

WOMEN AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN NAMIBIA AND NIGERIA: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF WOMEN IN ELECTIVE POSITIONS

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Abstract

While women in Namibia have made successful inroads into the country's parliament despite gender barriers in the country, Nigerian women are yet to make any noticeable progress in their efforts to achieve political power. Women's agitation for increase political participation over time has received backing from international instruments. The 1979 UN Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA), the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Protocol on Gender and Development are some of these international instruments. They emphasize that member nations, who signed and ratified these documents, put in place necessary mechanisms needed to eliminate gender discriminations and promote women's cause generally. Nigeria just like Namibia has signed these documents and has even incorporated some provisions in its National Gender Policy. In comparison with Namibia, women in Nigeria still have a long way to go in politics. The question is what accounts for the slow progress of Nigerian women in gaining political power? This paper examines the trend in women's political participation in Namibia and Nigeria by exploring and discussing those factors that engender increase in participation in Namibia and those that constrain the female politicians in Nigeria.

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Across the globe, there have been significant efforts at improving women's political representation and participation in political decision-making. While some countries made a great leap towards achieving gender parity in politics and political decision-making, some are still grappling with challenges of achieving gender parity in politics. There are now more female politicians and heads of international bodies in Europe, Africa, and Latin America (Waylen, 2012). The Inter-Parliamentary Report provides in global terms marginal increase in the number of women in parliament. As at January 2018, women hold at least 30 per cent of seats in 67 chambers (both single/lower and upper houses), and less than 10 per cent in 39 chambers (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2018).

This has been achieved through increasing interest in empowering women within international organisations. The issue was highlighted in the Beijing UN Women's Conference Platform for Action and has been incorporated into the objectives of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Millennium Development Goals. International democracy promotion agencies such as the International Institute for Democracy and electoral Assistance (IDEA) have placed considerable emphasis on women's political representation (Randall, 2011, p.1).

But, despite the progress made globally in improving the status of women, gender disparities in electoral politics still exist (Kasomo, 2012). It has been observed however that, substantial country variation in patterns of growth and change accompanies the worldwide growth in women's political representation (Paxton, Melaine & Painter II, 2010). In September 2015, 53 countries had achieved the 30% global target in lower and upper houses of parliament. Eighteen of these countries are from the Commonwealth, namely: Antigua and Barbuda, Australia, Belize, Cameroon, Canada, Grenada, Guyana, Mozambique, Namibia, New Zealand, Rwanda, Seychelles, Singapore, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Uganda and the United Kingdom. Rwanda still tops the list with parliament consisting of 64% women, closely followed by Seychelles with 44% and South Africa with 42%. In addition, the African region ranks quite high in the number of women in governance, followed by the Caribbean and Asian regions. Even though the number of women in parliament is growing, women's representation still remains at 22% (The Commonwealth, 2015; World Atlas, 2017).

The variations in attaining success in political struggle for power by women across countries are obvious. Explanations for the disparities exist across countries. Researchers have identified a broad range of political, social, structural and cultural factors that enhance or limit women's political representation on a global scale,

including electoral rules, party ideology, democratization, gender ideology and pressure from international and domestic women's movements ((Hughes, 2013, p.25).

However, in this paper, we are guided by the following questions in seeking explanations for variations in women's political representation generally and specifically in Namibia and Nigeria. Why have women succeeded in gaining political power in some countries and not in others? What are the cultural, structural, and political factors that shape women's access to political power? What accounts specifically for the differences in the level of women's access to political power and political decision-making process in Namibia and Nigeria? We examine historical trend in women's national legislative representation in both countries and seek for explanations on why progress has been substantial in Namibia, while Nigeria is still grappling with the challenge of improving women's political participation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Women, Democracy and Politics: A Discourse

The discourse on women's participation in politics and political decision-making often focuses on certain basic rights without which the democratic principle of equality of persons cannot be attained (Quadri & Agbalajobi, 2013). The principle of equality between women and men underpins basic human rights, which lies at the core of democracy. Therefore, women participation and representation are said to be critical for the sustenance of democracy. Since democracy is about popular political participation, the inclusion of the perspectives of women and their participation in politics are prerequisites for democratic development and should contribute to good governance (Ballington et al., 2012).

