

## **WOMEN EMPOWERMENT AND DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION IN NIGERIA: A PROGNOSIS**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The critical area of women empowerment has indeed received commendable governmental attention since the return of the Nigerian State to the path of democratic governance in 1999. From the initial Olusegun Obasanjo presidency, through the Umaru Yar'Adua era, up to the current Goodluck Jonathan dispensation, it has been a case of continuous victories for women empowerment. Within this same period also it remains debatable if it has also been success stories in the area of democratic consolidation. This paper has not only joined the debate, it has also proffered solutions on how women empowerment can increasingly lead to democratic consolidation in the Nigerian.

**KEYWORDS:** Women Empowerment, Democracy, Democratic Consolidation, Prognosis

### **INTRODUCTION**

The critical area of women empowerment has indeed received commendable governmental attention since the return of the Nigerian State to the path of democratic governance in 1999. From the initial Olusegun Obasanjo presidency, through the Umaru Yar'Adua era, up to the current Goodluck Jonathan dispensation, it has been a case of continuous victories for women empowerment. Obi (2007:236), cited in Idike (2013) opines that the Obasanjo Administration did a marvelous job in the area of women empowerment. Subsequently, according to Iheuwa (2013:1), also cited in Idike (2013) the Administration of President Jonathan has made significant impact in the area of women empowerment, in view of the fact that in all the 100 years of Nigeria's corporate existence, the country has never witnessed the monumental visibility and inclusion of women in governance and decision-making, as it has experienced under the Jonathan Administration. Iheuwa (2013:1) further posits that in the spirit of its expressed policy, in support of 30% Affirmative Action for the benefit of women, the Federal Government under President Jonathan, made conscious and positive efforts to take appropriate measures, to reflect a good percentage of women in governance. For instance, the administration took off in 2011 with the appointment of 13 female Cabinet Ministers, 5 female Special Advisers, 10 female Ambassadors, 16 female Judges of the Court of Appeal; 11 female Permanent Secretaries, 16 female Judges of the Federal High Court, 3 female Judges of the Supreme Court, 6 female Judges of the National Industrial Court; a female Acting President, Court of Appeal and The

Chief Justice of the Federation as female. By this, the President has made good his campaign promises by raising the number of women in decision-making positions to an unprecedented level (Iheuwa 2013:1). Within this same period also it remains doubtful if it has also been success stories in the area of democratic consolidation. It is thus believed in this study that one of the most critical challenges of the Nigerian State today is the challenge of democratic consolidation. Idike (2013) further highlights as follows:

After a long period of Military Rule in Nigeria, the country in 1999, returned to the path of what now appears to be sustainable democracy. The period of military rule, occasioning a civil war (1967-1970), critically hampered the democratic process in Nigeria, between 1966 and 1999. There was a major attempt to restore civilian democracy (1979-1983) but this was only an attempt; as the Military came back. Nigeria, a former British colony, obtained independence from Britain in 1960. The first democratic dispensation thus, lasted from 1960 to 1966 (a period of six years). The next democratic dispensation, covered the period of 1979-1983 (a period of four years). Every other era in the life of independent Nigeria, was either marked by full-blown military dictatorship or some form of amalgam between the military and civilian politicians. The psychology of the military essentially entailed the destruction of democratic structures. Olusegun Obasanjo, who became Nigeria's President in 1999 (he was also Military Head of State, from 1976 to 1979), was in office for two terms of four years each. He handed over to Umaru Musa Yar'Adua, whose demise in office in 2010 led to the emergence of Yar'Adua's Vice President, Goodluck Jonathan, as Acting President. Jonathan was subsequently confirmed substantive President and later elected in his own capacity as President on 18 April, 2011.

Hence, to the extent that between 1999 and the time of this study in 2014, the military have not taken over the reins of governance in Nigeria, it is possible to assume that democratic consolidation is on course. However, to further proceed in a logical manner in this study, we shall make some conceptual clarifications.

