

**WOMEN AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN CROSS RIVER  
STATE: THE CROSS RIVER SOUTHERN SENATORIAL DISTRICT  
EXPERIENCE IN THE FOURTH REPUBLIC**

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**Abstract**

This study examines women's participation in the political process in a rather patriarchal setting using the Cross River Southern Senatorial District women's experience in the Fourth Republic. Discrimination against women is exhibited in all aspects of human relations and manifests in different forms including socio-cultural, economic, religious, and most significantly political. Democratic development requires active political engagement. Consequently, democracy entails ensuring equal opportunities for men and women to cultivate their abilities. Politics is a game of numbers and women have numerical superiority that transforms into electoral victory. However, despite the numeric advantage, women are consigned to subordinate positions. The work adopts a multilateral approach to historical reconstruction relying on both primary and secondary sources. The study observes that the history of political transformation in Nigeria is brimmed with problems of male dominance and women's tokenism in involvement in public dealing. This paper concludes that Nigerian women especially those in the study area, are defying the glass ceiling hitherto inhibiting the mainstreaming of women in the political process.

**Keywords: Women Participation, Political Process, Cross River Southern Senatorial District, Dominance**

**Introduction**

The marginalization of women within Nigeria's political structure continues to pose a significant challenge to the country's democracy. Women constitute a significant population of the Nigerian state and have contributed meaningfully to the human and socio-economic development of the nation. In the Southern Senatorial District (SSD) for example, women have always played five key roles as mother, producer, home manager, community organizer, and socio-cultural and political activists. However, despite their demographic strength and critical roles, the distinctions between the male and female genders as recommended by most

cultures consigns women to subordinate positions. Consequently, women have been suffering several forms of discrimination, inequity, marginalization, and violence. At both the local and state levels, efforts to redress this ugly situation have yet to achieve the desired results.

Throughout history, human history has been marked by various forms of discrimination based on factors such as race, class, religion, skin colour, and gender. Racial discrimination targets individuals or groups based on their race or skin colour, often unfairly labeling them as inferior. In contrast, class discrimination centres on societal status, creating divisions between the privileged "haves" and the disadvantaged "have-nots." Lastly, gender or sex discrimination revolves around the unequal treatment and biases between the two sexes, male and female. However, wherever there is mention of gender discrimination, it is generally intended to mean discrimination directed against women (Iloh and Ikena 14). Throughout the ages, there has existed a bias and prejudice against women in all African societies. Discrimination against women is exhibited in all aspects of human relations and manifests in different forms including socio-cultural, economic, religious, and most significantly political.

Nigerian women had been visible and active partners in progress with the men in the precolonial era, complementing the role of the men politically. However, women's visibility and active participation on the political turf began to wane with the advent of colonial administration (Odey 1). From the socio-cultural front, there have been social norms and traditions in different societies that preclude women from attaining their full capabilities. Repugnant cultural practices have treated women as second-class citizens and lesser than men. In the SSD, it is traditionally believed that women's position is restricted to the kitchen, and educating a woman is considered taboo. Women's training was geared towards fulfilling natural destiny in marriages, housekeeping, and childbearing. Moreso, opportunities to freely express their choices in life were limited. Men's decision and opinion was supreme on every issue, including deciding the fate of the girl child in the family. Women in traditional society were also marginalized economically. Women were often

relegated to a stationary life primarily focused on housekeeping duties, while men ventured out to provide for the family's daily sustenance. However, it's important to note that women did make valuable contributions in smaller yet meaningful ways. This score, the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Youth Development indicates that out of every One Hundred Nigerian men in paid labour employment. Whereas, the 2006 shows that women are almost equidistant to men's population (Adeyemi and Adeyemi 367)

In religious matters where people are meant to believe that God created everybody (man and woman) in His image and likeness, women are equally discriminated against. Gender discrimination in the house of God was institutionalized right from the early days of Christianity. In St. Paul's first letter to the Church in Corinth (1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 14:34-35), it is stated in the Bible (King James Version):

Let your women keep silent in Churches for it is not acceptable unto women to talk but they are demanded to be obedient as also written in the law. And if they will understand anything, let them ask their husbands at home; for it is a shame for women to talk in the Church.

(King James Version).