We rely on Paxton, Hughes and Painter II's (2010) dimension of democracy as explicated below. According to them, democracy is typically defined by at least two dimensions:

The first dimension, political rights, exists to the extent that the national government is elected by a meaningful process and parties compete for political power. Civil liberties, the second dimension, exist when the people of a country have the freedom to express political opinions in any media and the freedom to organise and participate in any political group. The two dimensions of democracy may have different effects on women's political representation over time. Changes in political rights correspond to changes in institutional rules – for example, fair elections are held, shifts in power occur through elections and the government becomes increasingly free of military control. When political rights increase, women may be better able to understand the clear and transparent rules of the political game and more easily compete alongside their male counterparts. Increased

competition among political parties may also lead to more female candidates and leaders as courting voters, including female constituents, becomes important (p.30).

The quality of democracy is determined not only by the form of political institutions in place and the regularity of elections, but also by the extent of citizens' participation in the political process, including the participation of different social groups in political parties, elections, parliaments and decision-making bodies (Moghadam, 2008 p. 4). Political participation as one of the key elements of democracy provides the justification for inclusion of marginalised groups such as women and youths in electoral competition.

Women's participation is a central element of democracy and the nature and degree of women's participation is a key indicator of the quality of democratic culture (IDEA, 2013, p.7). Participation of women in politics will be meaningful only if the process is just, fair, permissive and a level playing ground is guaranteed for possible ascension of women politically. The degree of the permissiveness of the electoral process will determine the extent to which women can navigate the terrain to capture political power and share in political decision-making.

The view that women in politics matter is sustained by three reasons: First, politics is an important arena for decision making. Individuals who hold official positions in government get to decide how to allocate scarce resources such as tax revenues. Politicians make political decisions that may help some people at the expense of others. Decisions by politicians often affect individual choices by encouraging some behaviours and outlawing others. Second, political power is a valuable good. Politicians hold power over other social institutions such as the family. Third, holding a political position is to have a position of authority (Paxton, 2007).

It is possible to advance the argument that men cannot adequately represent women's interests, needs and concerns in parliaments. There are substantive women's issues such as reproductive health, HIV/AIDS, women trafficking among others that require women's perspectives and views in addressing them. Thus, integrating women in the political decision-making process provides women the opportunity to discuss and engage with these issues.

When women are excluded from political decision-making, some of these issues may be glossed over in legislation when there are no strong voices and pressure to enact legislation on them. Olurode (2013, p.8) argues that women's exclusion from politics is indefensible. He observes that exclusion will deny society of women's perspectives on issues of governance on the floor of parliaments and even at other levels of political administration. In the same vein, Ballington (2011) observed that "the number of women in parliament does matter; at the very least, the more women

there are in parliament, the more likely the parliament is to address women's issues and to change the gender dynamics in the chamber. The proportion of women members of parliament has a great influence on the nature of the debate in politics" (p.10).

According to Akande (2006), gender parity in politics ensures and strengthens democracy. A government by men for men cannot claim to be a government of the people for the people. She claimed that "the concept of democracy will only assume true and dynamic significance when political parties and national legislation are decided upon jointly by men and women with equitable regard for the interests and aptitudes of both halves of the population" (Akande 2006, p. 244). Men as politicians cannot claim expertise in legislating on matters that are purely women-specific. Inclusion of women in political decision-making will, therefore, engender all-inclusive deliberations and considerations of gender issues in parliaments.

