

THE UNMINED RESOURCE IN EMERGING DEMOCRACY IN AFRICA – WITH EMPHASIS ON NIGERIA

Barr. Mrs. Nwanneka C. Okolo

Founder/Executive Director, Lift Saxum Ltd/Gte.

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Introduction

Globally women comprise about 50% of the population so it will not be out of place to expect women to equitably constitute at least half of all the structures involved in taking decisions in the society, since democracy is a game of numbers and also connotes proportionate representation. But this is not the reality. Women have consistently been side-lined and marginalized in politics and decision-making processes. "Across the world, women are on the fringes in all facets of life endeavours - economy, education, governance, and politics compared to their male counterparts. Irrespective of the geographical location, women are culturally and socially disadvantaged. They are systematically deprived of individual choices, economic opportunities, political rights, political power as well as intellectual recognition. While the concept of marginalization may vary according to the historical and socio-economic context of societies, impact on the marginalized remains the same across cultures, peoples, and continents." It is argued that because of the multiple role women play as mother, wife, home-manager, informal educator, and family nurse, they are weighed down by these responsibilities and are therefore hampered from pursuing their goals and aspirations with the same impetus as their male counterparts. The 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action had set an international target of balanced political participation and power-sharing between women and men in decision-making and advocated 30% Affirmative Action.

UN Women maintains that women's equal participation and leadership in political and public life are crucial to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. However, statistics show that women are

underrepresented at all levels world-wide and achieving gender parity in political life will not happen in the nearest future. UN Women gave the following data on the subject as at January 1, 2023 as follows:¹

Women in Executive Government Positions

- There are 31 countries where 34 women serve as Heads of State and/or Government
- Only 17 countries have a woman Head of State, and 19 countries have a woman Head of Government
- 22.8% of Cabinet members head Ministries, leading a policy area,
- There are only 13 countries in which women hold 50% or more of the positions of Cabinet Ministers leading policy areas
- The five most commonly held portfolios by women Cabinet Ministers are Women and Gender Equality, followed by Family and Children Affairs, Social Inclusion and Development, Social protection and Social Security, and Indigenous and Minority Affairs
- UN Women posited that at the current rate gender equality in the highest position of power will not be attained in the next 130 years.

Women in National Parliaments

- Only 26.5% of parliamentarians in single or lower houses are women, up from 11% in 1995
- Only six countries have 50% or more women in parliament in single or lower houses: Rwanda (61%), Cuba (53%), Nicaragua (52%), Mexico (50%), New Zealand (50%), and the United Arab Emirates (50%).
- A further 23 countries have reached or surpassed 40%, including 13 countries in Europe, six in Africa, three in Latin America and the Caribbean, and one in Asia
- Globally, there are 22 States in which women account for less than 10% of parliamentarians in single or lower houses, including one lower chamber with no women at all. (*Unfortunately, Nigeria, the so-called giant of Africa falls under this bracket.*)
- At the current rate of progress, gender parity in national legislative bodies will not be achieved before 2063

Women in Local Government

- Data from 136 countries shows that women constitute nearly 3 million (34%) of elected members in local deliberative bodies. Only two countries have reached 50%, and an additional 20 countries have more than 40% women in local government.
- Regional variations are also noted for women's representation in local deliberative bodies, as of January 2022: Central and Southern Asia, 41%; Europe and Northern America, 36%; Oceania, 32%; Eastern and South-Eastern Asia, 28%; Latin America and the Caribbean, 25%; Sub-Saharan Africa, 25%; Western Asia and Northern Africa, 18%,

While most countries in the world have not achieved gender parity, gender quotas have substantially contributed to progress over the years. In countries with legislated candidate quotas, women's representation is 5% and 7% higher in parliaments and local government, respectively, compared to countries without such legislation.

Inter Parliamentary Union (IPU)

Of note is the 2023 report of the Inter Parliamentary Union,ⁱⁱ IPU, made up of more than 170 national parliaments from around the world. It tracks the number of women elected to parliaments globally every year and produces an analysis that helps to monitor progress, setbacks and trends. The global body is dedicated to promoting peace through parliamentary diplomacy and dialogue. According to the latest IPU report, Women in Parliament 2022 women's participation in parliament has never been as diverse and representative as it is in many countries today. And for the first time in history, not a single functioning parliament in the world is male-only. Women today occupy 26.1 percent of parliamentary seats globally, compared to 13.1 per cent in 2000.

