

**WOMEN IN GOVERNANCE AND THE CHALLENGES OF SECURITY IN  
NORTH EAST NIGERIA: THE WAY FORWARD**

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**BY**

**HALIMA M. USMAN**

**Introduction**

Women play a major role in every aspect of societal life. They contribute greatly to the economy of Nigeria whether as small scale business owners, farmers, hawkers, food vendors and so on. They also constitute about half of the entire population of Nigeria and are seen to be the custodians of family values. Women are equally more affected in the advent of any form of communal insecurity ranging from poverty to violence or terrorism. They become bread winners overnight in the case of the death of their husbands despite the fact that they were never empowered with requisite skills and resources to play such roles. They also constitute more of the internally displaced people in times of war and are victims of war time sexual violence.

How do women tackle these numerous challenges in a society where they are disempowered? This can only be addressed by the active participation of women in the process of governance.

The participation of women in governance is necessary and important not just as voters but also as candidates to be voted for and appointed. This is because "women's participation in economic and public life, from the community level to top policy-making circles, strengthens economic growth, equitable governance and public trust" (OECD,



2014). To achieve these, there is a need to close gender gaps at all levels of government. Closing gender gaps and attaining inclusive governance requires a holistic approach by government to strategically but decisively entrench gender considerations into policy processes and practices. This will in turn guarantee a national sustainable growth and development.

More so, in a country where half the population is women, to ignore such percentage would be detrimental to effective governance. However, it is not just enough to be cognizance to the existence of women as members of the community, it requires that government at all levels actively engage these women in policy making that decides their livelihood and future. It is instructive to note "that a country that fails to empower half its population will suffer from lower productivity, lower economic growth and weaker development" (Aina, 2015)

In Nigeria today, large number of women live in communities where they constitute 60-70 percent of the labour force and contribute 50-70 per cent of the accrued benefits of their economic activities such as agriculture, retailing, food processing (Ngara & Ayabam, 2013) and in some communities, much heinous works such as quarrying and mining which were thought to be exclusive to men. It has become important that they are part of the decision making process that determines how their hard earning are administered.

Lastly, as custodians and family care-givers, it is important that women are adequately empowered politically, economically, socially, mentally and educationally to be able to keep a stable home. As it is said, educate a woman, you educate a nation. This is factual because homes with greater youth restiveness which if not checked can result in deviant action, can be traced to families with low income or education, and in most cases the mother. You may agree that families in which a woman is self-confident and financially stable, the children are more likely to be stable and tend to be less interested in acts of violence. This shows that women empowerment and security are closely related.



Therefore, security to a large extent is a function of empowering the individual members of communities, especially women and youth to attain self-sustainability which can only be achieved in an inclusive system of government whether at the family, community or national level.

It is true that Nigerian women are active in politics. They participate in politics as voters, party supporters and usually attend political rallies in large numbers. They are massively involved in campaigns and the whole process of electioneering propaganda. They are indeed well informed and constitute the larger percentage of voters, yet their participation in governance starts and ends with the election process. Despite this numerical advantage and the massive participation in voting, less than 20% of political offices are held by women (Lewu, 2013) and it has even reduced with the outcome of the 2015 election. The implication is that, government policies without the presence of women in the formulation process will not impact positively to improve the living standard of the Nigerian woman.

What then is governance and what are the factors that hinder women from participating in governance? What are the causes of insecurity and how does it affect women in the North East geo-political zone of Nigeria? How would the greater participation of women in governance help solve the issues of insecurity in the region? These are questions this paper attempts to answer.

#### **Definition of terms:**

Governance can be defined as 1. Authority or control. 2. The act or state of governing. 3. To control or influence, 4. to conduct the policy and affairs of a state, organization or people. **Governance can also be seen to involve creative intervention by political actors to change structures that inhibit the expression of human potential.** It is a process whereby elements in society wield power, authority and influence and enact policies and decisions concerning public life and social upliftment (British Council definition). The emphasis here is social upliftment and the expression of human potentials.