Empowerment relates to the degree of representation in deliberative bodies and is often measured by the percentage of women in the legislature (Beer, 2009). As it is often said that 'politics is a game of number', the number of women in the legislative house can determine the extent to which women's issues will attract the attention of policy-makers. The presence of female representatives can contribute to the feminization of the political agenda - that is the articulation of women's concerns and perspectives in public debates - as well as the feminization of legislation - that is public policies that take into account their effect on women (Dovi, 2006).

However, the low representation of women in political decision-making continues in many democratic governments. The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) Report in 2017 found that in global terms, the number of women in national parliaments only increased by 0.1 percentage point from 2016 bringing the total representation from 23.3 percent to 23.4 percent (XinhuaNet, 2018). Many factors have been identified as responsible for the low representation of women in political decision-making. The underrepresentation of women is mostly symptomatic of persistent gender stereotypes, conflict between family and work demands, patriarchy and the lack of an enabling political environment, inadequate funding to support female candidates, the absence of special measures/quotas, low literacy levels, the lack of job security in politics, the absence of female role models and a lack of training for political participation.

Other factors include poverty, illiteracy and limited access to education, lack of confidence in other women, lack of access to information and the multiple effect of violence against women. Nomination and selection processes of candidates in political parties usually consider women as second best (Akiyode-Afolabi 2011, 2008; Kasomo, 2012; Norris & Inglehart, 2000; Ogwu, 1996; Okwuosa, 1996; Olurode, 2003; Shevdova, 1998; The Commonwealth 2015; Tibaijuka, 2000). Women in politics have tried to grapple with these limiting factors over time even though they have continued to hinder women in their efforts at getting represented in political decision making.

Politics has strategic importance for women because the ultimate success of women's movement will rest heavily on effective use of the political process (Lynn, 1978). Women's ability to effectively use the political process to get to political positions may increase their representation in elective positions and affect public policies. Women's exclusion from politics by extension is exclusion from public decision-making. This, in a way, can hinder their development as they are unable to affect legislation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Electoral System and Women in Namibia in Recent Political Evolutions

Since independence, Namibia uses diverse electoral systems for elections (Blaauw & Letsholo, 2009). The country is, however, still using the proportional representation system for elections because it is economical. This system has challenges that engender the fragmented party system which emphasized underrepresentation of women in the smallest parties in parliament (Blaauw & Letsholo, 2009). To overcome this legacy of the under representation of women in parliament, it became essential to invoke distributive politics to address this inequitable state of affairs. In the case of Namibia, the urgency with which this task was carried out is borne out in the country's ranking. Namibia has a score of 58% placing it 6th in Africa and 12th in the world which indicates good performance with some work still needed (IPU, 2017; Akawa, 2014).

Namibia has three levels of government: The national, regional and local level. Namibia's national parliament consists of two houses - the National Assembly (NA) and the National Council (NC). The National Assembly has direct law-making powers and is composed of 72 members elected through a party list system with an additional six non-voting members who are appointed by the president by virtue of their expertise, skills, status and experience. The 2014 constitutional amendments resulted in an increase of the NA from 78 to 104 members. The Electoral system used in the NA is the system of proportional representation in which NA seats are allocated to parties in proportion to votes cast for them; meaning that the more votes a party gets, the more seats it commands in parliament.

The NA is established in terms of chapter seven of the Constitution, which gives it the power to make and repeal laws for the peace, order and good government of the country in the best interest of the people of Namibia (Article 63). It is expected to approve budgets and taxation regimes, defend the constitution and laws of Namibia, agree on international treaties, receive reports of government agencies and parastatals, and remain vigilant in ensuring the best interest of the country. The NA also allows time for oppositions Members of Parliament (MPs) to hold the Prime Minister and Ministers accountable by posing questions relating to matters for which they are responsible.

The President is not a member of NA, but does deliver an annual State of the Nation address after which parliamentarians are allowed to ask questions. The Speaker, who is chosen by the MPs, presides over sitting of the NA and has the authority to make rulings concerning the conduct of proceeding. The Speaker acts as a spokesperson for the NA in its dealings with the State, the President, The National Council and other authorities. The Speaker also has a casting vote in the case of ties (Thomas, 2005).