## **CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS**

### **Women Empowerment**

Adewole (1997), cited in Lasiele (1999) describes women empowerment as the provision of conducive environment or opportunities to women to contribute their quota to the social, political and economic development of a nation. Lasiele (1999) further opines that women empowerment can be described as the provision of adequate opportunities to women to develop their potentials and contribute to the development of the nation in particular and to the world in general. According to Mayoux (2005), women empowerment is the process through which women, who are currently most discriminated against, achieve gender equity. Indeed, it is usually assumed that every day concepts such as women empowerment are amenable to simplified definitions. In social scientific investigation, such concepts are truly problematic to narrow down to particular meanings. Women empowerment belongs to this class of concepts. In this study, women empowerment stands for increased access to opportunities by women to participate in governance at the national political level.

### **Democratic Consolidation**

Ebirim (2014:51) has posited that the concept of democratic consolidation applies differently to different societies at various stages of democratic development. Accordingly, democratic consolidation may be defined as a status of democratic maturity such that it can no longer be threatened or truncated by reactionary forces whether internal or external. Furthermore, argues (Ebirim, 2014:51), democratic consolidation is the process by which a new democracy matures,

such that it is unlikely to revert to authoritarianism. Citing Diamond (1999), Kwasau (2013:182) sees democratic consolidation as the process of achieving broad and deep legitimation, such that all significant political actors believe that popular rule is better for their society than any other realistic alternative they can imagine. It also connects the act of reducing the probability of the breakdown of the system to the point where democracy can be said that it will persist. Some scholars, Kwasau (2013:182) continues, view it as regime maintenance and about regarding the key political institutions as the only legitimate framework for political contestation and adherence to the democratic rules of the game. It manifests under enhanced economic development, developed democratic culture, and a stable party system.

It is important to point out that democratic consolidation is a process; it is not an event. According to Osinachukwu and Jawan (2011:130), democratic consolidation implies a democracy that can last for (sic) the test of time and this can be assured if those values that made democracy worthwhile are fully institutionalized. Democratic consolidation in this conceptualization begins to look like a particular occurrence. In this study, democratic consolidation stands for the process of ensuring that the well being of citizens is more guaranteed under a current democratic dispensation than the preceding authoritarianism.

### **IS DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION ON COURSE IN THE NIGERIAN STATE?**

To the extent that the Military have not once again seized governance structures in Nigeria, it can be argued that democratic consolidation is on course in the Nigerian State. However, the worrisome issue is that under the current democratic dispensation, Nigerians seem to have experienced more of pains than gains (Inokoba and Kumokor, 2011:139). In other words, the political dividends that democracy promised have not been delivered. Citing, The Nation (2009:15), Inokoba and Kumokor (2011:140) contend that the tragedy of the Nigerian situation is that “social capital” is almost extinct, while the performance of government at all levels may be measured through the high levels of incompetence and corruption. Ten years of the Fourth Republic has elevated corruption, impunity and meddlesomeness to political creeds that have robbed governance the much needed responsive and caring human face. This is double jeopardy: bad politics and poor economic management characterized by collapsing institutions, disoriented political elites and an abused, violated, disillusioned and disenfranchised populace, has led to governance that has failed to deliver the much promised dividends of democracy (Inokoba and Kumokor, 2011:140).

Election rigging remains a notable feature of general elections in Nigeria. According to Osinachukwu and Jawan (2011:128), Nigeria’s elections have so far thwarted the foundation upon which democracy is built, due to election rigging. Nigeria is in the category where election management is less successful. The rules guiding elections are ambiguous, ever changing or easily maneuvered; the electoral regulations and rules are institutionally less effective; the political bigwigs are more of gladiators in their conducts; hence the electorates are often powerless as they live at the mercy of the political stalwarts. The political barons impose unpopular candidates on the electorate and employ every form of political gimmick to influence the election in their own favour, against the general will of the people (Osinachukwu and Jawan, 2011:128). They (Osinachukwu and Jawan, 2011:128/129), further highlight as follows:

Election rigging in Nigeria were evident in 1964/1965, 1979, 1983,1993,1999,2003 and 2007 general elections. Between 1999 and 2007, election rigging was accompanied with bloodshed and this claimed the lives of so many Nigerians, especially popular contestants, and these political killings were executed by hired assassins from wicked politicians who wanted power by

all means. The contemporary political barons in Nigeria impose gullible electoral officers on the system and the electoral officers employ various tricks to win election for their employers, to the detriment of the masses and popular candidates. This, however, has made the system very boring and many have resorted to staying at home during electioneering, for fear of being intimidated or coerced to vote against their will and this is too bad for a country that is desperate to institutionalize a consolidated democracy.

