

## Economic Recession, Women, Grassroots Governance and Nigeria's Development Aspiration: Challenges from the Fourth Republic.

### Author's Details:

<sup>(1)</sup>**Modupe AKE PhD**-Department of Political Science and International Relations College of Business and Social Science - Landmark University, Omu-Aran, Nigeria <sup>(2)</sup>**Leke OKE, PhD**-Department of Political Science, Faculty of the Social Sciences, Ekiti state university, Ado- Ekiti, Nigeria.

### Abstract

*Proponents of grassroots/local government envisaged a developmental system that will serve as a springboard for national development. This is anchored on the belief that grassroots development forms the basis for national development since it has a direct bearing on the citizens. However, successive governmental attempts at heralding development from this tier have been jeopardized by male dominance of the political terrain at this level of governance. This becomes compounded and more worrisome with the current economic recession the country has been plunged into with its attendant deleterious impacts on women and development. Utilizing secondary sources of data, this paper avers that the prevailing economic realities in Nigeria today are such that are impacting on women empowerment and political participation in all strata of governance with implication for development and good governance. The paper, therefore, canvasses the provision of economic and democratic incentives towards liberating women and heralding the national development*

**Key Words:** Economic Recession, Women, Grassroots governance, Development, and National Development.

### Introduction

The foundation of grassroots/local government in Nigeria dated back to the era of colonial administration, (United Nations (1995), with the introduction of indirect rule, which marked the genesis of self-rule and development (Mimiko, 1998). The closeness of local government to the grassroots enables it to perform specific functions and services which bother on the concerns, interests, and aspirations of the people in the respective domains. According to the International Union of Local Authorities (IULA), local government is created to encourage decentralized approach towards national integration and to create a sense of belongingness at the grassroots (Ola, 1984). Government at the grassroots was designed to maximize citizens' participation in development, promote balanced development in order for it to be more responsive and responsible to the yearnings of the local communities (Ugwu, 2002).

The grassroots level of governance is expected to provide feedback to the state and National government on the opinions and demands of people at the grassroots (Appadorai, 1975). At the same time, the grassroots government is expected to mobilize women as human and material resources for the development of local communities, etc. The 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria guarantees the existence of a democratically elected Local Government (Bekele, 2000). Unfortunately, grassroots governance in a bid to fulfilling this task has been handcuffed with the stark reality of economic recession in recent time, at the same time governmental attempts at heralding development from this tier have been jeopardized by male dominance. Women have increasingly been underrepresented in governance and are still considered misfits compared to men (Olojede, 2009). Women participation at the grassroots level is an issue of great concern because women have been relegated to the background politically for a long time, which of course made them lose their rightful place in local governance (Anifowose, 2004).

Thus the level of governance closest to the people and by implication the most critical in provoking good democratic governance and values at the grassroots level has failed to prepare for the looming crisis (Agagu, 1997; Essien, 2010) Given the magnitude of economic recession in Nigeria, specifically in the Fourth Republic, this paper examines how the recession has impacted on women empowerment, development and the issues surrounding their political participation at the grassroots level.

It is often argued that the near absence of women's voices in key decision-making on strategic issues at the grassroots, jeopardized by male dominance of the political terrain at the grassroots has become compounded (Igbuzor, 2003). More worrisome is the recent economic recession the country has been plunged into, arising from bad governance, partially manifested in gender inequities in the structures and processes of grassroots governance put in place by men.

This paper is thus organized into six parts to address its major contending issues successfully. The first part is the introduction while the second part is a theoretical discourse on women and grassroots governance. The third part focuses on economic recession and women empowerment. The fourth part examines the challenges of women's participation in politics and decision-making at the grassroots whilst the fifth part offers a plausible explanation for Nigeria's development aspiration and the challenges from the Fourth Republic. The sixth part concludes the work.

### **Theoretical discourse: Women and grassroots governance.**

Women have played numerous roles in the literature. In some countries, they are perceived as having "primary" responsibilities as wives and mothers for which they receive no overt remuneration. Women's under-representation or lack of involvement in governance is taken as given in most situations (World Bank Report 2012). While women are often at the receiving end of poor governance, they are seldom part of the inner circles of policy formulation.

Women have disproportionately been discriminated against in governance and at all levels in Nigeria (Afolabi & Lanre, 2003). Despite the fact that women constitute 48.78 percent of the national population, the average participation of women in grassroots governance has hardly ever been more than 3 percent (Adeniyi, 2003). This has impacted negatively on women, with implication for development, thus posing practical limitations on the possibilities for their active involvement in grassroots governance.