Notwithstanding, the fact that all humans are created in the image and likeness of God and despite the universal declaration of equal status of both genders, discrimination remains fully engrained in the power structure of society, with implications of restraining women's involvement in the political process. Political participation is a necessary condition for democratic development. But then, democracy involves a guarantee of equal opportunity for both men and women to develop their capabilities, ideally, democracy is a personal commitment to participate in the decision-making process of a nation's political life. Political participation refers to intentional activities such as holding public and party offices, becoming a candidate for office, participating in electioneering campaigns, and voting during elections (Anifowose 206).

However, the pursuit of this democratic principle shows that women are generally apathetic. In the hierarchy of political involvement, they are at a lower level than men as a consequence of the social, economic, and political circumstances associated with participation. A democratic society in which all the political institutions are open to all members of that society, including the right to vote and be voted for by virtually all adults including women. Involvement in the political process allows everybody to express, articulate, and protect interests of the numerous groups, especially the marginalized, like women, children, and people with disabilities. Therefore, the marginalization of women from political affairs has the danger of not fully and competently utilizing that vibrant human resource.

Even though women hold a significant demographic presence in Cross River State, where the SSD plays an essential role, their participation in politics remains limited when compared to their male counterparts. Low levels of literacy among women particularly those in rural areas and negative cultural stereotypes are among some of the nefarious problems militating against women taking part in political affairs. The SSD is a patriarchal society where political leadership has long been male-nominated; a factor that has been attributed to the social system that governs societies from the household, and kinship to community levels (Nkoyo Toyo, interviewed in February 2015). The system relegates women to the margins of power and promotes men to the mainstream of political affairs. Kinship, chieftaincy, clan heads, and family leadership are all exclusively preserved for male folks. It is given the forgoing that this study investigates the Challenges and Prospects of Women's Participation in the Political Process in Cross River Southern Senatorial District in the Fourth Republic

### **Culture and Women's Participation in Politics**

The cultural dimension of this issue becomes even more complex due to the exclusive authority traditionally held by males in interpreting culture. In certain cultures, the prevailing belief remains that women are unfit for leadership, and men

are expected to take the lead. For this reason, women who go into politics are perceived as cultural deviants. In this vein, patriarchy is embedded in society and women are expected to be subservient to men (Okpeh and Sha 175 - 195).

In traditional societies, women depend on men for decision-making, this is because women lack self-confidence in themselves. Even when women are sources of labour, wealth, and even social security to men in traditional society. Most ethnic groups still believe that “a woman’s place is in the house”. In their view, the most pivotal role for a woman is that of a "wife-mother." Competence in this role is what garners acknowledgment and respect for a woman in society. Conversely, if a woman is deemed inadequate as a mother or wife, any achievements she may have accomplished in other facets of her life are rendered insignificant.

In rural societies, only women who are married are respected women. A woman not married cannot fittingly be classified or rated to have a meaningful role in life. Motherhood is solitarily valued within an institution of marriage. Single mothers are despised, and their children are usually the bits and pieces of public ridicule. As a result, women are compelled to rely on men for enduring happiness and fulfillment in their lives. Furthermore, a woman must be respectful and submissive to her husband since it is the man who gives her an expressive place in society (Nwabueze 61). It is believed that the man knows better and more rationally, hence, the woman must allow him to make and take the vital decisions in the home, whereupon the woman follows suit. In effect: “Women's domestic responsibilities mean there is little time to become involved in organizations around work such as trade unions and professional organizations where men have traditionally learned their political skills” (62).

One therefore cannot help but agree with Jacqueline Baron:

For as long as women are usually expected to be responsible for their families' physical and emotional comforts, the idea of 50 percent of each gender representation in parliament cannot be accomplished. Most people, however, dedicated to a political philosophy, put their own needs first; and women unlike men are not

able to rely on a spouse to keep the house running in their absence.

They must either order a family life or afford it themselves (Baron as cited in Nwabueze 62).

Within many communities in the SSD, customary laws and traditions exacerbate the status of women. For instance, in certain regions, women are denied the right to inherit land and other valuable assets. In contrast, Efik women enjoy equal rights as beneficiaries of their fathers' and husbands' properties, alongside their male siblings (Offiong, interviewed 10/04/2013). More disconcerting is the fact that some communities view a man's wife as part of his property and subject to inheritance by male members of the deceased family. Although this practice is meant to protect widows and provide some sort of emotional and financial security, the sad side-effect is that they devalue females in the long run. With such low values on females, most couples would rather have sons than daughters.