The findings are based on **data from the 47 countries** that held elections in 2022. These polls saw women take an average of 25.8 per cent of the seats available, representing a **2.3 percentage point increase**, since elections were last held. Martin Chungong, IPU Secretary General: said that the bad news is that at this rate, it will take another 80 years to reach gender parity in parliament.

Seats held by women in National Parliaments in Africa as of 2022

As of 2022, the proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments in Africa is as follows: Rwanda 61.25%, South Africa 46.5%, Namibia 44.24%,

Senegal 42.68%; Mozambique 42%; Ethiopia 41.49%, Tanzania 36.86%, Chad 31.18%

Over 60% of the seats in Rwanda's national parliament were held by women as of May 2022. The country had the strongest female participation in politics in Africa. It also ranked first globally, with the highest proportion of women in power in lower houses than in any other nation. Second in the African ranking, South Africa registered 46.5% of parliamentary seats occupied by females. Namibia, Senegal, Mozambique, and Ethiopia also recorded a level of women participation above 40 percent. The best performing countries regarding female representation had in common the adoption of electoral quotas for women, a condition not present in the nations on the bottom of the ranking. In the last position, Nigeria had only 3.6 percent of women holding seats in the country's House of Representatives. (Statista, 202) Some East African countries have at least 25-33 percent gender participation at the national and sub-national levels. Rwanda records the highest with 61.3 percent women holding parliamentary seats. leading to 46.2 percent and 42.4 percent political representation respectively.

Countries achieving the 30% bench-mark appear to have adopted a form of affirmative action. For example, Rwanda has constitutional provisions reserving 30% of seats for women in its bicameral legislature while **in Namibia and South Africa, voluntary quotas were deliberately adopted by the political parties to enhance women participation.** South Africa's Municipal Structures Act of 1998 requires political parties to "ensure that 50% of the candidates on the party list are women" and that "women must be equitably represented in a ward committee." Although there is no penalty for noncompliance in South Africa, the country's ruling African National Congress voluntarily allocates 50% of parliamentary seats to women. In Senegal, the law on gender parity was passed in 2010. The law requires all political parties to place women and men in an alternating matter on candidate lists, aiming at a male-female ratio of 50%. Where there is non-compliance, the electoral commission has the authority to reject lists, and can exclude parties from competing in elections. Even though some African countries have made some progress in incorporating women in the political and decision-making processes, Africa also records a high percentage of countries where women representation is minimal. As at 2022, percentage of parliamentary seats held by women in The Gambia was 8.62%, Benin 7.41% and Nigeria bringing up the rear at 3.61% (Statista, 2022). **UNW said increasing the number of women in decision-making positions is vital for political accountability and "genuine**

democracy.” Consequently, bringing about sustainable socio-political and economic development requires initiating laws and policies that advance women inclusion. Societies that promote and protect human rights do better in advancing the cause of women.

The Nigerian Situation

Women form 49.4 per cent of Nigeria’s population, according to data from the National Bureau of Statistics. So, women make up almost half of the population of the country. In spite of their number and the various roles women play in the society, they are yet to be accorded commensurate recognition because of some cultural/traditional practices and patriarchal societal structures. In pre-colonial period women played active role in politics: Queen Amina of Zaria, Moremi of Ife, Emotan of Benin and Omu Okwei of Ossomari. In ancient Bornu, women held administrative offices alongside their male counterparts. During the colonial era, Nigerian women were disenfranchised with Southern Nigeria women given the franchise just in the 1950s (while in Northern Nigeria women did not get the franchise until 1979). In that era, only three women were appointed into the House of Chiefs; Olufunmilayo Ransome Kuti (Western Nigeria House of Chiefs); Margaret Ekpo and Janet Mokuolu (Eastern Nigeria House of Chiefs). The women's wings of political parties’ involvement in national and regional politics did not count for much in the scheme of things. After Nigerian Independence women began to get involved once again in active politics. Since independence to military incursions, second and third republics till date, the number of women in politics and indeed other decision-making positions at all levels of government and in the society at large remains insignificant.