Table 1

Percentage of Women in Governance and Decision-making in Namibian National Assembly (NA)

Year	Percentage of Women in Parliament
1st National Assembly= 1990-1995	6.4%
2nd National Assembly = 1995-2000	17.9%
3rd National Assembly = 2000-2005	28.2%
4th National Assembly = 2005-2010	26.9%
5th National Assembly = 2010-2015	24.4%
6th National Assembly = 2015-2020	42%

Source: Gender Links (2011), Iipinge & Le Beau (2005), Morna (2004), Shejvali, (2013) & Shejvali (2015).

The first and second National Assembly elections in Namibia were a challenge to Namibian women. Women only constituted 6.4% and 17.9% respectively in the National Assembly. Since independence in 1990, an increasing number of women have become leaders both in the government as well as in non-governmental and community-based organisations.

However, since Beijing, the need for gender balance at all levels and all spheres of society have become a matter of national concern in Namibia. As a signatory to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the Beijing Platform for Action and The Southern African Development Communities (SADC) Protocol on Gender and Development, Namibia has committed itself to ensuring equal representation of women and men in the decision-making within the organs of the state and in SADC structures at all levels. The goal has been to achieve at least a thirty percent target of women in all political and decision-making structures by the year 2005 (Southern African Development Communities [SADC], 1997).

From the third up to current elections, Namibia has increased women representation in its National Assembly thanks to the campaign of 50/50 gender balance in politics and decision making (Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2014, p. 129). In 2013, the ruling SWAPO party took a bold decision and introduced 50/50 zebra style that

increased women's representation on the party lists (Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2014). Since independence, the proportional representation system was not in favour of women because men had difficulty electing women to legislative office due the patriarchy syndrome.

The Southern African Development Communities (SADC) and in particular Namibia has a long history of many types of social inequality including gender inequality. Many challenges that women face in Namibia today have been influenced by the historical imbalance of power between women and men, social structural factors such as poverty, unemployment and related social problems (National Organisation for Women, 2006). Since the introduction of the 50/50 zebra list system by the ruling party SWAPO in 2014, women in the National Assembly constitute 42% and Namibia ranks 3rd in the SADC region.

Table 2

Percentage of Women Members in Namibian National Council (NC)

Year	Percentage of Women MPs in National Council
1st National Council = 1992-1998	3.8%
2nd National Council = 1998-2004	7.6%
3rd National Council = 2004-2010	26.9%
4th National Council = 2010-2016	26.9%

Source: Gender Links (2011), Iipinge & Le Beau (2005), Morna (2004), Shejvali, (2013) & Shejvali (2015).

The National Council (NC) recommends legislation on issues concerning the regions and has the power to raise objections to proposed laws. It consists of 26 members representing the 13 regions of Namibia. Since 2014, constitutional amendments include the increase of the NC from 26 to 42 members, and the changing of the boundaries of regions from 13 to 14. Two NC members are elected by the members of the Regional Councils of each of the regions. These regional councilors are in turn directly elected by the voters in separate constituencies in each region. If one political party controls the Regional Council then, representatives to the NC would normally be from that party.

The National Council reviews bills passed by the National Assembly and recommends legislation of regional importance. Although they can refuse proposals made by the National Assembly, laws can be enacted if two-thirds of the assembly

approve them. The NC has the power to establish its own committees for the purposes of scrutinizing legislation and holding public hearings. The NC recommends legislation on issues concerning the regions and has the power to raise objections to proposed laws.

As Table 2 indicates, the first and second NC elections were not promising at all with only one female representative in the 1992-1998 session. Stagnation was evident in 2004 with only seven female members out of a total of 26 members thus constituting 26.9% (Shejavali, 2015, p. 2). There is no electoral act requiring a certain percentage of women candidates in the regional elections like the one-third proportion in local elections. The 2014 constitutional amendments from two to three representatives had little effect on women representation in the NC.