Accordingly to United Nation Development Programme (UNDP), defines governance as 'the exercise of economic, political and administrative authority to manage a country's affairs at all levels. It comprises the mechanisms, processes and institutions through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise their legal rights, meet their obligations and mediate their differences' (UNDP 1997). "While government refers to the autonomous authority of the state régime, governance relates to the network of private and public actors and structures, which interact to solve societal issues" (Grote and Gbikpi 2002 as cited in Lewu, 2013). It is the variety of ways in which government policies and practices are influence by individuals or groups, Governance though variously defined, has to do with activities directed at controlling the decision-making

Security according to the Chambers 21<sup>st</sup> Century Dictionary can be defined as 1. The state of being safe. 2. Protection from the possibility of future financial difficulty. 3. Protection from physical harm, especially assassination. 4. Freedom from vulnerability due to lack of finance. It also means freedom from danger, trouble or worry, freedom from uncertainties or mistrust. It refers to the safety of state or organization against criminal activities such as terrorism or theft, (The online dictionary).

### **Causes of Impact of insecurity in North East Nigeria**

Insecurity in North East Nigeria and indeed Nigeria as a whole is a major threat to development. This is because it destroys lives and properties and hinders socio-economic activities thereby increasing the rate of poverty and related issues (Ewetan, 2014, Ladan 2012). The number of death and other casualties of insecurity especially within the North East region over the past five years since the beginning of the dreaded boḱo haram insurgency are worrisome.

According to the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, "the security and welfare of the people shall be the primary purpose of government." Which means that it



is the sole responsibility of the government of Nigeria at all levels to protect and defend the well-being of its entire citizen. Accordingly, this is the whole essence of governance and by our definition of security this includes the absence of fear or worry with regards to finances, health, education as well as being in a state of peace and harmony within and around the place of abode.

This remains a façade in Nigeria and especially in the north east where cases of insecurity ranging from armed robbery, kidnap, rape, violence, hunger, poverty, suicide bombing and terrorism has bedeviled the entire region.

To address the threat to national security and combat the increasing waves of crime the federal government from 2009 to date has continued to allocate huge budgetary allocation to security while the national Assembly passed the Anti-Terrorism Act in 2011 (Ewetan, 2013). Despite these efforts, Nigeria still ranks very low in Global Peace Index (GPI, 2012). More so, with various government efforts, insurgency has continued to flourish as though feeding fat on this government effort thereby necessitating the involvement of international community at combating the insurgence

Before the deteriorating security situation in the northeast, the region has been infested with challenges which seriously threaten socio-economic development. These challenges include endemic rural and urban poverty, high rate of youth and women unemployment, low or no industrial output, illiteracy, inadequate infrastructures, poor sanitary and living conditions, inadequate physical and social infrastructure, among others. This is further pronounced by unstable and deteriorating exchange rate in the country, high inflation rate, very large domestic debt, and rising stock of external debt (Ewetan, 2014, Adagba et al 2012, Ladan 2012, Omodia et al, 2013).

According to Ajodo-Adebanjoko and Walter (2014) "poverty in the country is more pronounced in conflict-prone areas while insecurity is rife in poverty-stricken areas" this goes to show the relationship between insecurity and poverty. It is true that where poverty is high, the tendency for all forms of violence and insecurity is very high and where insecurity exists, it increases the poverty level of that area, Poverty and insecurity are therefore twin siblings.



Though Nigeria is blessed with different sources of wealth and had been adjudged as the fastest growing economy in Africa, this has not translated to affect the live of the common man on the street. In the north east has retained the title of absolute poverty since 1985, with unemployment and poverty at over at 60.6% and 76.6% respectively (Ajodo-Adebanjoko and Walter 2014, Ladan 2012). This is even worst due to high level of illiteracy and the scourge of war that is constantly attacking schools.

A workshop organized in Gombe in 2014 by UNESCO saw participants identifying corruption, bad governance and lack of transparency as other causes of insecurity in north east Nigeria. Corruption is an attitude that promotes a selfish use of public office or position to acquire personal gain. It is behavior or actions that deprive a majority of people what is theirs to uphold personal gain. These are deviates from sociable acceptable norms. Corruption may include accepting bribe to subvert a course of action, favouritism, patronage, extortion, influence peddling, fraud and embezzlement (Ajodo-Adebanjoko & Okorie, 2014). Causes of corruption in Nigeria are not farfetched. They include greed and gluttony, societal pressure and the social environment, outrageous life style, the get rich-quick syndrome, poor reward system, inadequate motivation and overlooking corrupt cases and in most cases celebrating and promoting corrupt persons. Corruption in the north east and indeed Nigeria as a whole, is deeply ingrained into our social life and cuts across classes and remains a major cause of insecurity.

