# THE ROLES OF WOMEN IN NATIONAL UNITY

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## Abstract

*Women population in Nigeria has grown substantially from 26.8 million in 1960 to 94.2 million in 2017, out of a current total population of 190.9 million. Despite this substantial numerical female population, there is obvious massive gender gap between men and women; which can be witnessed in every sphere of developmental engagements: politics, economy, education and leadership; traceable to numerous systemic cultural and religious challenges that cause obvious gender marginalization in the society. These scenarios are even complicated by the inability of the Nigerian nation to fully associate with wave of globalization and international treaties meant to improve the lives of women and cause positive changes that can empower them. Going by Nigeria's large population, malformed means of development for women does significantly influence developmental achievement and growth of women in sub-Saharan Africa and Africa at large. This paper adopted historical method to examine the events of women's contributions in Nigerian politics, economy, education, religion, security and the family. The findings revealed that, promoting and involving women in development policies in Nigeria would have a major role to play in national unity and the progress of women in Africa generally. This paper examined some issues relating to women development and progress; and pointed out the noticeable challenges that implicate women in empowerment and growth in Nigeria. Some recommendations were made to help in remedying the observed shortfalls.*

**Keywords:** National Unity, Cultural norms, Empowerment, Gender marginalization, Politics, Socio-economic status, Women education, Roles

**Introduction**

Women can make indelible efforts in national unity if favorable environment is created. The placement of women in the society affects their roles and achievements. It is disheartening to note that women are looked down upon in various cultures and religions. The various definitions given to women by authors attest to this. The word, "woman" has been variously defined according to Okereke (2010) in the following manner: weaker vessel, feeble minded being, child bearer, emotional being, man's helper, caretaker, man's better half, man's wealth preserver, man's soul-mate, home managers, amongst others. According to Louw and Nida (1996), the Greek word for woman (γυνή) implies an adult female person of marriageable age. Fulfer (2008) conceives of woman as being that which patriarchal society relegates to the background. The connotations above show that women are given second class status. No matter the definitions and descriptions given to the term woman as stated above, she has more worth and qualities than these. A woman is powerfully created with superior structures. As human being, she is fearfully and wonderfully made by God. In recent years various women's issues have been the focus of attention and debate not only in connection with many of the structures and institutions of our Nigerian society but even in the religious circle. Failure to deeply emancipate women for the process of governance is a great factor responsible for the poor economy, under development and national disunity.

No nation can develop to the strength of its potentials unless women are fully involved to take up responsibilities as men and work collectively towards national unity. National unity could be viewed as the situation where majority of the population of a country has a common understanding on the basic targets for the country, consistent with the basic legal structure and to act in consequence to better the country. National integration is used synonymously with national unity. It is a process to unite various groups that have different social and cultural background into one physical entity. Every nation or any community of persons that desires growth and development, unity is of essence. From the beginning of the world till now, there has never been any time a people rise beyond the status-quo to create a society where human potentials thrive, there is economic prosperity and the people live together in harmony without first putting unity in its place. National unity insures a proper sense of order to the state. Integration insures the stability of a state, and the ability to endure the

various fortunes that happen to states. A state without some degree of national unity would be characterized with a degree of chaos, disorder and thus making life in the state very unpredictable.

To fully empower women to contribute in national unity requires a holistic approach. It means to break the cultural and traditional barriers that hold women in bondage in a free world of equal opportunities. The time has come when women should be fully integrated into the scheme of things for national unity. In Nigeria, various issues of instability and failure in leadership have led to the blood splatter, hatred and resentment which have pierced through the heart of our national unity. This requires collective efforts of men and women to proffer possible solution. It is against this background that the paper discusses factors that inhibit women's contributions to national unity. This paper identifies various roles women play in the home, community and Church that promote national unity.