As a result, women’s participation in politics and decision making at the national and regional levels is far from satisfactory. However, the Namibian government has undertaken various measures to advance the position of women in society and to promote gender equality in all spheres. A practical problem experienced with these legal requirements is that there are still negative attitudes exhibited towards gender equality at the national level. These attitudes pose a serious challenge to the implementation of gender-responsive policies and development programmes. Despite the impressive social policy issues, the objective reality regarding gender equality still has to be fully realized.

Table 3

Percentage of Women Members in Local Authorities

Year	Percentage of Women in Local Authorities
1st Local Authorities= 1990-1995	40%
2nd = Local Authorities 1995-2000	41.3%
3rd = Local Authorities 2000-2005	43.3%
4th = Local Authorities 2000-2005	43.3%
5th = Local Authorities 2010-2015	45%
6th = Local Authorities 2015-2020	42%

Source: Gender Links (2011), lipinge & Le Beau (2005), Morna (2004), Shejavali, (2013) & Shejavali (2015).

The country has adopted affirmative action legislation for local government elections, resulting in over 40 percent representation since 1998. At the local government level, women representation is not an issue. Since the inception of quota

system in the 1998, Dr Libertina Amathila, in her capacity at that time as the Minister of Regional and Local Government stated that, “when the Bill was tabled in Parliament for discussion and later ratification, there was a war in the House” as male members ganged up and were quoting the Bible to justify not allowing women to decide their own destiny (Amathila, 2012, p. 256). The Local Authority Amendment Act has assisted women to be elected as mayors and councilors because the act is clear when it comes to women’s election. Since the implementation of the Act, women’s representation has grown to the 42% it is today.

Electoral System and Trends in Nigerian Women’s Participation in the Political Process

Nigeria is a federation of thirty-six states and conducts elections periodically for federal as well as state political offices. The National Assembly of the Federal Republic of Nigeria is a bicameral legislature established under Section 47 of the 1999 Constitution and comprises a 109-member Senate and a 360-member House of Representatives.

For the purpose of presidential elections, the federation is considered to be one constituency in which everyone who qualifies to vote for a member of a legislative house is eligible to vote. Each state has a legislative body known as a House of Assembly, with the number of seats ranging from 24 to 40, representing in as far as it is possible an equally divided number of residents.

For the purposes of gubernatorial elections, each state is considered to be one constituency, in which everyone qualified to vote in state assembly elections is eligible to vote. Every four years, Nigeria conducts elections for these elected political offices in three phases: National assembly elections, presidential elections, and gubernatorial as well as state assembly elections (Goitom, 2011).

The history of election in Nigeria can be traced back to the colonial period, precisely in 1922. The Clifford Constitution of 1922 for the first time introduced the elective principle into the political system. This was sustained and improved upon by successive colonial regimes. In spite of the fact that the elective principle was sustained by the colonial regimes, it was not until 1959 that the out-going colonial administration inaugurated a special electoral body named the Electoral Commission of Nigeria (ECN) to conduct the 1959 elections and the first direct elections in the Country (Ogbeidi 2010, p. 45).

By 1960, when Nigeria became politically independent of Britain, the Tafawa Balewa administration set up a new electoral body, the Federal Electoral Commission (FEC), which managed the immediate post-independence federal and regional elections of 1964 and 1965 respectively. From a multiparty structure which marked the 1959 pre-independence elections, Nigeria witnessed the emergence of a two-party system in the 1964 and 1965 elections.