The impact of insecurity on women and children in the region are unimaginable. It has increased poverty, unemployment, poor sanitary and health condition, fear and uncertainty as well as psychological and physical trauma. Women and children have been worst affected with a number of women and girls abducted and school children murdered. Illiteracy and unemployment has left women and youth in a sorry state physical and social. Under five year and maternal death has remain very high in the region, while more women have become bread winners overnight despite their lack of resources and requisite financial knowledge and skills to occupy such office, more and more women are internally displaced living in conditions that are most debilitating to their health and psychology. It is for this reason that women empowerment is not just



necessary but very important as stated in a UNDP report, that a development that is not “engendered in endangered.”

Other effects include disruption of family and communal life, an atmosphere mistrust, fear, and especially between Northern Christians and Muslims and between other elements of the community. There are also serious cases of dehumanization of women and children, including forceful abduction, rape and child neglect/abuse. The state of hunger and poverty continues to deepen with a total fall out in the ability of government to restore peace and security in the region. Political and social mistrust is equally very rampant (Ladan, 2012).

### **Women and governance**

The participation of women in governance is very important to the development of the north east and Nigeria as a whole. To appreciate the importance and necessity of women participation in governance, we must understand their role in national development which goes beyond family care to affect all aspect of national economy. Aside the fact that women constitute 50% of the population, they carry out 70% of agricultural labour, 50% animal husbandry relate activities and 50-60% food processing yet having access to less than 20% of available resources especially those related to agriculture (Mohammed and Abdulquadri, 2012; Akpalaobi, 2011).

Women have also been seen as bridge builders and peace brokers' right from pre-colonial days when giving and taking in marriages cemented relationship between communities and peoples. They are also the bread-winners in the advent of the demise of their husbands and sometimes even while he is alive (Ngara and Ayabam, 2013, 49).

Women have always been a part of our leadership structure in pre-colonial Nigeria. They exerted great influence on how communities are ran and in some communities they determine the ruler, while in other communities they rule and lead the people. During such period, women either as rulers or as queen mother's help brought about peace and stability in the communities (Omodia at el, 2013). However, this structure



was completely abolished with the advent of colonialism which projected one man superiority over the other and hence a man's negative dominance over women.

With the return to democracy after years of military rule which further promulgate the male dominance in governance, successive government have tried to implement the Affirmative Action of 35% women participation in governance at all levels. However, many challenges stand as barrier to the ability of women in North East Nigeria to take up this opportunity.

### **Factors Affecting Women Participation In Governance**

Some factors affecting women's participation in governance were identified by women of this region during a workshop organized by UNESCO in 2014 which include:

1. Gender and cultural patterns
2. Ideology (Religion)
3. Predetermined social roles assigned to women
4. Male dominance and control
5. Conflicting demand on the time of a woman due to domestic and social responsibilities
6. Dual burden of domestic task and professional obligation
7. Lack of self confidence
8. A wrong perception that politics is a dirty game.
9. Illiteracy, unemployment, poverty and lack of access to resources or funds.
10. Nomination and selection process for elective and appointive positions.

### **Gender and Cultural Patterns**

Many of our traditional or cultural practices in the north are harmful to women's self esteem and self image which are necessary ingredients for the confidence needed to participate in public office. Polygamous and child marriages have reduced women to property to be owned and showcased by affluent men. This destroys the self-worth and confidence of women for public leadership positions. Child marriage has caused many girls to suffer V.V.F which in many cases is not correctible thereby subjecting these girls to a life of penury and misery as these husbands later abandoned them.



Widowhood practices in northeaster region and indeed Nigeria as a whole subjects women to all forms of derogatory situations by their in-laws and members of the community. Cases of infertility or the lack of a male child has over the centuries in the north been faulted to women as being the cause resulting in husbands sending out or rejecting their wives.

### **Religion**

Our religious practices are grossly biased against women. Most tenet of our religion discourages women from being heard or seen. It is believed that women should not be seen or heard in public. Also, in many African societies Islamic and non-Islamic, women have unequal rights to inheritance. This affects economic empowerment of women hindering them from attaining self-actualization. This denied right to inheritance also have debilitating effect on the ability of a woman to bring up her children who may then be taken from her to live with uncles or other relations, creating more psychological harm to the woman and her children. Where these children do not have proper care, they grow up to become nuisance in the society.