## Women in National Unity

It has been discovered that one of the serious problems faced by the Nigerian development is non active participation of women in the national affairs. Women had tangible records of religious and social activities in the Church, and society which promote peaceful co relation and economic development. However, these contributions are not really recognized, but the truth is whether one holds a pragmatic or a humanistic view of unity, the participation of women is necessary. According to Okereke (2010), the analysis of women's traditional and preservation responsibilities shows that they filled significant roles in the socio-economic aspect of a nation in addition to caring for their homes and families. The following areas have been identified as important avenues by which women have collectively contributed to national development: home, church, community, economy, leadership and education.

## Women in the Home and Community

Women should arise to their responsibilities in the home by inculcating good morals in their children that will generate the value for national unity. A lot of conditions in Nigeria hampers national unity such as violations of human rights, terror unleashed by Bokko Haram terrorists and Herdsmen attacks; fear of uncertainty, fear of war, seizure of land for grazing and cattle colonies; an economic situation which gives no incentive for the individuals to be productive and a situation which hampers the sense of belonging to the nation. These are clarion calls for prayers on our family altars. Women ought to encourage their

children to lead lives of prayers for national unity. Charity, they say begins at home. The home ought to be a place of peace and tranquility. The peaceful disposition in the home will certainly reflect in the society. The home is the first port of informal education. Women should all put their hands on deck to build a formidable society where human rights are respected to ensure national unity.

Women have the power to resist injustice on the basis of ethnicity, religion, political parties through peaceful rally and demonstration. Nair opines that the mobilization under a specific banner bears an emotional support and gets the response of the largest public. Women in their various social and religious groups can rally in mass in the communities and cities to speak against the forces militating against national disunity. If the men have failed to address and pacify the fears, anxieties, religious, economic and social unrest in the country, women can form organizations in the grassroots which will serve as a safe guard and agent of national unity. National unity can be enhanced, through serious and honest dialogues about the issues of divergences among ethnic, religious and political parties. They can organize programs of action such as workshops, seminars and conferences to create awareness to educate fellow women on roles to play for national unity.

**Women and the Roles of Theological Education in National Unity**
Theological education assumes a major commission of enlightening and training people for leadership and services in the church and society. According to Hardy, the primary task of theological education is to shape the lives of those who are followers of Jesus so that they can be used by God as leaders and influencers for the good of His kingdom. Theological educators are expected to be academically sound, spiritually mature, and professionally competent with ministerial experience to be able to equip leaders who transmit same in the church and society by raising godly and responsible citizens in social, cultural, economic, educational and political spheres for national unity and development. The church is an agent of socialization and change. In the Church, several ill behaviors are corrected through teachings, seminars, counseling and prayers. Women are nurtured and shaped in the women ministry through their fellow women to serve as agents of national unity. There abound a lot of biblical examples of women who played active roles in national development and integration. Obielosi (2015) notes that despite the Patriarchal and androcentric nature of the Old Testament times, many passages still rate women to a very high esteem.  Old Testament history includes accounts of strong female leadership in many roles. The following are striking examples: Miriam was a

prophetess to Israel during the Exodus, alongside, Moses and Aaron. Deborah was a prophetess and a judge who directed Barak to lead the army of Israel into successful combat against Israel's oppressors. Huldah who was also a prophetess authenticated the scroll of the law found in the temple and helped spark religious reforms in the days of Josiah. Through the lessons from biblical injunctions and establishment of 'Home and Abroad meetings' in various churches, a lot of developmental projects have been initiated and completed. Women have been able to settle disputes in the church that has led to peaceful co-existence, opportunity for meaningful development and national unity. The 'Home and Abroad' meetings help to stir up the women, and as well harness the efforts (spiritually, materially, financially and so on) of members in distant lands and those at home for development projects and national unity.

Furthermore, theological educators should incorporate the roles and empowerment of women in the curricular of theological education in Nigeria. This will create more awareness and opportunity to enlighten the society on God's mandate to women for the accomplishment of national unity. Women should be trained theologically to disseminate the message of peaceful co-existence in the society in order to ensure synergy and national development.