Kanter's "Glass-Ceiling Theory" is adopted for this study (1977). The theory focuses on ways in which the structure of work organizations, especially those with a large proportion of white-collar workers, establish women in subordinate positions, i.e., they put a 'glass-ceiling' over women's opportunities (Kanter, 1977). The key political positions in the political system of Nigeria especially at the grassroots level can be related to the organization referred to in Kanter's theory. He described work organization in terms of three dimensions:

- **Opportunity:** People who have less opportunity tend to be low in self-esteem and aspiration while people with more opportunity are competitive and have greater self-esteem.
- **Power:** Kanter defined power as the capacity to mobilize resources in support of individual interests. People with low power tend to be authoritarian, subordinating, coercive, critical, territorial and are not well linked. People with high power tend to be non-directive, encouraging to subordinates, helpful and popular.
- **Proportions:** This is a social mix. The small proportion tends to be highly visible, highly stressed and stereotyped. The large proportions invisibly fit in with the group, find networking and the acquisition of sponsors.

Discussing Kanter's opportunity as one of the three dimensions of work organization, the Nigerian political arena is not different: Women are not given the opportunity to exercise their political rights like occupying key political positions ranging from the grassroots to the federal government level at the upper echelon of decision-making. Instead, they are subjected to certain constraints and limitations in appointed positions where they only act as figureheads, while men who appointed them indirectly control them in the position. In terms of power, Nigerian women are just like as Kanter described those with low power, while men are those with high power in all strata of governance and especially at the grassroots level. For instance, during elections, men mobilize women; enticing them with diverse incentives in order to vote and never encourage them on how to mobilize themselves to be serious contenders for elective positions.

In a similar vein, Nigerian women are the small proportion (in the context of the Kanter's analysis). It is an indisputable fact that Nigerian women are not only limited or ceiled from power, but the attempt by the successive government at heralding development from the grassroots through women have also been

jeopardized by male dominance of the political terrain. Coupled with the economic recession the country has been plunged into with its attendant deleterious impacts on women and development.

A renewed commitment was made in 1995 in Beijing by world governments, to increase women's decision-making representation in governance to a minimum of 30 percent (United Nations, 1995). The reality of the 1995 Beijing declaration is far off the mark in Nigeria. Though, the Nigeria constitutions as amended granted women 30 percent political rights, the implementation of these good intentions run counter to the existing norms regarding women involvement and participation in governance. This has not changed in favor of women but has rather posed practical limitations on the possibilities for the active involvement of Nigerian women in grassroots governance.

While women in Nigeria have been active economically, the degree and significance of their participation in governance have not been rewarded by commensurate degrees of political power vis-a-vis men. Women are not adequately involved in the grassroots governance system (Olojede, 2016). Women are not prominent among policymakers; even when managed to be giving position they are unable to decide independently about the conception, planning, and execution of development projects (Mugambe 2000). Thus Nigerian women lack participation in decision making of their immediate communities.

### **Economic Recessions and Women Empowerment**

Economic recession is a decline in gross domestic product, drop in the stock market, insufficient funds to ensure sustainable livelihood, hunger, and malnutrition, ill health, limited or lack of access to education and productive resources, homelessness and inadequate housing, which comes up as a result of recessions in consumer confidence, government and wages (World Bank Report, 2012). The recession has no definite definition because it is multidimensional, and a physiological matter partly because the recession is relative. It is a general downturn, lack of income and productive resources, high unemployment, high inflation, slowing gross domestic product. (Agbalajobi, 2010). The blame is always on federal leadership, e.g., the president, the head of the Federal Reserve, or the administration in power.

That the global community was in economic recession clearly manifested in the myriads of intervention policies and programmes orchestrated to mitigating its ramifying and deleterious effects across the globe. At the London Summit in April 2009, the G-20 countries pledged to mitigate the social impacts of the global financial crisis by providing “US\$50 billion to support social protection, boost trade and safeguard development in Low income countries” (in the Global Plan for Recovery and Reform: the Communiqué from the London Summit). Later in the same month, the World Bank announced that its lending for social protection programmes would rise from US\$12 billion by 2012. Their press release said, “This lending includes rapid social response programmes and conditional cash transfers, where families are granted money transfers in exchange for sending their children to school and for regular medical check-ups.” In response to the food crisis of 2008, the World Bank established a US\$2 billion Global Food Crisis Response Programme (GFCRP), which supports social protection interventions such as food-or cash-for-work schemes and social feeding programmes. Following their July 2009 meeting in L'Aquila, Italy, and the G-8 countries issued a joint statement on Global Food Security, which urged support for a range of social protection measures-including cash-based social protection systems-to assist millions of people affected by the global food crisis (Poverty Insights; 2009:1)