According to Ibeh (2014), electoral violence is most likely to occur in 15 Nigerian states during the forthcoming 2015 general elections; a research by a non-governmental organization has shown. CLEEN Foundation, a non-governmental organization that promotes public safety, security, and access to justice, in the report listed 15 states as the most volatile with high security risk during the forthcoming 2015 election. The organization in its report titled 'Third Security Threat Assessment', noted that the security situation in the country could be seen as a reflection of the failure of the Nigerian state to protect its citizens. The states listed as most volatile are Nasarawa, Plateau, Benue, Borno, Yobe, Adamawa, Taraba, Kaduna, Zamfara, Rivers, Ebonyi, Enugu, Imo, Ekiti and Osun. Three of these states – Adamawa, Borno, and Yobe – are already under emergency rule due to the activities of the terrorist Boko Haram group. Some others like Plateau, Benue, Nasarawa, Kaduna, and Zamfara have recently witnessed killings of hundreds of people by unidentified armed men, as well as through communal and ethno-religious violence. The latest being the killing of over 100 people in a Zamfara community, by unidentified gunmen on motorcycles.

In an earlier assessment in July 2013, continues Ibeh (2014), the organization had listed Borno, Rivers, Bauchi, Plateau, Kaduna, Benue, Nasarawa, Delta, Sokoto, Adamawa, and Yobe as the most volatile states. The organization stated that the parameters used for the categorization of the violence-prone states include: history of violence, degree of control by the incumbent state government and relationship with the federal Government, stability of internal state party politics, existence of terrorists and militants, as well as communal and religious conflict. Others include zoning arrangement for political offices, bid for second term by the incumbent governor, and jostle for federal and state legislative positions. The foundation also listed proliferation of arms and increased activities by armed groups as major risk factors towards the 2015 election. It also listed 11 states as mid-volatile. These are Kogi, Niger, Bauchi, Gombe, Katsina, Sokoto, Kano, Abia, Anambra, Delta, and Akwa Ibom. According to Ibeh (2014), CLEEN Foundation further categorized the remaining 10 states including Lagos, Ondo, and Sokoto as low-volatile or stable states. It, however, said Ekiti and Osun states oscillate between most volatile and mid-volatile groups.

In 2011, Nigeria experienced post-election violence that led to the death of many citizens including National Youth Service Corps members posted to various states. In states like Kaduna, the post-election violence left over 4, 000 persons displaced and several houses destroyed and burnt. Many of the victims of the communal clashes and election violence including women and children were reportedly hacked to death, shot, or burnt alive based on their ethnic identity or political beliefs Ibeh (2014).

As a matter of fact, the most worrisome of the unsettling issues under Nigeria's current democratic dispensation is the issue of insecurity that seems to be defying every solution. Indeed, according to Ogege (2013:82), Nigeria is confronted with daunting security challenges which include armed robbery, ethnic crisis, assassination, militancy, kidnapping and terrorism. The current and most disturbing insecurity problem in Nigeria is the terror unleashed by Jama'atul

Alhul Sunnah Lidda' Wat, Wal Jihad - a dreaded militant Islamic sect popularly known as Boko Haram. The mass media present to the public a multivariied image of dramatic acts of bombings with impunity and horrific portrayal of people burnt to ashes, maimed and property wantonly destroyed by Boko Haram. Thus, everybody, especially in the hotbed of terrorism, lives in constant fear.