**Women in national unity and economy**
Women, according to Okafor and Akokuwebe (2015), are major stakeholders in the development project of any society. There is no area of the Nigerian economic endeavours, including the security, where women did or do not make an impact when called to action. The positive contribution by women of old to the development of the society was powered by the opportunity they gained in education. Their educational qualifications significantly empowered them to do the exploit. Long before the formation of a country called Nigeria, the geographic entity in Africa where we current inhabit, a woman, Queen Amina, apart from being a warrior and a conqueror in many battles, was a great leader. H. R. Palmer reports that she conquered Nupe and Kwarafa segments of the society and ruled for 34 years, and her major resources were derived from tributes collected from her conquered territory/subjects. Nduka (2001) states that what was known as the Aba Women's Riot of 1929 in South-East Nigeria was executed by women, who protested against the injustice and obnoxious rule during the colonial era. This paved way for more societal activism and leadership prowess by some other prominent women in the 1950s during pre-independence political engagements. Sklar (1963) mentions the notable among them as Mrs. Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti and Mrs. Margret Ekpo. Okafor and Akokuwebe (2015) reveal

that the later in 1951 featured prominently as the only female member of the seven-man committee that organized a national political organization focused on achieving self-government within five years; and 1959, became the Vice-President of the Eastern House of Chiefs. Nduka (2001) observes that in the education sector, Professor (Mrs.) Grace Alele-Williams was a woman to be reckoned with as a prominent academic and the first female Vice Chancellor of the University of Benin, Nigeria. Nobody can easily forget the role played by Prof. Dora Nkem Akunyili (OFR) popularly called, in some quarters, the NAFDAC woman, who as the Director of National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control reduced the incidence of fake drugs from about 90 percent to 68 percent in 2001.

During the Obasanjo democratic administration, as the Minister of Finance between July 2003 and June 2006, Dr. (Mrs.) Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala succeeded in negotiating a debt relief package for Nigeria; and also spearheaded, though deemed unpopular, the fuel subsidy removal policy under Goodluck Jonathan's governance in January 2012, which the public vehemently protested against. Aina (2012) and Osa-Okunbor (2012) note that she encouraged the reduction of the country's recurrent expenditure which stood at 74 percent national budget then, and spearheaded the execution of capital projects to reduce the 14 percent unemployment in the country. Following the footsteps of the mentioned amazons, many other prominent women have, sporadically, been identified in all spheres of the Nigerian society helping in societal development and shoring up the economy when encouraged and given the chance to participate or lead.

**Roles of Women in Politics**
In the history of the world's civilization, women have been leaders. From the Pharaohs of Egypt to the queens of England, women rulers are found in nearly every culture and time period. Yet, in almost all circumstances, male leaders greatly outnumber female leaders. Moreover, customs and laws against female leadership can be found throughout history, most notably in every major religion as observed by Christ (2014). In the political realm, rigid stereotypes about women and political leadership—often captured in biased media coverage of female candidates—can influence voters' perceptions of women candidates and discourage women from entering politics. Women have been running for president for more than a century—and they started doing so even before women had won the right to vote. American Association of University Women reveals that the first woman to run for president was Victoria Claflin Woodhull, who campaigned as the Equal Rights Party candidate in 1872.

Achieving gender equality in leadership is most importantly a matter of fairness. Leaders are powerful, so when women are excluded from top leadership, they are denied power to make a difference in the world. Women should stop being complacent with their position in the society but should take the bull by the horn. Time will make no difference but action will. American Association of University Women states that in Congress, on corporate boards, and in our colleges and universities, male leaders outnumber female leaders by considerable margins. To achieve national unity, women ought to be fully represented in leadership, in the culture, policies, and practices of the organizations where they learn and work. Despite gains in every profession, women remain underrepresented at all levels of leadership. Achieving national unity, gender parity in leadership is, first and perhaps most importantly, a matter of fairness. Leaders are powerful, so when women are excluded from leadership positions, they are denied power to make a difference in the world. Leaders enjoy high status and privilege, and leadership in one area opens doors to other opportunities, which further amplifies the perks of national integration. McGroarty (2012) observes that in Nigeria, women have made indelible marks in politics and national development, such as Prof. Dora Akunyili, Ngozi Okonjo Iweala, Oby Ezekwesili, Dame Virgy Etiaba and others. We need more late in politics to join in the fight against incessant killings, corruption and other vices generating disunity. Women should be encouraged to vie for elective position such as presidency, Governors and others