Thus Nigeria as a member of the global community was not immune from ravaging effects of the global economic recession. According to the Nigerian National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), the unemployment rate was at 20%, as a result of the early 80s recession hangover. It reduced to 12.6% in 2002 following some major economic reforms and went up again to 13.3% as of Q2 of 2016. In the 1999 General election 1.8% of women were Local government chairperson, 1.1% councilors, also in 2003 Elections 1.9% women were chairpersons, 4.2% councilors. In 2007, 3.7% of women were chairpersons and 3.6% councilors (NBS, 2009). The 2007 result shows greater challenges and disparity in women grassroots participation. Similarly, the challenges of the recession on women' empowerment in Nigeria has been very high: The economic recession has created a gap and invariably increased growth, in the numbers of job seekers, and these have worsened the employment

situation for women (Dunbar, 1997). Women face greater vulnerabilities in the labour market because of their relative lack of education and training, the tendency to channel women into certain occupations, and the continuous heavy burdens of unpaid domestic work, childbearing, and childcare, has equally restricted the time and energy available for income-earning activities.

Generating employment for women is pivotal to promoting equitable economic growth. Okonjo argues that Nigerian women's rate of unemployment is very much higher than that of men. Unmarried women's unemployment rates are considerably higher than those of married women. The job loss has affected women drastically, while men's contribution to family income has been reduced in some families in Nigeria. This is with a widening gap over the recession. These are due to the types of jobs men and women tend to have. President Buhari said women are the most heated by the economic recession. Women are also more concentrated in the industries that have shed fewer jobs.

Research shows that women remain different in terms of occupation and industrial distribution, earnings, and hours worked. These differences result in women impacts on levels of employment and family income as well as the demand for governmental assistance.

Women's employment status is shaped by the prevailing political conceptualization of gender roles they play, and by the economic positions and obligations which they have within the family and the community, as daughters, wives, and mothers (Sorenson, 1998). In addition, their economic position will be determined by their participation in the landscapes of politics, at the grassroots (Warsame, 1996). Apart from contributing to the definition of women's empowerment, the political and economic factors play a decisive role in defining the motivation as well as the constraints on women's involvement in grassroots governance towards sustainable national development.

### **Challenges to women's Political participation and Decision-making at the grassroots**

The consequence of the dysfunctional structure of grassroots governance and lack of political participation of women was as a result of the Economic recession (Anifowose, 2004). This lopsidedness of women in policy issues, coupled with inadequate participation, non-involvement in decision making at the grass root level leads to situations where they become dependent on their male counter path in political positions or political parties. Nigeria has the lowest literacy rate in the world while the majority of them are illiterates (Jama, 1996; Byrne, 1996). Thus Nigerian women find it difficult to acquire necessary knowledge and skills that will make them know and realize their rights and as well build the confidence necessary for leadership positions in them has been a challenge, Their attention is focused on how to be a good wife, and a homemaker rather than a policy maker

Another major constraint is that Women are biased in terms of policies, programs and socio-cultural practices (Bennett et al., 1995) Most women when asked if they are interested in politics, i.e., consider becoming a candidate for an elective position or appointed to a decision-making position in government, answered in the negative (Daramola and Oniovokukor, 2006) .Notable among their reasons is that politics is reputed to be dirty, where methods employed are illegal and unethical in order to win elections and assume political power, and where the corruption of public servants for personal and narrow group interests has been the accepted norm. Most Nigerian women opined that they are intimidated and threatened by these dark sides of politics which they are not likely to be associated with.

Similarly, women, a times do not have the minimum voice needed in decision-making bodies included in their political party base (Ola, 1984). Espousing such platform of gender issues such as equal rights for women and men could be threatening to the male majority, and this could discourage women members from taking on such gallant advocacy or confrontation where the chances of winning are doubtful, most especially with the assumption that women are subordinate to men.

Most perilous of all is how power has an absolute potential to corrupt. This potential may be greater for people who had been marginalized, subordinated and oppressed, these people, who had no such power before, which are the lots of most women, with the experience of subordination could decide to reject becoming an oppressor or getting even closer to former oppressors, a path which our women will want to uphold (Cramer, 2005). It must be noted however that the determinant of women's ability to make a difference in politics depends solely on the nature of governance and the political mainstream in place. In the word of Hillary Clinton, an ex-secretary of State "if half of the world's population remains vulnerable to economic, political, legal, and social marginalization, our hope of advancing democracy and development will remain in serious jeopardy (United Nations, 1995).