From a focus group discussion with a cross-section of women, the issue of classifying women as second-rate citizens was not actively discouraged by any of the religions practiced in Nigeria. Christianity and Islam both gave women second-fiddle roles. In both cases, women were denied important leadership positions, especially over men. This religious attitude and cultural affirmation of women's supposedly inferior status and leadership incapacity has sunk so deeply into the subconscious of women that they not only believe it but resist any attempt to alter the status quo. Some sincerely believed that if women were permitted to mount the reins of authority, societal essence would be destroyed.

Another discriminatory strategy used in eliminating female aspirants is the cultural deviants' label, with the argument that Nigerian culture does not consent to assertive or leadership roles for women. Accusation movements interpreting women aspirants as people acting in ways that controvert their culture and religion are normally systemically used as part of the strategy of marginalization. Many party executives make an open or surreptitious declaration about female aspirants being very self-assured and self-determining and consequently, cannot be team players.

The confluence of cultural practices works in tandem to perpetuate the ongoing restrictions and subjugation of women. Faced with a barrage of pessimistic messages concerning their capabilities, women often discover that conforming to societal expectations is the simplest means to avoid frustration and unhappiness. Consequently, the self-fulfilling prophecy of women's perceived inability to lead becomes a reality.

### **Education and Women's Participation in Politics**

One of the most significant barriers to women's active involvement in politics in the studied region, as well as in Cross River State at large, is the notable disparity in literacy levels between women and men. However, there is an exception among the Efik women who received early education due to the influence of missionary activities in their community. Due to their low literacy level, many women cannot answer a wake-up call to participate in politics. Consequently, many of the benefits associated with participation in terms of employment, skill acquisition for self-reliance, and extra income bypass them. Hence, education is a significant imperative for a successful political career. To that extent, females are limited in employment opportunities than their males' counterparts which in the long-run, leads to the immersion of women in low-skilled and low-income jobs. Approximately, some men feel apprehensive when their wives are educated. They label them as "bookish" women, who will not be ready to play subservient roles as defined by culture, and this generates uncertainty in connubial enjoyment in the home.

When Christians introduced formal Western education to Nigeria, their primary purpose was to train clergymen and teachers for the church. However, as Oyekanmi notes, from the outset, formal education was more accessible to men than women (Oyekanmi 43). Nina Mba adds that:

The early educational system in Nigeria was fashioned after the literary education model of English public schools in the late nineteenth century. In this system, schools for girls were

significantly fewer in number than those for boys, and the girls' curriculum focused on activities like painting, singing, dancing, and "accomplishments" aimed at preparing them for future roles as wives and mothers. Consequently, in mission schools across Nigeria, the primary emphasis in educating girls was on building their character. The enrolment of girls in mission secondary schools was remarkably low, exemplified by the 1920 ratio of one girl to thirty-five boys (1:35) (Mba, 61).

The majority of female children were not sent to school at all during this period. This reluctance was rooted in the belief that a woman's worth was best demonstrated by her mastery of traditional household chores and roles, qualities deemed unnecessary to acquire through Western education (Nwabueze, 91). Women continued to lag, especially in courses that did not lead to careers in teaching and social care. Ologede on her part said that women were geared towards social care courses. She noted that:

Since the government was neither interested nor had the money to provide education, the missionaries took control of the educational arena. Since missionaries had a virtual monopoly of schools, they were able to use them as means of further conversion in all aspects of life. Women were inculcated with spiritual values for the "home" and "needy". It is no surprise that most of the first Nigerian women who attended schools... felt obliged to become teachers and nurses. Sexism became manifest in educational practices – the range of subjects open to girls, the content of textbooks, and teachers' attitudes. Thus, women were encouraged to take subjects which are completely relevant to their domestic roles while men were adapted to abilities that were to enhance their leadership (Ologede, 82).

It is crucial to emphasize that a significant portion of women continue to lack access to education and training that would enhance their qualifications for pursuing roles in public office. Consequently, the lack of equivalent educational opportunities and organizational training for women exacerbates gender inequality

in the power structure. In effect, this denial perpetuates the absence of a female counterpart to the male political elite class. This male-dominated class primarily consists of individuals who have honed their organizational and public speaking abilities through their roles in decision-making positions within their workplaces and their participation on various boards. The paucity of women in the political scene therefore finds some of its explanations in the discrimination they have faced in the area of education (Mkpang, Giwa, Iso interviewed 04/09/2010).