## Roles of Women in Education

Aja-Okerie (2012) asserts that educational empowerment is the single most powerful way to lift people out of poverty and, therefore, should be an intrinsic part of any strategy to address discrimination against women and girls in our society. It enhances family responsibilities and aids opportunities for the economic _**women**_ resource empowerment of women. There is no iota of doubt that educational empowerment is a veritable means to relieve some of the socio-economic, occupational and political constraints the women are confronted with in Nigeria and Africa. Without proper educational qualifications, women easily fall victims of obnoxious social norms, political exclusion and economic discriminations or inequality. Poor education predisposes women to the risk of diseases and other health-related problems that are associated with ill-intentioned marriages - type of marriages practiced in some parts of Nigeria. Some parents also prefer to send their male children to school to their daughters according to Oniye (2010). To them, daughters get married and end up being

members of another family, hence, no need to spend resources on a daughter. This discrimination follows them into adulthood and marginalization continues. As if sustaining the global trend, this attitude of some parents replicates the disturbing information put out by the U.S. Agency for International Development and the World Bank. Gender Statistics reports that, on the world level, that 57 percent of the 72 million primary school children without school attendance are females; noting that girls are four percent less likely to complete primary schools than boys. Globally, low income countries such as Nigeria are more affected by this deficient educational enrollment for the girl-child right up to adulthood. Jesen (2010) observes 774 million illiterate adults globally, 64 percent are women. Gender disparity in education is an important indicator for measuring women empowerment and progress.

Tomasevski (2005) suggests that one of the ways to improve the lives and progress of women in the society is to increase the enrollment of the girl-child into primary and secondary schools, and progressively to the tertiary level. This can easily be implemented in Nigeria if the International human rights law were studiously followed: equal right to education by girls, equal right in education and equal rights for protection promoted through education. Despite the fact that enrollment of girls in schools is poor, Aja-Okorie (2012) observes that those who make it to schools still face the risks of dropping out of school earlier than expected, or fail in school assessments or examinations and are deficient in key subjects for some reasons beyond their control. One gets to hear of teenage pregnancies and sexual assaults/harassment, almost in all levels of schools by the male folk who, sometimes can be deemed to be less educationally endowed than the females they exploit. Gender, in Nigeria Report, shows that there are also reports of being discriminated against on mode of dressing or type of dress which could deny them the opportunity to graduate when due. Reports also have it that more than two-thirds of girls aged 15 - 19 years in schools in the Northern part of Nigeria are unable to read a sentence. This could be associated with cultural practices relating to inhibited social acculturation. But, one may not totally say that Nigeria has not been thinking positively in terms of reeling out policies on gender education. The table below shows that much has been done; but to what extent this has been effective leaves much to be desired.

**Table 1**: Key Policy Initiatives with a Gender Focus in Nigeria

| S/n | Policy Initiatives | Year |
|-----|--------------------|------|
| 1 | Blueprint on Women's Education | 1986 |

| 2 | Nomadic Education Programme | 1986 |
|---|---|---|
| 3 | National Commission for Mass Literacy and Non-formal Education | 1991 |
| 4 | Family Support Basic Education Programme | 1994 |
| 5 | Universal Basic Education | 1999 |
| 6 | National Policy on Women | 2001 |
| 7 | Education For All-Fast track Initiative | 2002 |
| 8 | Strategy for Acceleration of Girls' Education in Nigeria | 2003 |
| 9 | National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) | 2004 |
| 10 | Universal Basic Education Act | 2004 |

*Source:* *Gender in Nigeria Report, 2012*

May be a closer look should be done on the efficiency of implementation of those policies; probably paying more attention on the gender inequality in the content of the policies. Reinarz (2002) opines that balancing work, schooling and family responsibilities for women must be taken seriously as family responsibility impacts the others greatly. Educating daughters and women is a seminal strategy to ensure economic empowerment, enhance self-esteem, improve family planning and management prowess, societal growth, propel women to gain good employment, attain self-reliance and leadership positions in Nigeria.