### **Lack of Resources and economic empowerment**

Women are economically disadvantaged. In the heavily monetized politics of Nigeria, very few women have the financial base and political clout to generate funds for effective participation in politics. Women generally lack access to what constitutes wealth (Ilewu 2013). They do not have political godfathers to take-up their campaign expenses, thereby making them to recoil from any active participation in political processes.

### **Education**

Women generally lack equal access to education and are sometimes withdrawn from schools for socio-economic reasons. In most north-east states of Nigeria, girls are seen and encouraged to stay back and help with domestic affairs while the boys are allowed to go to school. This has created the wide gap in competence and qualification needed for effective leadership. Education is a necessary pre-requisite to obtain high-powered jobs in the public and private sectors. Without this important ingredient, women are



unable to put in their best towards personal and national development (Lewu, 2014). Education remains the greatest empowerment for women whether formal or informal education. When women are empowered educationally, they are socially empowered and this will improve their finance and self confidence to pursue self-actualization and participate effectively in governance.

However, this still remains a mirage in the north as there are a large number of women and girls who are uneducated. The recent spate of abduction of girls at school further instils fear in parents about sending their children to school. The implication is that unless this is urgently and strategically addressed, it will greatly increase the already worrisome girl and women illiteracy rate hence affecting the future of women participation in governance whether as voters and as aspirants.

### **Employment**

Though many policies and programmes have been put in place to encourage women employability, the number of women in employment, both public and private still remains minimal. This is due to lower educational qualifications and exposure. This therefore goes back to the issue of educational and vocational empowerment. When a woman is employed and rise through the ranks in an organization, it enhance competence, knowledge and leadership skills.

### **Political networking**

There is a subtle but firm and incapacitating resistance from male party colleagues who organize meetings in private homes at odd hours outside the normal times for meetings. Not many married women politicians are likely to attend such political meetings but that is where crucial decisions are taken and party posts shared (Lewu, 2014). The Nigerian society frowns at women participating in nocturnal meetings of any kind.

These challenges are universal cutting across states and regions, countries and continents yet some are more dominant in one area than the others. In North East Nigeria for instance, illiteracy, poverty and ideology which is mostly religious are among



the major obstacle to women participation in governance. This is evident in the result of the 2015 general elections which saw the emergence of only one (1) female senator from the North East and a total of only five (5) female senators out of the one hundred and nine (109) available seats. In the House of Representatives, only four (4) were elected from the North East out of 48 available seats for the region and 13 female representatives out of 360 available seats nationwide. In the public service, there is only 1 Permanent Secretary from the North East at the federal level and about 5 Director Generals. In a country of over 170 million and with half that population being women, how can these women initiate and withhold policies that will affect the lives of women in the region and the country at large when they are underrepresented in government both at elective and appointive position.

#### **Benefits of Women Participation In Governance in curtailing insecurity**

In countries with an increased women participation in governance, there is said to be a rise in budgetary spending on issues that tilt towards public health. It has been proven that where there are more female politicians or public office holders, they are more often to bring to fore issues of gender base violence and family friendly policies (OCED, 2014).

Greater participation of women in governance reduces inequality and improves a nation's global competitiveness due to diverse leadership ideas that promotes innovative solutions to growth and development.

It will increase the confidence the people have on the system, thereby encouraging popular ownership of government programmes and policies by the people.

An inclusive government will also bring about a decrease in poverty and unemployment as more and more vulnerable members of the society are carried along in the policy formulation and implementation.

Therefore it is in the best interest of the northeast that women are empowered and adequately represented in governance as issues that would help curtail further



insecurity in the region would be addressed before they sprout as the infectious disease that we see today.

### **The way forward**

While the above challenges have been with us over the years and have increased in recent times due to insecurity, and having realize the significant role women play both in maintaining peace and security and in economic activities which are fundamental to development, we must quickly find a way forward to encourage greater women participation in governance by closing gender gaps and encouraging inclusive governance. Therefore, the following may be considered which I will sum up into four points to be elaborated below:

- i. Intentionality, decisiveness and commitment from government of the region**
- ii. Building synergy at regional level for women empowerment**
- iii. Effective use of media and ICT by both government and the women in the region.**
- iv. Mentoring and role modeling on the part of women themselves**
  - a. Women must be encouraged to participate in grass root (local level) politics where they are dominant both in numerical strength and economic might. The state governors within the region must take deliberate steps to build synergy that encourage women participation in the state politics from the local government to state levels.
  - b. Religious bodies and reorientation of our cultural norms should be favourable toward women participation in leadership and public offices. Issues of right to inheritance should be looked into with the intention of positive change. Stigma against women aspirant at the community and party levels must also be address.
  - c. Political structures and processes should be mild enough to accommodate both female and male aspirants. The rigorous and expensive electioneering should be addressed to accommodate all aspirants.



