt. Although Anambra State is a stronghold of All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA) that did not guarantee Prof. Dora Akunyili victory at the polls despite the fact she contested under the platform of APGA. It is believed Prof. Dora Akunyili contested in a very inclement political weather as her strongest opponent Dr. Chris Ngige of Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN) has a favourable political record as his legacy as one time governor of the State before the court overturned his political victory in 2006 still speaks for him.<sup>52</sup> It is quite unfortunate that Akunyili's impeccable record as Director

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<sup>50</sup> Civilian Head of State from 1999 – 2007.

<sup>51</sup> THE GUARDIAN, Tuesday, April 19, 2011. p.12

<sup>52</sup> Chief Chris Ngige ceased to be the governor of Anambra State under the platform of PDP in 2006 when the Court of Appeal declared Peter Obi of APGA as the winner of the 2003 governorship election in Anambra State.

General of National Agency for Food and Drug Administration Control (NAFDAC) did not speak for her at the polls.

Vote buying which was alleged by some voters may have influenced the voting pattern of some people. It was alleged that some party agents discreetly gave out cash ranging from ₦500.00 to ₦1,000.00 per voter at the polling stations. Some agents gave the money when they had been informed by the voters that they voted for a particular party whilst some others gave the money to voters after securing promise from the voters to vote for a particular party.<sup>53</sup> Vote buying has implications for female candidates as many of them are not similarly situated economically with their male competitors and therefore, would not be able to woo voters with money. It also has implications for female aspirants without privileged background as they will be doubly disadvantaged at the party's primaries given money politics that also characterize our politics.

#### **IV. Determining a Level Playing Field.**

From the foregoing, the list of both successful and unsuccessful female candidates at the just concluded 2011 general elections deserves some consideration. The list seems to suggest that only persons with strong political affiliations either by virtue of their parents, spouses or other close relatives' political cleavage with strong economic base can aspire or contest for elections starting with the party primaries. Strong economic base is a strong factor in electioneering campaign giving the politics of money that pervades our political landscape. The feminization of poverty would in itself eliminate potential female candidates for elective office. The credentials of quite a number of the female candidates reflect this view as in the case of Chief (Mrs) Oluremi Tinubu, Senator Iyabo Obasanjo-Bello, Senator Gbemisola Saraki-Fowora, Senator Daisy Danjuma, Senator Ume Ufot Ekaete<sup>54</sup> and Honourable Beni Lar. Others that have long been at the corridors of power who contested in the 2011 general elections include Prof. Dora Akunyili, Nenadi Usman and Kema Chikwe.

This development is disturbing as it gives the impression that the political space is only opened for a select few, excludes a greater number of women who are already marginalized by virtue of being women and doubly marginalized by virtue of their low social and economic status. The concern is credible as the present system would likely marginalize many female activists and politicians of humble background from contributing their quota in democratic governance and this has ripple effect on development as it will strongly constrict the use of gender lens in development programmes/initiatives. Feminization of poverty would likely exacerbate the situation except where there is review of the electoral law so as to permit independent candidates for elections. Alternatively, the extent to which this trend will determine intra party politics is the extent to which the electorate will jettison imposition of candidates by 'god fathers' and vote for the candidate of their choice. This is exemplified in the outcome of the elections in Kwara, Ogun and Edo States that saw the defeat of Senator Gbemisola

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<sup>53</sup> A feminist who witnessed this development during the polls when she went to vote shared this experience with the writer.

<sup>54</sup> Her husband was the Secretary to the Federal Government under Obasanjo civilian regime.

Saraki-Fowora, Senator Iyabo Obasanjo-Bello and Senator Daisy Danjuma at the polls just to mention but a few.

Currently in Nigeria, political events are likely to be more favourable to female aspirants and candidates from privileged background as typified above. This is against the backdrop that they are less likely to be victims of sexual harassment that many female politicians are subjected to. They are also less likely to be victims of political violence as they would take advantage of the party's machinery which to a great extent is either controlled by the said relatives or can be influenced by the said relatives. This view has been reinforced by the experiences that some female politicians shared with the writer at various fora.

## **V. The Way Forward**

The performance of women at the just concluded 2011 general elections in Nigeria is not particularly cheering. It calls for sober reflection and there is urgent need for women groups in collaboration with relevant government agencies, political institutions, development partners and other donor agencies to re-strategize for the 2015 general elections. The time for that is here and now. We cannot afford to wait till 2015. Activities of various stakeholders have been on political education and women's political participation and even voter education. Nevertheless, there is clear and present danger that women's performance at the 2011 general elections could repeat itself or rear its ugly head in 2015 if we do not include training of political parties on women's political participation and their impact on democracy and good governance. The training will expose the political parties to basic principles of internal democracy, gender and democratic governance.

There should be the inclusion of gender sensitive provisions in party's constitution and manifestoes as this will serve the purpose of mainstreaming gender into its activities.<sup>55</sup> There should also be examination/assessment of parties' primaries with a view to formulating and implementing reforms that will support a more level playing field. Furthermore, an amendment of the Electoral Law to encourage independent candidates and to provide for persons disenfranchised from voting should be included.

There is also an urgent need for the establishment of a Women's Political Institute where parties and all female aspirants and candidates should be equipped with relevant skills that underpin the positions in government they seek in elections for. It will further challenge them to improve their level of education to enable them cope with the challenges that may be thrust upon them as a result of political exigency. This is imperative given the competitiveness of the various elective positions as opponents could intimidate them with overwhelming credentials.

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<sup>55</sup> Senator Grace Bent in an interview she granted SATURDAY VANGUARD, MAY 17, 2008 said "The problem, I think starts with the political parties. They have a lot to if they want to take the issue of female representation seriously in this country. But right now, we are just playing lip service to female representation, there is not enough conscious effort by the parties".