**Inter-Ethnic Marriage in National Unity**
Tribalism and ethnicity are remarkable factors that interrupt the growth and development. Ethnicity tensions can result to violence, riots and war if not controlled. History reveals that the Nigerian civil war of 1967-1970 which was the offshoot of the 1966 coup and other national violent events could be regarded as the negative outcome of ethnic rancor. On the other hand, inter-ethnic marriage as a basic social institution and fundamental creation of the family can help in maintaining national unity. Marriage across ethnic groups possesses the power to aid in tackling ethnic conflicts and fostering development through peaceful co-existence. Inter-tribal marriage provides opportunity for brotherly love among people of different tribes who relate as in-laws. This leads to social interaction and cultural understanding or blending instead of intolerance and crisis. It promotes the comprehension of various languages and cultures which reduces the problem of suspicion and tribalism.

Again, inter-ethnic marriage promotes mutual understanding among women and creates opportunity for interaction among women of different backgrounds. Alapiki (2000) views this kind of integration as a process that attempts to erode the presence of micro-nationalities in place of a spirit of nationhood. It can lead to the sharing of common identity and destiny. With the national loyalties achieved, ethnic barriers are broken under categories such as project, process and product. Women have roles to play in understanding and positively influencing their husbands for peaceful coexistence in diversity and national unity. However, this will work more and faster in inter-ethnic marriage within same religion because inter-religious cum ethnic marriage may not thrive without fanatical challenges on belief.

**Challenges women face in Nigeria**
In Nigeria, the Nigerian constitution and true religious adherence offer no room for gender discrimination. It can be seen that women experience challenges in socio-economy, politics and education, including cultural norms/traits compared to their men counterparts. By creation, women are positioned prominently as pillars in the society and home through building of households; as they play the roles of mothers, wives, sisters and daughters, and more importantly, are enjoined to be reliable helpmates to the men. This goes to say that without the women, the men may not succeed alone. Therefore, in candid considerations, women's roles in all spheres of development of any society cannot be overlooked. Traditional and sycophantic religious beliefs place so much huddles on the progress of women in areas of interpersonal relations and economic potentialities. In the minds of men, women are subordinate, which has formed worrisome stereotyped practices of discrimination and oppression from the male folk, no matter which achievements or status of liberation the women have attained. Any adversity that befalls a family is more or less blamed on the women. Women, most times, are on the receiving end of domestic violence.

**Marriage rights**
The right to have a say in the way marriages are contracted for women is denied of them in the society. In some parts of the country, marriages are fixed in spite of the knowledge of the maiden and she is bundled to the would-be husband at the will of the father in preference to going to acquire some reasonable education. Due to improper marriage cases, Vesico-vaginal Fistula (VVF) and Pre-eclampsia abound. Family planning approaches are not appreciated and considered in some areas in the Nigerian society for prevention of diseases, child-spacing and pregnancy not properly planned for, including criminal

abortions. In such situations, there is high rise of maternal and child morbidity and mortality as a result of those problems. Religious manipulation affects women more and makes them fall prey for ulterior motives such as false marriages, inordinate sexual pleasures, monetary inducements, rituals and many more.

## Economic status

Women are on the receiving end of economic recessions in the country. Poor economic situation due to misappropriation, embezzlement and mismanagement by the leaders, fuel the risk of diseases such as HIV/AIDS and sex trade among women. Lack of no reliable employment opportunities leads to poverty among women; making them to fall prey of human trafficking for sex trade and bondage in the hands trafficking beneficiaries. In the face of religious and ethnic/border clashes which leads to displacements, destruction of properties and deaths, women bear the brunt of the hazards; among which are rape, hunger, diseases, to name but a few; without accessible healthcare and credit facilities.