The political crisis of 1965 eventually resulted in the intervention of the military through a coup d'état on 15 January, 1966. The Constitution (Suspension and Modification) Decree No.1, 1966 was promulgated and the 1963 Constitution was suspended and political activities banned (Odusote 2014, p. 28). The military lifted the ban on political activities on 21st September 1978. A Constitution Drafting Committee (CDC) was inaugurated by the then military Head of State, General Olusegun Obasanjo. The CDC which was headed by a Lagos-based legal practitioner, Chief Rotimi Williams, was to draw up guidelines for a Constituent Assembly. The final draft of the Constitution by the Assembly was adopted as the 1979 Constitution. The Constitution provided for an executive president, a federal senate and House of Representatives, state governors and state legislators. The government also established a Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO) to manage the electoral process and conduct Elections (Ogbeidi 2010, p. 47).

In 1983, there was another military intervention led by General Muhammadu Buhari. A palace coup by General Ibrahim Babangida overthrew the regime of General Buhari in 1985. Babangida inaugurated a Constitution Review Committee (CRC) to examine the 1979 Constitution and make possible recommendations. The recommendations were then incorporated into the aborted 1989 Constitution. Included in the 1989 constitutions are: Provisions for a two party system and additional fundamental rights. The Constitution came into effect in phases but was aborted after the annulment of the June 12, 1993 elections by General Babangida (Odusote 2014, p. 29). The 1999 Constitution was promulgated through Decree No.24 of May, 1999. The Constitution prescribed multi-party system for the country.

From 1999, there had been five successive elections in the country supervised by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). These were the general elections of 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011 and 2015.

The struggle for inclusion of women in political decision-making in Nigeria which started with the colonial political process is on-going, although yet to lead to substantial gains in women's political representation. Nigerian women have not moved from the marginalised position in the Legislature since the country attained independence in 1960.

Section 48 of the 1999 Constitution stipulates that the Senate shall consist of three Senators from each state and one from the Federal Capital Territory. Section 49 provides that the House of Representatives shall consist of three hundred and sixty members representing constituencies of nearly equal population, but with a provision that no constituency shall fall within two or more states (Nigeria Journal of Legislative Affairs, 2006). In 1960, the 36-member Senate had one (1) woman. In 1964, there were two (2) women in the Senate. No woman emerged as Senator in 1979. In 1983, only one (1) woman was elected into the 45-member Senate.

Table 4

Female Members of Nigeria Legislature 1960-1983

Year	Senate	House of Representatives
1960	1	Nil
1964	2	Nil
1979	Nil	3
1983	1	Nil

Source: Independent National Electoral Commission

Table 5

Women Elected into Public Office in Nigeria 1999-2015

Office	1999		2003		2007		2011		2015	
	No of Seat (Women)		No of Seat (Women)		No of Seat (Women)		No of Seat (Women)		No of Seat (Women)	
President	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0
Senate	109	3(2.8)	109	4(3.7)	109	9(8.35)	109	7(6.45)	109	8(7.3)
House of Representatives	360	12 (3.3)	360	21 (5.8)	360	26 (7.2)	360	25 (6.9)	360	19(5.2)
Governor	36	0	36	0	36	0	36	0	36	0
State House Assembly(SHA)	990	24(2.4)	990	40(3.9)	990	57 (5.8)	990	68(6.9)	990	60(6.1)

Source: Independent National Electoral Commission

After a long break from democracy which was terminated by the military coup d'état of December 1983, Nigeria returned to civilian rule in 1999. The National Assembly as constituted had 109 Senate members and the House of Representatives had 360 members. We can only talk of marginal increase in the number of female members and not substantial increase (see Tables 4 and 5). This still leaves the women in a disadvantaged position because the insignificant number of women in a male-dominated NA may find it difficult to negotiate women's issues successfully unless they find willing male members that share in their passion and are ready to give support to their cause.

Comparative Analysis of Namibian and Nigerian Women in Politics

Significant progress has been made in Namibia in terms of women's political participation. If one compares the percentage increase in the National Assembly from 1990 which was 6.4% to the 2015 figure (42%). The progress was steady except for the two periods 2005 and 2010 when the number of women in parliament

experienced a decline. This picked up by 2015. The same can be said of the percentage of women in Namibian National Council. The percentage took a giant leap from a mere 3.8% in the 1st National Council (1992-1998) to 26.9% in the 4th National Council (2010-2016).