### **Finance and Women's Participation in Politics**

Money is the prevailing viewpoint in Nigeria. The “money” factor plays an essential role in nurturing ambition, conscription, and winning a political office at any level, including even age-grade meetings. Financially, women are subordinates to men both inside and outside the family. But then, women’s access to material resources was and still is regulated leaving them to heavily depend on the men. The men-controlled lands on which farms were cultivated dominated the real economic sector. Financial constraints have made women perpetually dependent on men for sustenance. Women lack the needed funds to carry out political campaigns and this confines their partaking in politics since they can easily be influenced by the person who manages the funds (Edisua Iso interviewed 04/09/2010).

Nkoyo Toyo posits that financial capital is very necessary in determining, who holds a public office which is hypothetical to be on trust. Thus, how sophisticated and superior one’s monetary abilities are in Nigeria, the more one’s possibilities of winning any public office. She said she sourced for and got funds from family members and friends when she decided to contest for House of Representatives. So much money was needed to settle people you talk to from the ward level. She needed about Five Million Naira (₦5,000,000.00) to set up a campaign office and run around. She was able to raise ₦3,500,000.00 out of which ₦500,000.00 was stolen from her car during her campaign tour at Odukpani (Nkoyo Toyo interviewed). Other women interviewed including Hon. Asuquoanwan Attah, Rev. Mrs. Grace Ekanem, Hon. Barrister Josephine Effiom,

and Hon. Uduak Akiba, to mention a few all attested to the fact that finance is a strong constraining factor to women in politics. They complained that even rich women would not sponsor a woman candidate for fear of her losing. So, women have little or no financial backing. Hence, corruption that has subverted the Nigerian political system has virtually skimmed women out and the whole ball of wax seems to be working against them.

Sharing up the family earnings to fund one's political ambition is a challenge many women face in their mission for political ascendancy. To achieve this goal, an individual requires funds whereas, the needed household consumption income might be little, thereby requiring a strong capital base for politics. Naturally, women are sympathetic, and caring and their thinking is directed towards home building, thus, vying for public offices to enrich themselves is very unusual. Most men, on the other hand, lack such compassion for the suffering when in control of public affairs, they misappropriate public funds to build their political empire for the future.

### **Violence, Thuggery, and Intimidation Against Women in Politics**

Though violence, thuggery, and intimidation are recurrent incidences in politics and directed against political opponents, female political aspirants are the worst affected than their male counterparts. In many cases, women tend to be more cautious than men and avoid resorting to violence and thuggery as part of their campaign strategies. Conversely, men often employ all available tactics to secure victory in elections. Women who cannot withstand the demoralizing effects of political violence often find themselves with no alternative but to withdraw from the competition, contributing to a certain level of apathy among women in politics (Edisua Iso, interviewed 4/9/2016).

All the female politicians interviewed agreed violence against women is one of the most powerful tools used by most men to irk women out of the political game. Hon. Toyo posits that she had been attacked in her house on three occasions and her valuables catered away in the process. She said the young men surprisingly came back after the incident and confessed who sent them (Nkoyo Toyo interviewed.

23/08/2014)

Rev. Mrs. Ekanem said she has been attacked several times during campaign tours at Akpabuyo, her constituency, her car destroyed, and the people raining abuses on her. When asked what her response was to such actions, she said that as clergy, she would always use such opportunities to inform them that politics was not all about violence but what good the person has in mind for them. All they want is money to pacify them which is always the result. Hon. Asuquoanwan Attah also said any woman who ventures into politics should "be ready to be a man and withstand all she will see and confront in the political arena. She should just be strong, wild, and determined".

In light of the foregoing, it is difficult for women to whirl in the "foggy waters of Nigerian politics". The nocturnal political meetings discourage married women's participation and consequently, their political futures are not protected when critical party decisions are taken. These meetings sometimes end in a fiasco because of disagreement. It is even worse for women whose husbands are apolitical or if such do not have the support of the immediate family (Asuquoanwan Attah, interviewed 21/01/2015).