## Politics

Can we say that Nigerian women have a future in politics in the face of, according to Vivian Bakpa, "large scale marginalization both in voting exercises and allocation of political offices?" Okafor and Akokuwebe (2015) reason that so far as men have control over assets and have relatively better education; they have a dominant position in terms of political power. This makes women not to have access to and control of finances and therefore incapable of contesting for election creditably. Even when the men and women have the same level of educational qualification, the men are still preferred to women to hold a particular political office; and decisions made afterwards tend to favour the men folk. Sometimes there is prescribed political violence when security personnel are deployed to election areas which will naturally and disturbingly disenfranchise the women to a large extent. This makes them not to have a say in political decisions that affect policies. Lack of economic empowerment hinders women from effective participation in politics in Nigeria. When maternal obligations and challenges are added, political participation becomes more of a herculean task. Small wonder that the former president, Olusegun Obasanjo (OBJ) observes that women must participate in politics for sustenance of democracy in Nigeria and promotion of peace and unity. He urged that if Nigerians were to play participatory politics without fear or favour, women must participate fully in the affairs of Nigeria for effective gender balancing. The girls must be educated to see that political participation is a means to nation building. It is through

education that the women will acquire the necessary skills to proffer ideas measurably or more effectively and be recognized as potent leaders. Okafor (2015) stated that non-participation, inadequate representation and non-involvement in project planning and execution of plans by women contribute adversely to economic development and social justice in Nigeria.

The factors hindering women's effective control to national unity, especially in Nigeria need to be addressed for peace and development. Nigeria has been faced with a whole lot of challenges in recent times which have posed a major difficulty to national unity. The critical circumstances through which our people have been living had blurred their understanding of national unity. One of the reasons is the diverse ethnic groups, belief systems and various religious groups, each looking for its interests. Those who have made enormous efforts for the independence and liberation from colonialism and the unity of the country would naturally expect the outcomes of liberation and democracy to be reflected in their regions. Adeleye (2014) says the crucial problem of this country is the inability of the present political leadership to sit down and consider ways of forging unity amongst the nations or tribes to co-exist peacefully. It is disheartening, that the Nigerian people have not known period of stability in which the nation's components could come together and be able to detect and strengthen the shared values between them, give room for dialogue and constructive arguments which can lead to national integration. Women have played significant roles in the home and society yet, Women in Nigeria no doubt belong to the disadvantaged group in the society when compared to their male counterparts. Women are subjugated in matters of leadership in the home, church and the society. Some obnoxious traditions, parental upbringing and orientations about women inhibit their progress and active participation in national unity. Women are generally not given a voice in policy making bodies. They are often seen but not heard. Such cultural beliefs and practices which reduce women to chattels have helped to deny women of their rights as human beings. In some cases women are seen as inferior beings that are not intellectually equal with men. They are forcefully given in marriage outside their volition. Some are discouraged from inter-ethnic marriage for selfish reasons. These disparities between Nigerian women and men have hindered the Nigerian women from contributing meaningfully to national unity. The factors hindering women from actively participating in roles that promote national unity include:

**a) Illiteracy**

Some families in Nigeria see the training of their female children as waste of resources. To them, the girls are meant to stay at home to take care of domestic tasks, and prepare for marriage while their male siblings are sent to school. Education is paramount in any individual who is to be an agent of change. Education, whether formal or informal constitutes a vital tool for socio-economic development of any society as well as conflict resolution that brings about national unity. The problem of gender inequality in Nigerian's educational institution poses an obstacle to women development in Nigeria. For women to be integrated into development process, they need quality education, in order to become co-partners in the fight for national unity. The problem of gender imbalance in access to basic education in this country has not been fully addressed going by gender disparities in school enrolments. Ainabor, Eregha, and Ovbiagele (2006) reveal that preference for male education and anti-women education traces which are still visible in some parts of Nigeria, particularly in the far North contribute to women's less access to basic education. This gender imbalance to access to educational development opportunities has for a long time hindered women's full development of their potentials and consequently affected their contributions to national unity.

