Harnessing Dividends of Democracy through Women Empowerment in Nigeria's Fourth Republic

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ABSTRACT
In spite of the fact that women constitutes the integral part of the nation's development, their disadvantaged position in Nigeria when compared to their men counterparts, and the fact that they are ravaged by poverty make case for efforts to be geared towards their empowerment. This paper examines this scenario closely through the use of secondary sources of data and reveals that successive governments in Nigeria have made frantic attempts to formulate and implement policies and programmes to empower women but these efforts have yielded little or no result. It argues that those charged with the responsibilities of implementing such lofty policies and programmes have allegedly diverted the funds into personal use. It concludes that women empowerment in Nigeria should be taken seriously essentially on the basis of their large population as they are at disadvantaged position when compared to their men counterparts in the country. The paper recommends among others that government at all levels in Nigeria should intensify efforts towards providing enabling environment for women empowerment to be achieved holistically. And it is the belief of this paper that if women are empowered, it can have positive impact on the social, political, economic, and cultural development of Nigeria.
Keywords: Dividends of Democracy, Capacity-building, Women, Empowerment, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION
It is worthy of note that women across the six geo-political zones of Nigeria have been crying of impoverishment, deprivation and marginalization. Ethno-cultural associations and pressure groups are being formed to articulate interests that can guarantee them better share of the nation's resources, even when such interests threaten the basis of democracy. As a result of this, successive governments in Nigeria had made frantic attempts to formulate and implement policies and programmes to empower women but these efforts have yielded little or no success. The reason is not farfetched, those charged with the responsibilities of implementing such lofty policies and programmes have allegedly diverted the funds meant for it into personal use. Governments on their part failed dismally due to their inability to ensure monitoring and evaluation to see that funds budgeted and disbursed were judiciously utilized for the purpose it was meant. Considering the important role of women in the society in general, UNESCO Institute of Statistics, (2009) indicates that women constitute significant proportion of the world population. According to the National Population Commission (NPC, 2006), Nigerian women constitute 68,298,683millions

(48.78%) of the total population of 140,003,542 million. Women's roles in national development cannot however be overemphasized if the usual saying that 'behind every successful man is a woman' is anything to go by. This clearly shows that women contributed greatly to the successes attained by great men in the world. Domestically, women play very pivotal roles such as caring for children and the entire family, farming, petty trading, cooking of food, washing of clothes, and a host of others. In spite of these roles, women are disadvantaged sex in Nigeria (Nzeribe, 2008; Esere, 2001; Durosaro, 1998) because:

• Few among them have secured paid job;
• They do not have equal responsibilities for decision making as men. Only 7.3% of women are members of the Nigeria Federal Legislative House (World Development Report, 2011);
• There is violence against women in the society (Angya, 2009). A lot of women are used for rituals. In some cultures, teenage female children (the virgins) are used to appease gods while women are forced to carry calabash and other materials for sacrifices to gods;
• They are fully engaged in agriculture. In some cultures, while women go to farm to cultivate, men sit at home waiting for women to feed them with the proceeds from such farming activities;
• They do not have right to inherit properties in some cultures;
• They are regarded as witches at home. There is a belief that the more a woman becomes aged, the most likely she is regarded as a witch;
• Many female children who are used as house helps are subjected to in-human treatments by their masters.

Some are often raped by the overzealous masters. A lot of women are also working as attendants in cafeteria, restaurants and other non-economically viable places. Such women are thus subjected to decent lives in abject poverty.
Many cultures in Nigeria subject widows to harrowing experiences as revealed by (UNICEF, 1995, cited in Udosen, Sesugh and Madaki, 2009; Utulu, 2009). They face harsh treatments during widowhood. Their hairs are often shaved, forced to sleep on bare floor, cry for days and made to wear black clothes. They are incarcerated for months to mourn their departed husbands. Some women are also forced to drink concoction and swear to oath, to prove their innocence when circumstances surrounding the death of their husbands are controversial;
• Due to poverty, some do engage in commercial sex to make ends meet. Many are exported to foreign countries to attract international clients as prostitutes. Consequently, they are often prone to the vulnerability of HIV/AIDS diseases;
• Many are victims of rape and sexual abuse, female genital mutilation, wife battering, women trafficking (Nnadozie, 2007);
• They are subjected to inhuman treatments from entrusted husbands such as divorce and assault (Ochonogor, 2005).
However, the world has recognized the role of women in the socio-economic transformation and political development of the society. It is against this background that leaders of 189 countries in the world at the United Nations Millennium Summit, held from 6th – 8th September, 2000 at New York, endorsed the then Millennium Development