### **Nigeria's Development Aspirations and the challenges from the Fourth Republic**

From 1962 through to the Fourth Republic, Nigeria has had several development aspirations with numerous challenges which have continued to militate against the achievement of development transformation. First, from the standpoint of recession, the stress associated with this has a devastating challenge on women empowerment. The country has strived to employ a considerable number of strategies; plans and programmes towards achieving her developmental aspirations (Aremu, 2003). These aspirations range from nationalization, indigenization, self-reliance, import-substitution and free market strategy. The Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), First Rolling Plan, Guided Deregulation, Vision 2010 and Vision 20-20-20, diversification of the economy away from oil, courting Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), unemployment reduction. In addition to the above are the Four Nigeria Development Plans (NDP). Unfortunately, some of these development aspirations were never realized (Mimiko, 1997). Nigeria could not achieve some of these development aspirations due to the economic recession and the continued absence of women voice in governance.

The country is seriously beset with numerous shortcomings in the area of the economy and in women arena, most especially in the spheres of politics, corporate or at the community level, etc. In fact, the case of Nigeria could be rightly classified as governance decadence across all spectrum of human endeavour (Mimiko, 1998). The bane of governance in our environment could conveniently be ascribed to the issue of discrimination against women in governance at all level. This unequal status between men and women has created a high level of economic and political powerlessness among women which in turn retards development at every level of governmental structure.

In 1999 the Nigeria economy grew below 1%, while the GDP crashed to its lowest in the same fourth republic. Sanusi,(2012)The economic recession was due to massive corruption that came as a result of stealing, misappropriation, and misallocation of public funds. Since the beginning of the fourth republic, at least 2 million Nigerians have lost their lives in various disasters, assaults and depressions resulting from bad governance, poor planning and many more have become refugees. These have placed tremendous burdens on women who suffer displacement, loss of families and livelihoods, various forms of gender-based violence, and the responsibility of sustaining entire communities.

Nigeria average participation of women in grassroots governance stands at 11% reflecting little progress in achieving the 30% target of women in decision-making positions set by the UN Economic and Social Council (Udom, 2000). This is even more alarming when compared with the Beijing Plus advocacy of 35%. Access to normal decision-making and political power for Nigeria women is a long-haul process. Millions of women are illiterates. For those who are literate, they have to contend with the difficult process of seeking the support of their husband, family, and friends, recognition and acceptance from party colleagues.

Nigeria economy in the Fourth Republic is yet to achieve the necessary Political and Economic changes required for sustainable development. This is traceable to the manifestations of political rigidities occasioned by the apparent weak linkages existing among men and women. (Mimiko, 1998; Adelman, 1995). It is women's determination and capacity to organize their role as nurturers and societal problem solvers; however, it is difficult to work within structures which are still hostile to the empowerment and equality of women thereby placing new issues on the political agenda.

It is obvious that the polio-economic challenges of the Nigeria Fourth Republic were borne mostly by women, firstly due to their inability to participate fully in the decision making process of governance. In this kind of situation, women often find themselves carried along in waves of a situation which they neither understand nor agree with.

## **Conclusion**

From the preceding analysis, grassroots governance is an area where women could contribute their quotas; make a lasting difference or impact in politics with snowball effects on national development. The prevailing economic recession in Nigeria today is such that has impacted negatively on women empowerment and political participation in all strata of governance with implication for development and good governance. Women must exercise their rights and responsibility to participate equally with men in governance. But unfortunately, there is a low number of women in this area of governance. This situation is not in any way good for the political and national development of Nigeria;

There is a need for government to re-orientate the people, provide economic and democratic incentives towards liberating women and heralding national development. It is axiomatic to see women as a dependency syndrome that women are known to have been, dependent on men. In order words, their roles as that of helpers to men or property or object and second citizen that should not compete with the male that the society assumes to be superior should be redefined. This could be achieved by an intensive re-orientation towards changing the negative perception of both male and Female, in order to accept women as equal partners in the development of their communities. Governments should increase the participation of women in decision-making at the grassroots level by setting a target for women participation in governance in line with the global best practices. However, with the notion that women's involvement in decision-making at the grassroots was not only a question of quota for women but a process that also entailed increased women participation in gender issues. This can be enhanced by mainstreaming gender and women issues into the governmental structure and getting their domestic services remunerated and getting them involved in decision making at the grassroots due to their roles as the custodians of family and community values, and as nurturers, caregivers and mediators within the family. This has the capability of fast-tracking development from the grassroots level.

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