In Nigeria, International, regional and local human rights framework for promotion and protection of women’s rights include: Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (Fundamental Human Rights), Child Rights Act, Violence Against Persons Prohibition Act, Sexual Offences Act, Administration of Criminal Justice Act, Criminal Code, Penal Code, African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights, African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, Protocol to the ACHPR on the Rights of Women in Africa, AU Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, UN General Assembly Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women, The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

The key principles in these instruments include non – discrimination, equality of rights, participation, individual autonomy and non-violence and Women are mandated to have equal rights and freedom as men. (National Human Rights Commission) The 1995 Beijing Platform for Action advocated 30% affirmative action and the Nigerian National Gender Policy (NGP) recommended 35% affirmative action instead and sought for a more inclusive representation of women with at least 35% of both elective, political and appointive public service positions respectively. Under the National Gender Policy, the government must be proactive in its commitment in addressing problems affecting women and ensure the mainstreaming of women issues in the formulation and implementation of all policies and programmes.

With all these instruments and concerted efforts of non-governmental organizations and international agencies, little progress is being recorded as women in Nigeria continue to suffer marginalization in elected and appointive positions. According to the National Bureau of Statistics only 3 out of the 109 members in the Senate in 1999 were women, representing 2.75 percent, while 12 out of 360 members or 3.33 percent of the House were women. After the 2019 elections, only seven females or 6.42 percent emerged in the 109-seat Senate and just 13 females in the lower chamber. At the administrative leadership level, of the 43 ministers in Buhari's cabinet, only seven are female (16.28 percent), while 26.2 percent of Nigerian judges are women. Out of the 13 current Justices of the Supreme Court, only three are females (23 percent). Prior to the 2023 elections, a Bill seeking an additional 111 special seats for women in the National Assembly (37 in the Senate and 74 in the House of Representatives) did not see the light of the day.

With the signing of the 2022 electoral Act into law by the President despite representations and protests by women groups, it became clear to women that the government and male dominated Nigerian legislature had little or no interest in including women in politics and governance. Nigerian women seeking to contest elections in the 2023 general elections, had gathered at Women Aspirants Summit in Abuja for a discourse, "Women Working Together for A Democratic Nigeria." The summit was organized by the Nigerian Women Trust Fund, Women in Politics Forum, 100 Women Lobby Group, Voice of Women and supported by Macarthur Foundation. They identified fundraising and strategic media engagement as critical to their success in the elections. Women were commended for participating in "occupation" of the National Assembly while protesting the rejection of the gender bills and told them not to relent in the effort to realize their goals. Women were encouraged to get their

PVCs and vote for women aspirants no matter what party they belong to. Aspirants were advised to work together across party lines and when they get into office to continue to demand for adequate representation of women in politics. The National Democratic Institute, NDI, UNWomen and US Embassy also lent their voices to the exhortations.

The 2023 elections have come and gone and it was all business as usual and worse. From alleged manipulation/failure of the Bimodal Voters Accreditation System (BVAS) to falsification of election figures, the usual electoral intimidation, campaign of calumny via social media, outright disenfranchisement by blocking some residents from access to polling booths, ballot box snatching, killing and maiming of opponents and voters including women, publicly warning people of certain tribes not to vote in some metropolitan centres, to mention a few. Impunity reigned! Kogi State Governor, Yahaya Bello cut off access roads leading to Natasha Akpoti's community because he wanted to make sure she failed in her senatorial bid. Musiliu Akinsanya a.k.a C Oluomo, Chairman of Lagos State Parks and Garages openly threatened Igbos who would not vote for APC to sit down at home. The list is endless.

2023 Elections: Score card for women

Out of the 1,019 females (as against 9,221 males) who contested in the state houses of assembly elections across the 36 states, only 48 won. This amounts to 4.7% success rate for women. Compared with the 2019 election where 45 women were elected into the state legislatures representing 4.41%. The increase by three in 2023 elections is not even up to 1%. The gubernatorial elections had 416 persons contesting across 28 states. However, only 24 of them, which accounts for 6%, are females. None scaled through.