Goals (MDGs) and now Sustainable Development Goals (STDs) framework for women empowerment. Nigeria being a signatory to the declaration has over the years been making efforts to achieve the goals before the year 2015. As observed by Ugwu, Ofuebe & Etiubon (2011), the goals can be effectively pursued, achieved and sustained through efficient, relevant, and functional educational management system. Worthy of note also is that the issue of women empowerment is a basic human right that lies at the heart of equitable development and a veritable tool for poverty eradication and advancement of development (FGN, 2009).

CONCEPTUALIZING DIVIDENDS OF DEMOCRACY AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT
Dividends of Democracy

Naturally, a shift from one of the worst forms of government; military despotism or autocracy to the supposedly best political system; democracy was exhilarating to most Nigerians. It elicited expectations from the people-high, but somewhat confused expectations. From democracy they expected all that were absent from the military rule. From democracy, the people anticipated a resuscitation of the country's institutions left comatose by military rule, the revamping of the economy and a conspicuously palpable improvement in their quality of life. It can be argued that democratic dividends include the construction and maintenance of good roads, provision of pipe-borne water, qualitative and affordable education, and qualitative health care, provision of electricity, employment generation for the youths and women empowerment, provision of agricultural facilities, enhanced state of environment, transportation, dispensations of justice, security of lives and property as well as general good governance.

Women Empowerment

Women empowerment is a synergy of the words 'women' and 'empowerment.' According to Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary, 'women' are 'adult female human beings', the opposite sex created by nature in addition to men. According to (Sako cited in James 2008:8), "empowerment is the process of strengthening the existing capacities and capabilities of disadvantaged groups in the society to enable them perform towards improving themselves, their families and society as a whole". It is a multi-dimensional process involving the transformation of economic, social, psychological, political, and legal circumstances of the powerless (Sandbrook & Halfani, as cited in Enemuo, 1999). It is the process of articulating plans, aimed at bridging the gap between the advantaged and disadvantaged groups in the society so as to achieve growth or equitable distribution of income (Etiemana, 2009). Women empowerment can thus be described as all purposeful efforts aimed at imparting education to women with the aim of repositioning the knowledge, skills, and competences required of them. It is also the process of equipping women with functional skills that can make them live as useful members of the society.

Theoretical Framework

For the purpose of this study, empowerment and capacity building theories were applied. The theory of empowerment was propounded by Rappaport (1981) and Perkins and Zimmerman (1996). Empowerment under this theory is a construct that links individual strengths and competencies, natural helping systems, and proactive behaviors to social policy and social change. Empowerment theory links individual well-being with the larger social and political environment. Theoretically, the construct connects mental health to mutual help and the struggle to create a responsive community. It compels us to think in terms of wellness versus illness, competence versus deficits, and strength versus weaknesses. Similarly, empowerment theory focuses on identifying capabilities instead of cataloging risk factors and exploring environmental influences of social problems instead of blaming victims. Empowerment oriented interventions enhance wellness while they also aim to ameliorate problems, provide opportunities for participants to develop knowledge and skills, and engage professionals as collaborators instead of authoritative experts.

Empowerment suggests that participation with others to achieve goals, efforts to gain access to resources, and some critical understandings of the sociopolitical environment are basic components of the construct. Applying this general framework to an organizational level of analysis suggests that empowerment includes organizational processes and structures that enhance individual participation and improve goal achievement for the organization.

At the community level, empowerment refers to collective action to improve the quality of life in a community and to the connections among community organizations. Organizational and community empowerment, however, are not simply a collection of empowered individuals according to this view. Zimmerman (1993) in his contribution to this theory focuses on empowerment and measurement. This general framework cuts across individual, organization, and community levels of analysis. He therefore, recognizes the independence of these levels but emphasizes (individual level) psychological empowerment because it is goal common to all levels of intervention. The framework presented includes interpersonal, interactional, and behavioral components.

