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TOPIC: GENDER AND POLITICAL REPRESENTATION: ASSESSING WOMEN PARTICIPATION AND INCLUSIVENESS IN NIGERIA PARTY POLITICS

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1.1 INTRODUCTION

Gender inequality especially in the political arena is a serious challenge being faced by women in recent times. Gender inequality has been an issue for several centuries, the world over. Though history has it that fewer women have been in power even before colonialism. Instances are the Queen of Daura who ruled in fifteenth century in Oyo, after the death of her husband (Modupe, 2001). Though from the foregoing, it will be seen that very, very few women have had the opportunity in a leadership position, yet in every one or single case of women, there are several hundreds of the male counterparts.

Sexism has become a major problem in Nigerian politics. Women have been politically considered endangered species and their low participation in Nigerian government and politics is often associated with culture, religious, economic constraint and male chauvinism. The traditional society did not recognize the contributions of women in any decision making process.

In recent past, however, especially in the wake of the millennium and also in the 2015 general elections, many women have risen up to the challenges of the time. Many women have come to assume leadership positions in both politics and religion. This is a giant step in the right direction as it will go a long way in breaking the jinx of gender inequality and male chauvinism in Nigeria society. The 2015 general election was seen as a good platform to authenticate the voting pattern of Nigerian women.

The objective, which this term paper work seeks to achieve includes: To assess the nature of women participation in politics, to identify the economic disadvantages associated with the women failure in political participation, to examine the relationship between politics and women's participation in politics, and determine the factors hindering women participation in Nigeria politics.

2.1 SEXISM

Sexism is prejudice or discrimination based on a person's sex or gender. Sexism primarily affects women and girls. Gender inequality acknowledges that men and women are not equal and that gender affects an individual's lived experience. These differences arise from distinctions in biology, psychology, and cultural norms. Some of these distinctions are empirically grounded while others appear to be socially constructed.

2.2 THE NIGERIAN WOMEN: A CONCEPTUALIZATION

A woman is biologically defined as an adult member of the female sex. From a social and societal perspective, there are varied definitions of women. According to (Igube, 2004), the perception of a woman and womanhood in Nigeria is a function of the inter-play of the societal dynamics of the three cultures that form the Nigerian triple heritage.

2.3 DEMOCRACY

The term originates from the Greek (*dēmokratía*) "rule of the people", which was coined from (*dēmos*) "people" and (*kratos*) "power" or "rule". Democracy is a form of government in which all eligible citizens participate equally either directly or through elected representatives in the proposal, development, and creation of laws. It encompasses social, economic and cultural conditions that enable the free and equal practice of political self-determination.

2.4 PARTY POLITICS IN NIGERIA

At the inception of party politics in 1923 following the introduction of the elective principle by the Clifford constitution, Nigerian parties had very limited and self-serving objectives. The main objective was perhaps, that of buying legitimacy for the colonial government through very limited franchise restricted to Lagos and Calabar.

2.5 WOMEN IN POLITICS: AN OVERVIEW

Nigerian women just like their counterparts all over the world, have contributed immensely to the nations socio-political and economic development, yet the struggle for their political emancipation cannot be successful unless equal opportunities are given to them. This is very important as women represent a potent force for the development of any nation in that they form a greater percentage of the global population. It was due to this observation that Ghali (1998) posited that until the role of women in national leadership is recognized, our national problems will remain unresolved.

2.6 CONSTRAINTS OF WOMEN IN POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN NIGERIA: AN EXPOSITION

Fifty-nine years after Nigeria's independence, there are still fears that increased participation by women in governance is threatened by practice already discarded by other democracies. Women participation in politics and decision-making process is very important in order to bring about even development to the society. Like many countries, Nigeria maintains a national democratic constitution, boasting inclusive and equitable access to political participation. It was expected that facilitating Nigerian women's admission to one-third of positions in governing bodies would enable women to reach a critical threshold in the pursuit of changes in gender equity and thus, women's empowerment (UNIFEM, 2003). However, the under-representation of Nigerian women in politics is both descriptive (that is, the number of women in institutions is not reflective of the number of women in society) and substantive (that is, the unique perspectives of women are being heard in political institutions to ensure that women's needs, demands and interests are incorporated into political agendas) (Tremblay and Pelletier, 2000). According to Nussbaum (2002), Nigerian women's under-representation in the public and social domain, against their male counterparts and the inability to properly fit into political arena has affected Nigerian women's empowerment and social status.

3.1 CONCLUSION

The thinking that only women are suited for domestic activities is a destructive attitude that has retarded development over the years. There are very rare cases of female head of national governments in the decision-making the world over. The Nigerian experience remains more pathetic. Though Nigerian women for the majority of the number they are not adequately represented in political and even administrative positions. There is therefore a great need to engender Nigeria by dismantling the existing socio-economic status quo which hinders or obstructs women participation. Also women domestication ought to be discouraged while equal representation of all genders and social classes encouraged. Until this is done, women participation in politics will remain a mirage hence they will not be able to contribute to the development of the society be it socially, economically or politically.