In the 2023 National Assembly elections, 378 women ran for various seats Senate and House of Representatives elections, but only 17 were successful. Only 3 women won the senatorial elections. The number of women that will have seats in the Tenth Senate would therefore be less than that in the current Ninth Assembly where we have 7 serving senators and 13 House of Reps members. All 7 women senators lost their re-election bid. This puts women's representation in the incoming 10th Assembly at 3.62%. So, **3 women will be in the Senate and 14 in the 360-member House. Seven women won seats for the first time in the House. The figure of 17 women only out of the 469 federal lawmakers in the 10th NASS is n pitiable indeed.** And of course, there were no female candidates vying for the Office of the President. Meanwhile, the regional average for women legislators in national parliaments in Sub-Saharan

Africa is 26%. **In 2023, 378 women ran for Senate and House of Representatives seats, but only 17 were successful. While all the current female senators are not returning, seven of the current 13 female members of the House in the Ninth National Assembly also lost their re-election bids. In the Ninth NASS (2019), only seven of the 109 senators are women; aside from two – Oluremi Tinubu, who is the wife of the President-elect, Bola Tinubu, and Aisha Dahiru, who ran for the Adamawa State governorship, – the others lost their bids to return.**

In fact, with the sham elections conducted in the February/March 2023 the situation appears to have worsened in all parameters. Outright intimidation, harassment, violence and murder of women politicians and aspirants, have made the situation dire. Some women are simply afraid for their lives as there is no guarantee that the state will protect them. A culture of impunity has taken over, accountability is not the strong suit of those who power resides in. Security issues have become hydra-headed, so much so that one of the states of the federation chants the mantra that the "...State is in the hands of God". Some south eastern states are still bogged down by a sit-at-home order being physically enforced by some faceless individuals and the government is not bothered". In August 2023, it will be two years since that order was first issued by the Nnamdi Kanu-led IPOB, but hijacked with time by a renegade individual living outside the country. Nigeria just experienced a botched attempt to exchange some of its bank notes at so much human and material cost and no one, no one, has been held accountable.

In fact, the last general elections so much exposed the Nigerian under belly that it would not be out of order to question the existence of rule of law in Nigeria where law enforcement has since become a respecter of persons. The current cultural perception by some that women are not competent enough to hold top public offices or elective positions is regrettable. Nigeria needs to strengthen its institutions and enthrone laws and policies that provide for at least 40% participation of women in political and appointive positions. The 2022 Electoral Act must therefore be amended to reflect international best practices where gender parity is concerned. For Nigeria to have fair and credible elections, the electoral umpire, Independent National Electoral Commissioner must be really independent and not an appointee of the Federal Government. Dr Esther Uduehi, former Special Assistant to ex-President Olusegun Obasanjo on National Assembly Matters, had recommended a review of the appointment of the INEC Chairman and said the process should be democratized to allow independent bodies to appoint the Chairman.

Why Women Are the Un-mined Resource in African Politics

Investing in women's economic empowerment sets a direct path towards gender equality, poverty eradication and inclusive economic growth. Women make enormous contributions to economies, whether in businesses, on farms, as entrepreneurs or employees, or by doing unpaid care work at home. *Women's economic empowerment* is central to realizing *women's rights and gender equality*. Where women are empowered, the family is empowered and society fares much better. The positive impact of women in politics is undeniable. Dr. Kofi Annan the former Secretary General of the United Nations, once said, "Study after study has taught us, there is no tool for development more effective than the empowerment of women. No other policy is as likely to raise economic productivity or to reduce child and maternal mortality. No other policy is as sure to improve nutrition and promote health, including the prevention of HIV/AIDS. No other policy is as powerful in increasing the chances of education for the next generation."ⁱⁱⁱ