The reverse was the case with most of the women interviewed. They claim from the inception of having a political mindset, the idea of late-night meetings had to be accepted by you and your spouse. Rev. Ekanem, Elder Asuquoanwan Attah, and Elder Edisua Usang Iso confirmed their husbands' approval to go into politics and even followed them to such meetings and waited for them. Hon. Toyo said she has been called names and often asked "Are you a woman?". All women who claim to be true politicians and want to succeed in the political game "must be ready and willing to attend all meetings, especially night meetings, for it is there that major decisions are taken". When asked why those decisions cannot be taken in the daytime, Hon. Toyo laughed and said, "The night is calm and quiet, the brain is also calm after all the rigours of the day. And at this time, no crowd is needed because the meeting is only for strong caucus members/stakeholders" (Nkoyo Toyo interviewed 23/08/2014). When the researcher approached her to interview her, she gave an appointment for 10 p.m. on that day. When asked why so late, she said her brain would be calm then and she would be able to talk better. Which means night

meetings have become part of her. She strongly attests to the fact that it is because of this violence and thuggery in politics that most women rather appreciate civil service work, where violence hardly occurs.

Political thuggery before, during, and after elections, the tenuous security circumstance that characterizes politics has made cultism, ritual killings, and the attendant destruction of properties have become the determinant factors for success in the Nigerian political landscape. To that extent, active political participation seems elusive for pious adherents of the society, particularly women apart from a few strong-willed ones. Hence, the soft ones prefer the civil service where they grow steadily.

### **The Indigeneity Ploy Against Women in Politics**

Another obstacle that limits women who have the intention of taking elective positions is the indigeneity scheme, particularly for those who are married outside their constituency of birth. For instance, women who are interested in contesting elections in their husband's constituencies are in most cases regarded as non-indigenes. In such situations, such women are not considered qualified to contest because they are only members of that constituency by marriage. Even more worrisome is when the woman is married from an entirely different ethnic group. Such women are looked upon as exhibiting over-ambitiousness and every possible means is used to weed them off (Florence Giwa, interviewed 01/08/2017).

The virile democracy is a prerogative bestowed on all citizens by law. Section 40 of the Nigerian 1999 Constitution (as amended) spells – out these rights clearly, thus:

Every citizen shall have the right to assemble freely and associate with other persons and in particular, he is free to belong to any political party, trade union, or any other association for the

protection of his interest; provided that the provisions of this section shall not be belittling from the powers conferred by this constitution on the Independent National Electoral Commission concerning political parties to which that commission does accord recognition.

In the same vein, Section 42 (1) states:

A citizen of Nigeria of any community, ethnic group, place of origin, sex, religion, or political opinion shall not, by reason only that he is such a person be subjected to any form of discrimination.

Indeed, the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria remains the authoritative reference document for social harmony amongst groups and no person shall be discriminated by anyone, male or female in the socio-political structure. Consequently, it is untenable for men to dictate the Nigerian political landscape and, push women aside. Available data indicates that since the inauguration of current democratic governance in Nigeria, women have been scantily represented in public offices.

The game of indigency is often used when women seek political office. It is often extremely difficult for the woman to go back to her constituency of birth to contest the assumption that she has “lost” her status of being an indigene by marrying outside such constituencies. However, women politicians like Sen. Florence Ita Giwa and Nkoyo Toyo, who were able to scuttle the hurdles, did so because of their competencies. Giwa insisted the game of indigency is what her opponents used in exploiting her because she is from Cross River State but married to an Oron man from Akwa Ibom State. According to Hon. Toyo, “These are political ploys and gimmicks they raise against you when you have a superior argument”. The whole idea about the ploy is that you will not be independent and will rely on your husband for every decision made and more so, the secret of the state will be made known outside” (Nkoyo Toyo interview 23/8/2014).

While on her part Hon. Ekaette Ebong (Nee Onoyom Ita) claimed she has never had a problem playing politics in Akwa Ibom State. Though from Cross River

State, she was invited to take her husband's position when he got sick, and she had fared well playing politics in Akwa Ibom State. Such was the case of Chief Mrs. Margaret Ekpo who was successful in politics outside her place of birth and marriage.

### **The Zoning Formula and Women's Participation in Political Process**

The strategy of zoning political offices was presented in Nigerian politics to assuage the worries of minority groups. It was feared that if politics is conducted based on "survival of the fittest" or "might is right", the numerical and educationally disadvantaged minorities may never occupy certain positions. For that reason, to ensure that the privileged groups do not continually use their power to dictate the political space, zoning is therefore employed at all levels for political equanimity. Even though it has no constitutional backing, it is gradually becoming a standard, especially since after the 1994/95 Constitutional Conference where it engendered an intense argument (Iloh and Mikel 122).