Empowerment and Community Planning Theory

This theory was also used by some scholars to explain empowerment at various levels. Since the eighties, four ideological approaches have provided the framework of ideas for the discussion of empowerment. The first is an ethnocentric approach, which seeks a solution for difficult social problems of ethnicity and minorities. This view was popularized by Solomon (1976); Gutierrez & Ortega, (1991) as cited in Sadan (1993). The second is a conservative liberal approach that seeks to revive the community as a social unit which among other things has to care for its weak citizens as pointed out by Berger & Neuhaus, (1997). The third is a socialist approach which demands for equity and social responsibility in the treatment of social problems. The fourth approach sees empowerment as a profound and professional implementation of democracy i.e. one that will contain every legitimate social ideological disposition in a democratic society. This is a progressive democratic world-view

which resolves to live in harmony with the other approaches and attempts to create an integration of them which was propounded by Rappaport (1981). According to Sadan, (1993),"Where there is a multiplicity of shades it is not always easy to distinguish a new color", meaning that not everyone who is interested in empowerment is interested in interpreting the ideologies behind it. Since ideology is gaining popularity the world over, it is worth acknowledging that different and even contradictory value-systems have participated in its creation.

Empowerment for the purpose of proper understanding according Sadan (1993) can be seen at three levels:

Individual empowerment-which focuses on what happens on the personal level in the individual's life;

Community empowerment –which emphasizes the collective processes and social change;

Empowerment as a professional practice-which sees empowerment as a means of professional intervention for the solution of social problems.

Capacity Building

The whole aim of empowering the people is to build capacities at individual, community and professional levels. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP 2010) sees "capacity" as "the ability of individuals, institutions and societies to perform functions, solve problems, and achieve objectives in a sustainable manner." To them, the terms "capacity building" or "capacity development" describe the task of establishing human and institution capacity. Inadequate capacity is a constant thorn in the side of underdeveloped economies. Aid programmes invariably feature at least one of the dimensions of capacity building. Examples include training budgets for community-based and local government workers involved in areas such as water, agriculture, education, nutrition and health. Strengthening public sector delivery with adequate staffing is a recurrent theme, as it is the use of media technologies such as e-learning and community radio. The diversity of this intervention reflects the many contexts in which capacity building takes place. It is as relevant to the highest level of government as the most humble village. The tools of its trade range from women's leadership courses to diagrams explaining, water pump maintenance, ante-natal procedures for pregnant women, knowledge of immunization schedules and awareness on HIV/AIDS and ways of preventing infections, exclusive breastfeeding techniques, etc. Individual organizations such as local community groups are crucial providers of capacity building programmes whilst themselves often lacking capacity to sustain their mission. Improving internal management structures, access to information and technology, and networking are integral to institutional capacity building. At the international level, capacity building initiatives are reflected in the sequence of global crisis summit that took place through 2009 and 2010. The declaration following the 2009 world summit on food security makes repeated references to capacity building, including a commitment to "strengthen the capacity of farmers and the capacity of farmers' organizations." And "health workforce capacity building" is amongst the list of key elements of the global strategy for women's and children's Health launched at the 2010 summit on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are all through empowerment for

capacity building. UNDP's global conference (2010) addressed the theme "capacity is development", reflecting the organization's interpretation of its core function. This surge of political recognition may inspire more countries to follow the example of Ethiopia in establishing a government ministry of capacity building.

Perspectives of Women Empowerment in Nigeria's context

In the opinion of (Hezekiah et'al 2014), the issue of women empowerment can be viewed from different perspectives such as: education, politics, social, economic, and technology. This study will examine women empowerment from these various perspectives.