For Nigerian women, the story is not the same in terms of their struggle to be relevant politically and their efforts to influence political decision-making. For them, progress has been slow right from independence. There has not been any appreciable progress in the movement whether at the National Assembly nor at the state houses of assembly. It is evident in the last three general elections that the gains recorded earlier in the number of women in the National Assembly were reversed. In 2007 as earlier observed in Table 5 above, there were a total number of 35 women in both the Senate and House of Representatives. It dropped to 32 in 2011 and further declined to 26 in 2015 (for both Houses).

Scholars and observers have identified many factors that constitute impediments to women's advancement in politics (Akiyode-Afolabi 2011, 2008; Kasomo, 2012; Norris and Inglehart, 2000; Ogwu, 1996; Okwuosa, 1996; Olurode, 2003; Shevdova, 1998; The Commonwealth 2015; Tibaijuka, 2000). However, in spite of these obstacles women in some countries have moved from politically disadvantaged positions to political empowerment.

Eight sub-Saharan African countries – Rwanda, Seychelles, South Africa, Mozambique, Angola, Uganda, Tanzania and Burundi – were among the top 30 worldwide with more than 30 per cent representation of women in a single or lower house of parliament (IPU, 2018, World Atlas, 2017). The national legislatures that included from 25 to nearly 50 per cent women had placed them in the top 30 nations worldwide in terms of numbers of women in national legislatures.

In some other countries such as Ghana, Liberia and Nigeria women's organizations struggle in their quest for the enactment of women-friendly electoral laws. Consistent with trends around the world, those African countries at the top of the worldwide ranking all use some type of electoral gender quota in electing more women to parliament (Bauer, 2012, Clayton, 2014). Some of these countries at one time or another in their political development had taken some measures to increase women's representation in political decision-making. In Namibia, for example, the campaign of 50/50 gender balance in politics and decision making and the ruling SWAPO party bold decision to introduce 50/50 zebra style that increased women's representation on the party lists boosted women's increased number in Parliament.

Quadri (2015) observed that constraints to Nigerian's women participation in politics and their persistence failure at attaining the pinnacle of political decision-making are continuously being interrogated. Studies (see Mangyvat, Ibeanu & Mahdi, 2009; Olurode, 2013; Okoronkwo-Chukwu, 2013; Pogoson, 2013) have identified gender norms and practices, structural challenges, patriarchy and finance as constraining the visibility of Nigerian women politicians. Kathambi Kinoti (cited in

Bauer 2008, p. 373) suggests that women candidates in Nigeria are 'invisibilised'. As such, their political struggle is yet to yield any appreciable gain.

More importantly, in making women more visible in politics, is the role which Nigeria's political parties have to play. A good indication of a party's commitment to gender issues is given by the number of women within its leadership structures, the initiatives it undertakes to increase the presence of women in different spheres of political decision-making, and how seriously it undertakes the task of promoting gender equality through its political activities (Sacchet, 2005). The question is to what extent has Nigerian political parties enabled women's efforts at expressing themselves politically?

According to Wollack (2011), political parties are the primary and most direct vehicles through which women can access elected office and political leadership. Thus the structures, policies, practices and values of political parties have a profound impact on the level of women's participation in the political life of their country. To achieve gender equality in political decision-making and enhance women's political empowerment, political parties play a very crucial role. How those issues are articulated in parties' manifestoes and constitutions and how they get implemented by parties form the reference point for assessing the commitment of parties to women's political empowerment?