Evidence abounds that that women's leadership in political decision-making processes improves them. Research on local councils in India showed that the number of drinking water projects in areas with women-led councils was 62 per cent higher than in those with men-led councils. In Norway, a direct causal relationship between the presence of women in municipal councils and childcare coverage was found.^{iv} The few women legislators Nigeria has had in the National Assembly have relatively themselves well going by the number of bills to enhance women's rights which they initiated. These include: Gender and Equal Opportunities Bill and Sexual Harassment in Tertiary Institutions Prohibition Bill. Better representation will therefore ensure women's voices are heard and their issues. Women demonstrate political leadership by working across party lines through parliamentary women's caucuses—even in the most politically combative environments—and by championing issues of gender equality, such as the elimination of gender-based violence, parental leave and childcare, pensions, gender-equality laws, and electoral reform (UN Women). Always in their subconscious, especially women in conflict prone zones, is the fact that in the event of any conflict, people are displaced, maimed, rendered homeless or killed, and the women bear the brunt as they lose children or husband especially. According to Solomon Amar of Forbes Business Council^v, "when structural women become leaders, they bring talents, new views, alongside structural and cultural diversity to the companies they work for, resulting in more successful solutions." Women are more detailed and can delve into matters for more insight.

The research holds the view that **“the future is female”**. Companies with more females on their board perform better than those without female board members. Also, organizations with greater gender diversity at senior management levels are more profitable. Even though globally, in 2022, women leadership positions grew to 32% a lot more needs to be done to get the numbers up. “The reality is we need more women in leadership positions. It’s not just good for women, it’s good for business”. A diverse workforce is an innovative workforce. Diversity in all its forms—from gender to culture to age to race—inspires new ideas and fosters innovation. While technical skills and knowledge are essential for career success, CEOs regularly rate soft skills as the most valued professional characteristics (paywall). Women often excel at the soft skills required for business leadership. Soft skills and emotional intelligence may be a competitive advantage for women in business. According to a survey by the international consulting firm Hay Group published in 2016, women surpass males in 11 of 12 major emotional intelligence characteristics. Where women are appointed to leadership position, they generally excel even though the system is wired towards getting them to trip and fall. The likes of Dr. Dora Akunyili of blessed memory, Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala and Oby Ezekwesili, to name but a few, will always be shining examples of women who excelled in their appointed positions. Internationally, the late Golda Meir, former Israeli Prime Minister, Indira Ghandi of India, and Margaret Thatcher of Britain were all beacons of light as heads of their respective governments.

Way Forward

Statistics have shown Nigeria at the bottom of the ladder on women participation in politics in Africa. This is regrettable. Since it is obvious that our chauvinistic men folk do not care a hoot about our women and wellbeing of families, the women must forge ahead and fight for their rights. Nigerian women need to borrow a leaf from their Senegalese counterpart and forge strong alliances with relevant stakeholders for progress. The Senegalese women’s movement was a child of necessity that grew into a very strong solid movement. It was founded in 1994 and many female women politicians from across the political spectrum suffering marginalization in their various parties saw an opportunity for a common ground to air their experiences and chart a way forward. They allied with other women’s organizations and trade unions in their country and fought together for the common cause of increased representation. However, they were lucky to have two successive empathic and gender sensitive president and despite their obdurate and uncooperative

religious leaders, Senegal started off with 30% affirmative action before they achieved parity (50-50). It is interesting to note that Senegalese population is made up of 96.6% Muslims, Christians, 3.3% and others, 0.1%. Women must wake up and form strong alliances across party lines and demand for inclusion and equitable participation in all aspects of national life.

Women must also push for the following: Constitutional amendment to provide for gender parity, amendment of s.154 (1) & s.154 (2) of the Constitution which vests the President with the power to appoint the Chairman of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), passage of laws and instruments that enhance and guaranty women's rights and amendment of the 2022 Electoral Act to include gender quota so as to ensure that political parties field women constitutionally with enshrined quota.^{vi} As earlier stated, studies have shown that in countries with legislated candidate quotas, women's representation is five percentage points and seven percentage points higher in parliaments and local government, respectively, compared to countries without such legislation. There is no gainsaying the fact that the men folk in Nigeria have failed this country. The political elite manipulate the uneducated and the poor for their own ends. Regrettably, Nigeria has fallen under the class of countries where politicians and democratically elected leaders completely ignore or violate the constitution of Nigeria and the rule of law. Women must hold any incoming President to the 40% affirmative action they promised during electioneering campaign. Women must therefore rise above tribal/ethnic/religious politics and parochial interests and work as one with aim of righting the wrongs and putting back the country where it should rightly belong in the comity of nations.