**b) Traditional Beliefs and Culture**

Various cultures and traditions in Nigeria restrict the role of women to domestic activities, such as keeping the home clean, bearing children, cooking food for the entire family members among others. The society as at today sees these roles as less important as they require less extensive formal education for one to be able to perform them. Most cultures and traditions in Nigeria depict male dominance in all situations and as such females are inferior. These unfortunate belief systems have been a major obstacle to women development in Nigeria and as such constraints their contribution to national unity.

**c) Sex stereotype**

Females play significant roles in the family unit. During the period of socialization, females are usually trained to believe that there are different roles for males and females as well as the superiority of males over females. Adults also discourage competition between males and females and as such the female feel inferior to the males. Ovute, Dibia, and Obasi (2015) in Yomi (2007) raise another challenge which he described as the "patrilineal system of descent" in which generations are identified through male off-spring. The responsibility for the preservation and continuity of the "family tree" rests on the male children

and special recognition are accorded them than the females in the preparation for their adult roles. This orientation from childhood hinders the woman from aspiring to great heights and exhibiting God's potentials in her life and hence she cannot contribute enough to the national unity.

**d) Religious beliefs**
Women are relegated to the background as a result of religious beliefs. Second class status has often been the lot of women in Judaism which has also crept into Christianity. It is not an overstatement to say that the Holy Scripture has today been used to subordinate women to the background. Most women are comfortable with the way religion has positioned them. The second place given to women has tied their hands from harnessing God given resources and maximizing their potentials to contribute to national unity. Some texts in the Bible have been used to silence women such as 1 Cor. 14:34-35, Eph. 5:22-25, 1 Tim. 2: 9-15.

**e) Low participation of women in politics**
Women's participation in politics in Nigeria is still very minimal. Okemakinde (2007) opines that women do not see themselves as viable instruments of political participation and agent of national unity. Women shy away from vying for leadership positions such as President, Governor, senatorial seats and other electoral posts. This is as a result of discouragements from their husbands, children or other family members. Secondly, in the Nigerian society, politics is seen as a dirty game and not for responsible and godly women. The phobia of death, assassination, kidnap and meddling with charms and ritual killing associated with politics inhibit the influx of the women folk into politics. Instead of contesting in elections, women are used for campaigns and praise singing during elections.

**Recommendations**
➢ Theological Educators should equip women through in-depth theological training and practical involvement of courses on Socio-Religious significance of women in the curriculum.
➢ Improving public programmes and policies in gender equality, which will be in line with international agreements on non-gender discrimination is needed.
➢ Minimizing constraints on women's empowerment and identification of areas of potential opportunities for women to grow economically and to have asset ownership are very crucial.

➢ Legislation and punishment against forced marriages and religious manipulations must be given and effected.
➢ Improving girl-child education should be regarded as a reasonable way for women empowerment and acquisition of self-identity.
➢ Political space to be made more participatory and constraints in areas of huge fee and decision-making in electoral matters removed, so that women will have the will to participate actively and positively.
➢ Encouraging and supporting women to form co-operative societies mostly at the rural areas and credit facilities must be made available for them to access.
➢ Awareness among the male folk to think of and accept women in positions of power as a positive way to enhance development in the society must be taken seriously.
➢ It is right to develop and implement programmes that will support and advance women in climbing the corporate ladder through mentorship, allies and professional networks. This will help them to gain negotiation skills and bargaining power.

**Conclusion**

The role of women in national unity cannot be overemphasized. Therefore, efforts should be intensified to play down the gender inequality marginalization syndrome in order to encourage women full participation in politics, education and, economy and other sectors for the sake of national unity. Women need to utilize their natural potentialities to ensure development, peace and unity.

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