According to Nwachukwu (2014), Nigeria has lost more people in one year from acts of terrorism than the numbers killed in the Irish Republican Army terrorist campaign in the United Kingdom that lasted 30 years. Nwachukwu (2014) further declares that Nigeria is in a war, in all but name and that the enemy is in our midst, as we were told by the President they are even in his government. Abidde (2014), clearly suggests that (a) President Jonathan will contest and win the 2015 presidential election; and (b) that Boko Haram is just warming up (unless its backers have a change of min). All this will be taking place of course, in the name of democratic consolidation, under a brand of democracy that delivers pain and death to the citizens. Thus, as Nigerians experience more of pains than gains (Inokoba and Kumokor, 2011:139), what then is democratic consolidation? As election rigging persists in Nigeria and electoral violence remains on the ascendancy, is democracy truly being consolidated? As the citizens encounter unabated armed robbery, ethnic crisis, assassination, militancy, kidnapping and terrorism, of what use is democracy to them? Of what use is the type of democracy under which citizens are butchered in large numbers on daily basis? How can women empowerment positively impact on the process of democratic consolidation in Nigeria?

#### **WOMEN EMPOWERMENT AND DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION IN NIGERIA: A PROGNOSIS**

The commendable new wave of women empowerment in the Nigerian State needs not subsist in a vacuum. In other words, it must have a socio-political and socio-economic impact on the Nigerian State. In the scheme of the burning issues in the Nigerian State as at today and in view of the immense expectations of the citizens for democratic dividends from the equally new wave of democracy, it is suggested in this study that women empowerment in Nigeria should necessarily impact positively on democratic consolidation. According to Nwogu (2013) a former United States ambassador to Nigeria, Mr. Walter Carrington, posits that insecurity and the developmental challenges confronting Nigeria were caused by corruption. Carrington therefore advised the citizens to hold the leaders accountable and tasked the electorate to ensure that their votes served as an instrument to bring about development (and by extension reduce the level of insecurity). Women empowerment must lead to reduction in the level of corruption. A corrupt national system can not be believed to be consolidating on democracy. We must use our improved status as empowered Nigerian women to hold Nigerian political leaders accountable to the electorate. We must use our new status to sensitize the electorate to ensure that their votes served as the instrument for bringing about development, as democratic consolidation is inextricably tied to development.

Empowered Nigerian female political office holders must say no to corruption so that their empowerment will not amount to a collectively selfish endeavour. The new status of the empowered Nigerian female political office holder requires that she positively influences her male counterparts to also decisively say no to corruption. The empowered Nigerian female public office holder must not be a praise-singer. She must tell her superiors the truth always, in the overall interest of the Nigerian State. When elections are rigged, she should be at the vanguard of the necessary condemnation of such electoral fraud. In addition, she must not be a beneficiary of electoral fraud, in the course of attempting to consolidate on her empowerment. Empowered Nigerian women in the Executive Council at the Federal level, can jointly present to the Council, memoranda on issues that would speedily deliver democratic dividends to Nigerian citizens. At the National Assembly, the empowered women in the two different arms of the

Assembly, should constantly work together to sponsor bills that would aid the course of democratic consolidation in Nigeria. In the Judiciary, the newly empowered Nigerian women must take up the challenge of delivering landmark judgments that would positively impact on the course of democratic consolidation in Nigeria.

In an era of escalated wave of armed robbery, undulating ethnic crisis, every day assassination, debilitating militancy, horrible level of kidnapping and unimaginable recourse to terrorism, empowerment of the Nigerian woman must also lead to the proffering of solutions on how to bring about a drastic form of reduction in this level of ills, destruction and death, in a democratic state. Silence is anathema to empowerment. Sycophancy is contradictory to it. The voice of the empowered Nigerian woman must always be heard authoritatively, in the face of the current generic challenges being faced by democracy in Nigeria.

### **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, this paper highlights that women empowerment has indeed received commendable governmental attention since the return of the Nigerian State to the path of democratic governance in 1999. This commendable new wave of women empowerment in the Nigerian State it has been suggested in the paper, needs not subsist in a vacuum. In other words, it must have a socio-political and socio-economic impact on the Nigerian State. Hence, the paper has made suggestions on how this desired impact can be engendered. It is strongly believed in this paper that if the opinions of the paper are adopted and implemented by Nigerian women, women empowerment can increasingly lead to democratic consolidation in the Nigerian State.

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