- d. Structures, institutions and policies such the Gender Policy of 2006, the Ministry of Women Affairs, the Human Right Commission and other judicial institutions must be strengthen to uphold gender issues, protect and implement sanctions on gender offences. The Ministry of Women Affairs must be empowered to go beyond structure to effectively implement its mandate.
- e. Gender mainstreaming must become a prerequisite for effective governance. Government must willfully and decisively implement the various gender policies adopted both at national and international level.
- f. Women empowerment must be the focal point of any progressive minded government. This is because women empowerment saves the family and community from problems of insecurity relating to poverty and youth unemployment. It is necessary to note that youth who grow up with very industrious and empowered mothers become highly industrious and focused as well. Therefore proper home bringing is important at attaining peace, security and sustainable development of the north east and this can be achieved if women equality are encouraged in the process of governance. Women who are secured will devote more energy to raising well groomed children. The reason for all the rush we get carried away with at the expense of our family time is due to poverty and other forms of insecurity. When this issues are addressed through inclusive governance, sanity will be restored at family level which will transmit to regional and national levels.
- g. Opportunities for political socialization, networking, role modeling and mentoring should be vigorously pursued by female politicians as a way of encouraging other women. Women tend to waste more time in socializing and discussing issues that adds no value to their lives, they also use the media just for entertainment instead of watching educational programmes. These only result to absolute waste of time and energy which when mobilized towards positive use can yield desired result.
- h. ICT like the mobile and other smart phones or divices should not be underutilized for socialization alone. They are valuable learning tools as almost all the network



service providers have created educational and vocational skill acquisition portals where people can subscribe to get daily information on issues.

- i. Education and self-empowerment is key to development. The women in north east Nigeria have low education with serious consequences on their self-confidence and ability to make any meaningful contribution to policy making and governance at all levels. This must not be left in the hands of government alone. Women should seek out opportunities for personal development
- j. Women should also have easy access to loans and other financial schemes that will help empower them.
- k. Women should also have knowledge and financial skills, solution solving techniques, fund raising techniques as well as leadership and governance techniques. These are all functions of education, conventional or not. Women require such skills and knowledge to be able to effectively hold public office because here, competence is nonnegotiable.
- l. It is pertinent to note that during the 2011 PDP Presidential primaries, Mrs. Sarah Jibril a female presidential candidate got a lone vote, obviously a self lone vote. This shows the lack of support from other female party stalwarts which could be said to represent the attitude of women toward supporting other women. The effect is that it continues to provide room for marginalization of women in politics.

## **Conclusion**

The North East region will continue to suffer the spate of insecurity and all forms of violence and terrorism until women are empowered educationally, financially and socially to bring about change in their families and communities being the first contacts between the youths and reality.

It is equally a pity that these women will remain the worst victims of the insurgency in the region unless they are empowered and well represented in government. This is because, many women are completely reliant on their husbands who were the bread winner, unfortunately the death toll of men is high leaving behind ill equip and



underpowered women to fend for the family from unavailable resources, without skills or knowledge. The consequences is that more youths will go out to fend for themselves and in the process either join the insurgency or be killed by it.

Secondly, unless women who are mothers become adequately equipped and empowered to serve as peace agents and not victims, they may not be able to broker peace between their children and the government. I think it is time the government of Nigeria rethinks its strategy of combating the insurgency at the north to include women education, empowerment and confidence building. Women have always been agents of peace and when they are empowered as agent of peace, it will positively improve the peace process.

Lastly a government with diversified membership guarantees a balanced in designing and implementing rules that enables an inclusive approach to policy making and service delivery.

Therefore an inclusive government will guarantee the possibility of restoring the peace and sanity of North East Nigeria. Inclusive government here refers to the involvement of all stake holders and especially women and youth in the process and practice of governance.

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