The Women's Political Institute should be an independent body and preferable non-governmental and non partisan to guarantee its independence and non-interference from the ruling party. Donations towards the running of the Women's Political Institute should be open to companies which should in turn entitle them to tax holiday, whilst names of individual donors should be published in the Institute's website and newspapers. Newspapers on the other hand should be encouraged to publish such names free of charge as part of its corporate social responsibility. Donations from development partners should also be encouraged and published on the Institute's website/newspapers.

Women should be very active in fighting against corruption and bribery in elections. Women should be at the forefront in calling for electoral reforms to restrict the use of money in elections. However because of the circumstances of women not meeting the resources needed of election, special seats as in Tanzania and Rwanda should be reserved for women. In the case of Nigeria with identifiable six geo political zones, each zone should be allocated a five percent of the elective offices to be filled by women. It would not be demanding too much for each of the zone to forfeit five of the parliamentary offices from the State Assemblies to the National Assembly to Women.<sup>56</sup> The sacrifice is worthy. In the alternative, recommendations of the Justice Uwais Panel on the Electoral Reform Commission on representation of women and persons with disabilities on proportional basis with respect to selection of candidates for elective office could be adopted as circumstances permit by parties during party primaries as this will be in line with temporary special measures to accelerate equality between men and women.<sup>57</sup>

## **VI. Conclusion**

The challenges ahead will truly test the true motive of the first lady's pet project – Women for Change Initiative. Will it take a recess now that President Goodluck Jonathan has won or will it start preparing women for 2015 general elections? The task ahead has medium and long term goals. The short term goal of encouraging women participate in the 2011 general elections may have been achieved although the writer of this article does not credit the Women for Change Initiative for this effort. This is against the backdrop that politically focused women NGOs have since been clamouring for affirmative action and increased representation of women in both elective and appointive positions long before the First Lady Dame Patience Jonathan's initiative. Besides, Goodluck Jonathan assumed leadership on May 6, 2010 and that obviously meant that women who aspired for elective offices had been nursing the ambition and by May 2010 many of them had already signified interest and started their grassroot mobilization and party politicking.

The BAOBAB led Nigerian NGO CEDAW Coalition Shadow Report submitted to the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women during its consideration of Nigeria's 6<sup>th</sup> country periodic report in July 2008 can attest to this. Also, BAOBAB for Women's Human Rights (BAOBAB) has been working over the years to ensure comprehensive political education (not just voter education) and hopefully creating a space for experienced female politicians to mentor younger women

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<sup>56</sup> [www.awlproject.org/.../30Spet07\\_WhyNigerianWomenFailinElections](http://www.awlproject.org/.../30Spet07_WhyNigerianWomenFailinElections). Last visited on May 23, 2011.

<sup>57</sup> Article 4 of CEDAW

interested in vying for political positions in future. Furthermore, the Northern Women Roundtable, a non governmental organization with support from the British Council in Kano began to prepare northern women politicians for 2011 elections by building the capacity of women politicians and empowering them on leadership skills.<sup>58</sup> Thus it would be preposterous to conjecture that these women have been slumbering and were only awoken from their political slumber at the wake of the activities of Women for Change Initiative. The efforts of the first lady and the activities of Women for Change Initiative built on the labours of others thereby lending her voice to a worthy cause which of course deserves to be commended for pegging it at 35%. When women roar together the sound is thunderous and it shakes the foundations of the earth. Synergy on the part of women will enable us challenge the status quo.

In the light of the foregoing, this article calls for a stakeholders' meeting to review the participation and performance of women at the just concluded 2011 general elections with a view to chartering a fruitful course for women's participation in future elections in Nigeria. Nigerian women need more than economic empowerment for success at the polls. Political violence negates women's chances at the polls and in political participation and women collectively say 'NO' to political violence and violence of all forms. The state should ensure full security of women and girls during election periods and end impunity. Political parties must commit to non-violent campaigning and desist from hate speech. Non-violence education should be mainstreamed in all awareness raising and voter education campaigns by all players and the state should guarantee and safeguard freedom of movement, expression and assembly for all citizens, especially women.

Lastly, perpetrators of political violence must be brought to justice in addition to adequate compensation to victims/their families. It is pertinent to mention that the report of the 22 person panel inaugurated by President Goodluck Jonathan to look into the causes of the post election violence in Nigeria should be made public and the recommendations implemented to the letter to deter future occurrence and guarantee security.<sup>59</sup> This is necessary as the feeling in some quarters is that the setting up of the Commission of Inquiry is a sham designed to divert attention of the world to the proper prosecution of the perpetrators, and compensation of victims and families of those killed.<sup>60</sup> The question that should agitate us is what is really expedient at the moment! Is it a 22-person commission of inquiry into the violence or that state prosecutors need to follow through on arrests to try perpetrators and seek justice? Would justice be traded on the altar of political expediency? Was the government actually proactive? Where there no warning signals that there could be post election violence given utterances by some politicians prior to elections? What steps were taken to beef up security in areas of

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<sup>58</sup> NGO woos women in politics. THE PUNCH Thursday March 20, 2008 p. 5

<sup>59</sup> This view is reinforced by the fact that it is common for government to set up panels or commissions of inquiry and the reports are never made public. The inability of government to indict and prosecute perpetrators is responsible for the cycle of impunity that has become a recurrent decimal in the country.

<sup>60</sup> The National Coalition of the International Criminal Court (NCICC) is strongly of this view. NCICC is also of the view that the Federal Government has no power to set up such a panel of inquiry in relation to the provisions of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Therefore, the decisions and recommendations of any such panel may be null and void and will likely not be enforced by the court.

possible flash points? NGOs are quite skeptical about the commission of inquiry given our history.