Whereas zoning is used to guarantee that no party is constitutionally left out of any political office. It is equally argued that it is undemocratic because all eligible persons are allowed to contest. However, zoning emboldens mediocrity as the best could be easily wriggled out. It is likewise being used to push aside unwanted contenders. This tactic is employed by party officials to sideline influential female candidates. They achieve this by strategically relocating the contested office to an area where the targeted female aspirant is not a native. This typically occurs when it becomes evident that the female contestant is likely to secure victory in the primary election (Giwa, interviewed). In essence, it becomes simpler to eliminate her from the competition by arguing that it is not yet the appropriate time for her region to produce the officeholder. This, in turn, clears the path for a more compliant male candidate (Grace Ekanem interviewed 10/04/2013).

Such was the case between Hon. Nkoyo Toyo and Prince Bassey Otu who were contesting for the House of Representatives in the year 2003. Hon. Toyo was seen as the strong candidate on the ground coming from Calabar Municipality and Prince Bassey Otu coming from Odukpani. The party barons zoned the seat to Odukpani

to favour Prince Otu who was their preferred choice. On the day of the primaries, she and her delegates were not allowed into her hall. Her team was attacked and some of her delegates were badly beaten. Her car was vandalized and the sum of Five Hundred Thousand Naira (₦500,000.00) and gift items were stolen (Nkoyo Toyo interviewed 23/08/2014).

Responding to the electoral fate of Hajiya Sarah Jubril Aminu during the 2011 PDP Presidential Election Primaries at Eagle's Square, Abuja, Rev. Furthermore, it was common knowledge that the seat of President had been zoned to South–South. Maybe the Reverend Gentlewoman contends "If it were a woman that emerged from the South–South, all the women or at least half of them would have cast their votes for her. Or better still, if the seat was for the North they would have voted for Sarah Jubril" (Grace Ekanem interviewed 10/04/2013).

### **Labeling as Strategy of Exclusion: Subverting the Affirmative Action Policy**

Generally, party executives were ill-disposed to the female candidature of female aspirants completely. Paradoxically, their major reason was the affirmative action strategy embraced by some of the parties' waving fees for female aspirants. Party officials in some constituencies are out to label women aspirants as people with less required guarantee the party needs to win. Party chieftains at the Local level frequently argue convincingly that by the decision of the National Executive Committee to wave nomination fees for women, they have demonstrated a lack of commitment to the development of the party. This argument has been used to affirm that male candidates are more dedicated to the party because they make their financial contributions eagerly and that assurances should be documented and compensated. Hence, such party leaders succeed in labeling women aspirants as "anti-party" and thereby creating the basis for their marginalization (Ibrahim 7).

Once a deleterious label has been effectively enforced on an aspirant, it is easy to eliminate the branded aspirant notwithstanding the rules and procedures established, hence, the aspirant's acceptability has been battered. To avoid such

labeling, some women have had to disregard the affirmative action policy and pay their nomination fees to increase their chances of success.

### **The Politics of Invectives: Undermining the Moral Standing of Female Aspirants**

Closely connected with undesirable labeling is the use of harangue language to demoralize and delegitimize woman aspirants. Certainly, it is well known in the sociology of elite competition that the use of abusive words and insults is an operational stratagem of excluding political opponents. Such was the case of an Honourable member of the House of Representatives from Akwa Ibom State, Hon. Iquo Minimah who was insulted and called abusive names on the floor of the house some years back. When she retaliated and slapped the male member, the whole house was in an uproar. In Cross River State, most young women politicians when interviewed claimed that it was normal in the political scene. When asked further what their response was in such instances, they laughed and all they said was, “That is the game, politics for you”. Senator Florence Giwa, Hon. Uduak Akiba, Hon. Barr. Josephine Effiom, Hon. Asuquoanwan Attah, etc., all confirmed that at one point or the other, they have been called derogatory names.

Because of this, many female aspirants are always exposed to murmur campaigns and insinuations about their purported slack sensual and good standing and some had been openly offended with the use of polemics like prostitutes and harlots. Campaigns were organized around the “true marital statuses of female aspirants as a means of interrogating their moral uprightness. This meant that the standards for women politicians should be higher than those of male politicians (Interview, Hon. Edisua Iso 04/09/2010).