Political parties in Nigeria have consistently denied women their fair share of positions in the party hierarchy. Akiyode-Afolabi (2011) observes that almost all the political parties over time have failed to integrate women's needs and concerns in the business of democracy. For example in 2007, the People's Democratic Party (PDP) had 52 National Executive Officers out of which only six were women. In the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), there were only four women out of 32 National Officers and in the All Nigerian People's Party (ANPP), of the 28 National Executive Officers only four were women. These forms of marginalisation and poor representation of women exist in all the other political parties in the country. This trend has continued in political party representation in the Nigerian political system.

Women's participation in decision making spheres generally depends on the interest that party leaders might have in promoting "inclusive" structures. (IDEA, 2008, p. 37). In Namibia, for instance, the ruling party has had the most potential to equalise the gender structure of parliament, given the party's sheer size and influence within the National Assembly. SWAPO has contributed the largest number of women to the overall National Assembly list. The party has made possible the greatest proportion of females in parliament since independence (Shejavali, 2013, p.16)

Unfortunately, women in Nigeria still face a lot of barriers when it comes to getting nominated for elective positions by their parties. Omenma, Onu and Omenma's (2016) analysis is very apt for the experience of women in parties' internal politics in Nigeria:

Given that, nomination is the most important predictive factor for women's representation, methods of party nominations becomes central to women participation... In Nigeria, Section 221 of the 1999 Constitution provides: No association other than a political party shall canvass for votes for any candidate at any election or contribute to the funds of any party or to the election expenses of any candidate at an election. The above provision effectually removes the possibility of independent candidacy in our elections and places emphasis and responsibility in elections on political parties. Without a political party a candidate cannot contest. Therefore, the ability of women to mobilize within parties, and their willingness to challenge party hierarchies is crucial for women representation (p. 206).

No doubt, there are a number of factors that have continued to hinder women. However, oligarchic tendencies of parties more than anything else has contributed to the low visibility of women and their political powerlessness (Quadri, 2013). To conceive of political parties as organizations with its own characteristics is to make apparent the authoritarian elements inherent in party organizations which run contrary to the principles of democracy (Quadri, 2013). Nigerian political parties have incorporated gender equality framework in their manifestoes and constitutions but failed to demonstrate their commitment to its implementation. What is clear is that parties' practices have continued to exclude women in parties' hierarchies, leadership and elective positions, and consequently resulted in women's political disempowerment.

CONCLUSION

The paper discusses women's political participation in Namibia and Nigeria. We observed the trends in the participation of women in the national legislatures since the two countries gained independence. Women politicians in Namibia have been able to increase participation in spite of observable barriers. This is due to the adoption of some forms of legislation that helped women in gaining political relevance. Nigerian female politicians have not been so lucky. The more they try to become politically relevant, the more difficult it becomes. This is apparent in the last two general elections where the number of women in the National Assembly experienced a decline.

We observed that apart from known gender barriers that constrain women in their effort at gaining political power, the structures, policies and practices of political parties in Nigeria have not positively impacted the fortunes on the female politicians. Politics of exclusion is more apparent in party organisations where women are deliberately marginalized when it comes to fielding candidates for elective

positions. Although Nigeria is a signatory to some of the international gender instruments, the country is yet to make concrete legislation on its adoption.

How can women move from their marginalized position? Much debate has centred on the electoral system. It has been suggested that women's chances of being selected as a parliamentary candidate is substantially higher under a proportional representation system (Randall, 2011). The case of Namibia clearly demonstrates this. The leap from the low level of representation in the first and second assembly, as we argued in this paper, was achieved through proportional representation legislation. Globally, quotas have become an acceptable way or an important step for recruiting women into government (Gouws, 2008). Legislative quotas and other affirmative action measures can rapidly increase the number of women in politics. They may serve as temporary measures to ease women's path into politics. Nigerian political parties can borrow a leaf from the ruling party (SWAPO) in Namibia. The action of the party to execute the 50/50 zebra style that increased women's representation on the party lists has empowered Namibian women politically. There is the need for Nigerian women to continue to mount pressure and explore all avenues of ensuring that affirmative action to increase women's political participation in the country is implemented.

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