Empowerment through Education

One of the indicators of human capital development is the level of educational attainment of all citizens of a country irrespective of gender difference. To achieve this, the Sustainable Development Goals in Nigeria is aimed at eliminating gender disparity at all levels of education amongst other objectives as indicated in National Millennium Development Goals Report of 2004 and now Sustainable Development Goals. In spite of the efforts of Nigerian government towards achieving this goal for all citizens many female children still do not have access to formal education. The above scenario had prompted (Okeke 2001), (Uwadiae 2004), (Njoku 2000), (Oguche 2006) and (Mohammed 2006) to at various intervals confirmed that there is gender disparity in enrolment at primary and secondary educational levels in Nigeria. This implies that there is a dim hope in realizing the goal of education as contained in the Sustainable Development Goals in Nigeria. According to (Ajayi and Mbah 2008), (Adukwu 2009), (Adeyemi and Adu 2012), a lot of female children drop out of school prematurely due to multifarious factors such as poverty of parents, early marriage, and associated 'bride price,' religion, socio-cultural, school based problems among others. The inability of most female children to have access to formal education is consequent upon the high level of illiteracy among women folk and its attendant poverty rate. Sustainable structures and opportunities that can be used to empower women through the acquisition of formal education should therefore be encouraged.

Empowerment through Political Participation

A few women in the world have demonstrated effective political leadership skill through their political activities as asserted by Anyanwu (2005) and Ochekpe (2006). However, the political landscape of Nigeria has remained an all men-affair while women have been relegated to the background as mere babies' manufacturers. Obayuwane and Iheanacho (2003) observed that in Nigeria, there is discrimination against women in politics and government. Confirming this observation, (Aina 2002) and (Tersoo 2009) expressed that only negligible women are thus occupying political positions in Nigeria. The situation seems to be changing as women who were hitherto despised as weaklings are becoming visible in the political atmosphere of Nigeria since the third republic. Pockets of educated women in the new political dispensation are elected local government chairpersons, State Houses of Assembly members. More so, a negligible percent of them are occupying seats at the National Assembly and members of Federal Executive Council. Women can thus be

empowered if there are more appointments to political positions to enhance their contribution to national development.

Economic Empowerment

Most women in Nigeria need economic empowerment as majority of them live below poverty line. Many women are into menial jobs, peasant farming, petty trading with only a few of them gainfully employed. This observation was contained in the (UNICEF report cited in Udosen 2009) that in Nigeria only a few women occupy managerial positions in public and private sectors. As part of the productive sector of the economy, women need economic break-through if the current campaign against women illiteracy, ignorance, poverty, diseases, and high mortality rate must be achieved.

Social Empowerment

In Nigeria, women unlike their men counterparts are not socially developed because of several restrictions placed on them. It is thus imperative that cultural and religious barriers, superstitions, and all manners of discriminations against women be removed to accelerate their social development, (Hezekiah et'al, 2014).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As stated earlier in this paper, the need for women empowerment as part of harnessing dividends of Democracy in Nigeria cannot be over-emphasized. This is on the basis that despite their large population, women are at disadvantaged position when compared to men in Nigeria. Among other indicators include the participation of women in education which is low in Nigeria while there is prevalence of poverty among the women-folk. In this paper, issue of women empowerment was examined, from the perspectives of the meaning and what it entails, as well as the strategies for achieving it through effective educational management strategies. Government however, needs to provide enabling environment for women empowerment to be achieved holistically in Nigeria. If women are empowered, not only will their status change, Nigeria economy will become stronger. There will be socio-political stability while the high maternal mortality rate exacerbated by poverty and diseases particularly in Nigeria and Africa as well as the whole world will be reduced to minimal level.

More importantly, governments at all levels should demonstrate greater commitments to combating poverty and raise the overall living standard so that the gains of development can be better spread and many more women can be rescued from sinking into poverty and hopelessness or else the country would be creating a readily available army of ethnic militias, religious irredentists, tribal warlords, cultist, armed bandits, international prostitutes exploited by weak politicians and disadvantaged groups, taking advantage of the desperate and hopeless situation and position of the women. The restiveness which seems to characterize them is nothing but a wakeup call to the government to give due attention to the younger generation whose future depends on what we do or fail to do today. The purpose of this paper is to call the collective attention of Nigerians as a people to the greater need of

unleashing the potentials of the country's women towards building a great and prosperous country, bound in freedom, peace and unity. Finally, it is even in the interest of any responsible and responsive government to take care of its women as the future cannot be guaranteed without inputs from them.

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