### **Godfatherism and Women's Participation in Politics**

Hon. Edisua Iso said your Godfather is your mentor. In her case, Senator Florence Ita Giwa was her mentor. She admired Sen. Giwa and towed her line and ventured into politics. When during one of the Senator’s campaign tours far back

in 1992 she met with her, the Senator then vying for House of Representatives picked interest in her and encouraged her into politics. She has a supportive husband, so she has never had problems as a politician.

It is imperative to indicate here that the most prosperous women in politics in the SSD, are those with supportive husbands, and those who are done with childbearing, those who have intermingled with the armed forces, daughters of older politicians. Mention will be made of women from the area of study, thus: Chief Margaret Ekpo (supportive husband), Sen. Florence Giwa (widow), Late Mrs. Asi Arikpo (Wife of a past Minister), Kate Okon (supportive husband).

Politics in Nigeria has been designated as a vocation destined for the toughened, and aspirants cannot finance their campaigns and elections themselves without resorting to godfathers (Makana 132). Godfatherism implies a patron–client or master–servant relationship which cannot be free of violence, particularly in the area of disagreements where a candidate fails to conform to previously contracted agreements. The politics of godfatherism in some cases does not favour women. Most women cannot withstand the subsequent consequences of not meeting the godfather’s requests (132).

### **Virility Deficiency Syndrome**

Another major challenge confronting women in politics and policy making is the women themselves due to women's lack of confidence in their capability to lead. They feel politics is solely for men and they dare not porch into it, and women who manage to attempt are typically comfortable with the back seat. Now and then, consensus has been the conventional approach based on high political virility; those who have all it takes to contest in the tempestuous atmosphere, those who possess the resources to take it by force when force is required, and those who can march violence with violence. By compromise, it is believed that men hold the greater power, are independent, and are well–equipped to battle in the political endeavour, whereas, women are considered too flaccid to be involved in politics and governance (Agbalajobi 69). Hence, women think of politics as a “dirty game” and

sustained fear of the assumed violence has further estranged them from mainstream politics. In Nigeria, there seems to be no clear understanding of “a visible agenda for women” (Toyo 29). Whereas, importance is placed on women’s geometric power, interpreting such into the fulfillment of authority has been challenging as women seem to be “supporter's club, a team of cheerers and clappers” in contradistinction to their male counterparts.

### **Pull Her Down Syndrome (PHDs)**

Another major factor weighing against women in politics is that many women are not comfortable with the leadership capabilities of their fellow women. Elements like envy, jealousy, hatred, and associated interpersonal disputes are common with women. By and large, women would rather vote for men or support men to win an election against a fellow woman. This negative attitude of women to fellow women is tagged as “Pull Her Down Syndrome (PHDs)”. Rich women hardly sponsor women in politics but would rather support or sponsor men. Some women claim this is so because they either do not want you to be where they are or they might be shy to agree with awarding them a contract or refunding such monies back. Better still they are afraid that the aspirant might not get much support from the men folk and, hence, lose the election and such money wasted (Hon. Asuquoanwan Attah, Esther Ayomobi interviewed).

Despite the numerical strength of the women from the SSD, they have however not been able to utilize this to tilt political governance to their advantage. This study postulates that women's inability to have a united front is not unconnected with the society being polygamous. This means that the disharmony and struggle among and between women in domestic politics have a stronghold on women not being able to trust their destiny into three hands of other women in local and national politics. This poses a greater challenge for leadership skills and confidence-building among women.

“Women are their enemies”. The greatest obstacle is how to get women to vote for women as a strategic issue. From the above, we can see that the

involvement of women in the political history of the study area, the SSD, and the current political dispensation can best be interpreted in the circumstance of practices confronting them as a group. These practices, which include institutionalized exclusion, entrenched inequalities, inappropriate socialization, powerlessness, and poverty have resulted in differential relationships between men and women. Such differences have created a huge gap between women and their male counterparts both in the public and private domain. In many ways, the context of women's private lives has influenced their responses to the public spaces available for politics.