However, while pushing for adoption of relevant international instruments that seek to empower women, women must look out and be wary of provisions (in such instruments) that go counter to our family values and cultural beliefs. Specifically, Nigerian women must reject the craze by Europe, some United Nations Agencies, international organizations like International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) and misguided local NGOs to foist comprehensive sexuality education, sexual and reproductive health right and LGBTQ rights on our children and youth. Homosexuals are free to live their lives but they have no right to force other people's children to learn about their way of life and possibly follow their footsteps. They do not want to have children, so why must they insist that it is their right to adopt children born by heterosexuals! Children are gifts from God and not human right!!

Special attention should be paid to the **EU-ACP Agreement (European Union- Africa, Caribbean and the Pacific Agreement)** where European Union and 78 countries from Africa, Caribbean and the Pacific have been in alliance. for over 20 years purely on trade and development. The agreement is due for renewal but European Union has smuggled into the document legalization of abortion, SRHR (Sexual and Reproductive Health Right), comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) and unconditional adoption of LGBTQ practices by the ACP nations. African Heads of State are expected to sign this agreement. According to Ms Sharon Slatter, the President of Family Watch International^{vii} said, "This is the most serious threat we have ever seen for Africa that will deceptively advance the SRHR, abortion and CSE agendas across Africa".

UN Women proffers two main obstacles that prevent women from participating fully in political life as structural barriers, whereby discriminatory laws and institutions still limit women's ability to run for office, and capacity gaps, which occur when women are less likely than men to have the education, contacts and resources needed to become effective leaders. Beyond these obstacles proffered by the UN Women, women must as defenders of women's rights not only strive to enlighten and educate themselves and the general public on the rights of women but also endeavour to denounce, expose and report human right violations that subjugate women and strip them of their dignity.

Women must reject specific legal, cultural or religious practices by which they are systematically discriminated against, excluded from political participation and public life, segregated in their daily lives, raped in ethnic/religious conflict situations, battered in their homes, sexually harassed in work places and schools, denied inheritance rights, forced to marry, assaulted for not conforming to gender norms and sold into forced labor or sexual slavery etc. (NHRC), Women must shun the culture of silence which encourages and perpetuates these wrongs.

Violence against Women

Violence against women in politics is a world-wide phenomenon cutting across nations. At the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW66) held in 2022 with the priority theme, "Achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls in the context of climate change, environmental and disaster risk reduction policies and programmes", UN officials, government and civil society representatives decried the upsurge of violence against women involved in politics. Women parliamentarians, human

right activists and electoral observers are being intimidated and silenced globally. The President of the 2022 CSW General Assembly, Abdulla Shahid said, "As a former Parliamentarian, and a lifelong politician, violence against women in politics is an issue near to my heart. It is a moral and ethical failure on us as a society."^{viii} Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed from Nigeria said that **violence against women in politics is a violation of human rights that aims to undermine governance.** "The aim of some groups is silencing women and robbing them of agency," she further stated. The UN deputy chief noted that concrete action is needed to address violence against women and girls. Violence against women active in political life is a form of gender-based violence that manifests physically, psychologically and sexually, both in-person and online. The Head of UN Women Sima Sami Bahous, said at the 2022 Commission on the Status of Women (CSW66) that **"violence silences women, renders them invisible, pushes them from public space. Only when women are safe from violence and there is accountability, only then, can we make progress."** The Inter Parliamentary Union 2023 Report acknowledged the increasing trend of sexism, harassment and violence against women as one of the biggest obstacles to women participation in political life. It attributed the early resignations of New Zealand and Scotland premiers Jacinda Ardern and Nicola Sturgeon, to harassment they had been subjected to. The President of the IPU called on male colleagues in every parliament worldwide, "to work with their female counterparts to move forward and **accelerate the pace of change.**" The increase in violence against women is a global phenomenon and this is not unexpected as more and more women are crying out against it. Women are the hand that rocks the cradle and that hand should rule the world. Women must recognize and acknowledge their importance in creation. They must uplift and stand by fellow women and should not give the men folk the opportunity to divide and rule them. Women must not knowingly or unknowingly support or perpetuate patriarchy.

Patriarchy in Nigeria

Patriarchy is a socio-cultural system that gives males privileges and dominance over females in the society. Patriarchal dominance evolved into a formidable institution with clear political undertones. It operates in many societies across the globe, and is pervasive and resilient in African cultures and particularly strong in Nigeria. On matters of gender parity, many African states lag behind primarily because of the respect for culture and tradition which is often portrayed as intractable and given precedence over gender equality. This

combined with certain religious norms gives way to patriarchal structures. Nigeria is a male dominated chauvinistic society stifled by culture. It must be mentioned however that men while fighting to maintain the status quo by ensuring that patriarchy keeps thriving for them to keep enjoying the privileges, women actively and inadvertently encourage patriarchy and enthrone it. It manifests in the ways the woman socializes her boy child, giving him privileges. Also, in certain situations, some women that have the opportunity to change oppressive and violent cultures, do nothing because they want other women to experience the same mistreatment that they themselves had been subjected to at a point in time^{ix}

Ownership of landed property is another area where discrimination against women is glaring and women contribute to exacerbation of the situation. In some parts of the country, women are not allowed to own or purchase land in their name and they often have to buy through a male relation or contact despite the provisions of S.43 of the Constitution which states that, "Subject to the provisions of the Constitution, every citizen of Nigeria shall have the right to acquire and own immovable property anywhere in Nigeria". It is unfortunate that some Nigerian women still prefer to bestow landed property (even those acquired by their own sweat) only on their male children and give the females only chattels. A very welcome development is the signing into law by the Abia State Governor of *"The Female Persons' Right of Inheritance of Property Law 2022*. The law builds on the April 2014 Supreme Court's judgment in *Ukeje v Ukeje* on April 14, 2014, where in a unanimous judgment the court upheld the decisions of the lower courts, which had found unconstitutional an Igbo customary law of succession excluding female offspring from eligibility to inherit the property of their fathers. The obnoxious widowhood practices in Nigeria will stop if and when the women want it to. Some women would never report the incidence of their husbands sexually abusing their own children for fear of being blamed and thrown out of the house. Women subject fellow women to cruel and dehumanizing widowhood practices and often fail to support each other politically. So, we need a lot of advocacies, enlightenment calls and continuous engagement with all women at all levels especially, the grassroots. Patriarchy in Nigeria is a cankerworm that must be tackled from every available angle and with all seriousness.

Closing Thoughts

So far, the outcomes of Nigerian elections tell us that Nigerian women are not fit to stand tall and work side by side with the men, neither are they

good enough to be vote for. In fact, the action and body language of most of Nigerian men in the corridors of power would suggest that a woman becoming the President or Vice President or Governor is not feasible in the nearest future. A population of about 100miliion out of 211million people is almost ignored. It is obvious that the men in the legislative houses have no intention of ceding and sharing power with women. it is equally clear that women have to make very serious concerted, if not radical, efforts to take what should rightly accrue to them as they constitute almost half of the Nigerian population Nigerian women must embrace the 2023 CSW 67 priority theme of "Innovation and technological change, and education in the digital age for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all". During the currency swap fiasco that was visited on hapless Nigerians in February-April, 2023, when people were forced to transact online, women were the most affected as they did not have the requisite IT knowledge nor the finances to buy android phones.

For gender equality to become a reality in Nigeria, a conducive legal framework is required together with collaborative efforts of relevant state and non-state stakeholders which include the Judiciary, INEC, Inter-Party Advisory Council, relevant government ministries, the Attorney-General of the Federation and civil society organizations. Beyond these, Nigeria must tackle the institutional, cultural, and political barriers and inordinate preference for male candidates that have plagued it through the years since independence.

NHRC reminds women that, "The realization of women's rights is a global struggle based on universal human rights and the rule of law. The NHRC calls on us all to unite in solidarity to end traditions, practices and laws that harm women. It is a call for freedom to be fully and completely human and equal without apology or permission"

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