At a campaign rally at the Calabar stadium in 2010, a group of women who came into town from the northern part of the state with uniforms were interviewed about their view of women venturing into politics (Focus Group Interview). A good number of them answered, saying they would not have left their business and come down if the Governorship candidate were to be a woman. When asked why, a great number of them said a woman's place was to take care of her family and not to struggle position with men. Some asked back saying, who will take care of the home when the woman is busy traveling up and down. Some said they prefer to come out for a man because a woman will not remember them when they get into the office (Focus group interview 10/04/2015).

### **Conclusion**

This study attempted an investigate the challenges and prospects of women's participation in the political process in the Cross River Southern Senatorial district in the 4<sup>th</sup> Republic. The study has revealed that throughout Nigeria's history of political transformation, there have been persistent challenges of male dominance and the limited inclusion of women in public affairs, often reduced to tokenism (Aina and Ukeje, 1998; Aina and Olayode, 2012b). This pattern is observed not only in the pre-colonial and colonial periods but also in the post-colonial era. However, the study suggests that despite these challenges, there is still a promising outlook for Nigerian women in terms of political participation

and engagement, particularly considering the increasing number of educated and enlightened women in contemporary Nigeria. This study believes that the first step towards the actualization of Nigerian women's participation in politics is the appreciation that our social system is not fair and just to the women folk. It must be realized that the woman has a mission on earth, and as such must be allowed to fulfill her mission like her male counterpart. Thus, she must not be held hostage culturally, psychologically, politically, and socio-economically. The reconstruction of our social system to ensure the total liberation of women is of paramount importance in this regard.

Moreover, the study concludes that eliminating occupational bias against women and addressing labor-related issues affecting women can be achieved by promoting women's capacity building, facilitating opportunities in the labor market, and ensuring equal access to education and skill development, as well as fair treatment in terms of wages and promotions in both public and private sectors. Personnel policies should align with the principle of equitable representation of both genders, by national and international labour laws. A system of incentives should be established for organizations, both in the formal and informal sectors of the economy, that adhere to principles of gender equality and egalitarianism.

Furthermore, the study asserts that empowering women in politics necessitates the active encouragement of women's political engagement. This can be accomplished by creating an inclusive environment that encourages women to participate in politics through a thorough review of the structure and operational procedures of political parties. Financial support should also be extended to female political aspirants to foster an increase in the representation of women in elected positions and the policymaking process. The importance of affirmative action in politics cannot be overstated, such as reserving a certain percentage (e.g., 35%) of elective and appointive positions for women. Constitutional provisions should be established to legally ensure women's presence in the political sphere, supported by legislation on women's and children's rights. Promoting gender equality through customary laws, gender advocacy, awareness campaigns, and equal access to

justice, regardless of wealth or gender, should be considered essential. To achieve this goal, integrating human rights education into school curricula at all levels and enhancing the capacity of legislative, judicial, and enforcement bodies is crucial for achieving gender justice and gender parity.

The implementation of quotas and proportional representation serves to foster gender balance within society. As pointed out by Philips (1995), the quota system doesn't differentiate but rather compensates for the genuine obstacles that hinder women's pursuit of a political career. In this regard, electoral stakeholders such as the Independent National Electoral Commission and political parties should play an active role. Connected to the aforementioned is the vital legal framework that safeguards women's rights, particularly in the establishment of international and domestic mechanisms aimed at enhancing women's participation in social, economic, and governance processes.

Nonetheless, the study further concludes that over the past three decades, there has been a consistent increase in the enrolment of girls in higher education institutions in various parts of Nigeria. For instance, in the Eastern region of Nigeria, where many male children have engaged in trade from an early age, girls have stepped in to fill the void. Numerous boys' secondary schools have been converted into girls' secondary schools to accommodate the growing enrolment of female students. This shift has been made possible by the changing perspectives of many traditional parents regarding the role of women in society. Additionally, there has been a notable rise in the enrolment of girls in both private and public higher education institutions in Nigeria. Correspondingly, they conclude that political violence limits women's chances at the polls and in political involvement.

Based on forgoing the study recommends that:

- i. The State should ensure adequate security for women and girls during elections and end impunity against them.
- ii. Political Parties should commit to non-violent campaigning and abstain from hate speech, especially against women.

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- iii. Non-violent education should be mainstreamed in all consciousness and voter education campaigns by all players.
- iv. The State should maintain freedom of movement, expression, and assembly for all citizens, especially women.
- v. Culprits of political violence especially against women must be brought to justice.

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