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Gender Balance as a Panacea to a Credible and Successful Election

By

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Abstract

This paper focused on Gender balance as a panacea for a credible and successful election, having as its raison d'etre: to review the concept of gender balance and appropriate its implications towards achieving a credible and successful election required for the existence of human centered development process for the amelioration of human conditions. Thus, the paper achieved its goal by examining the urgency for the crusade on gender balance; the interlink-ages between gender balance and a credible-successful election; with an admixture of the application of the mediation of certain notions namely: the notions of social contract, Democratic culture and ultimately the participatory electoral process - for the sake of proper extrapolations and reconstructions to explaining Gender balance as a panacea to a credible and successful election. In the final analysis, the paper made some findings and draws conclusion, with some recommendations.

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The social distinction between Male and Female forms the basis for division of labour, and influences power relations in social institutions. It often manifests as male dominance and female subordination, although at different points' the extent of privilege, constraints and beliefs may change. Societal conditions which negate the well-being of citizens or impede their ability to function in a manner contributive to their environment must be condemned. Bammeke (2006).

The advancement of women and the achievement of equality between women and men (Le, gender balance) are necessary prerequisites for building a peaceful, egalitarian and well developed society (Nwakeze,2006). That is to say, that integrating gender perspective in macro economic reforms of the development process of any nation require an understanding of the practical and strategic needs of both men and women, without the exclusion of the other. Its absence (i.e., lack of gender equity) in any political socio-economic development process is, in all ramifications, an Antinomy to an ideal typical democratic society. Regrettably, the scenario in most countries of the Third World, especially the sub-Saharan African countries like Nigeria, is that men are more favoured than women in all aspects of human centred development indicators like, education, political participation, economic empowerment etc. The call for engendering macro economic issues – that capture an out took on gender balance imperatives - emphasized by many writers among whom are, Sen (1990), UNDP (1995), Folbre (1996) excetera. The consensus among these writers is that, any form of deprivation for women would have adverse consequences not just on the women but the society at large. Thus, gender considerations should not be viewed simply as mere women's issues or as a minor in development process but should be seen as a robust credible means of achieving a sustainable, well rounded human centered development process - a sort of development with democratic permissiveness!

As an ancillary to that, Nwakeze (2006), confirmed that, "gender mainstreaming is justified under the assumption that human development would be endangered if not engendered". To be sure, a nation truly in pursuit of a sustainable human centered development does not neglect any part of its human resources; that is, its men and women resources. At this juncture, and with this thought process, the proposal for "gender balance as a Panacea for a credible and successful election", to a limited or greater extent, becomes clearer and meaningful. Ideal typically, in a democratic society where democratic ethos are engendered, a major avenue of assuming political power or electing political elites into power is via the medium of a free-and fair election - free and fair, so as to justify its Credibility.

By the same token, in every truly democratic electoral process, one of the fundamental expectations is the exercise of the inalienable political rights of both men

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and women, to vote and be voted for without any discrimination, as required by United Nations declaration of fundamental human rights (1948). In reality, however, there is unfounded disjuncture between what is and what ought to be: in most cultures, the right to political participation is lopsided, where most cultures prefer to vote men into power to voting for women; not because women lack the potential but because they have been judged on their biological positions as "women" instead of on their fundamental human rights of being human! Most cultures upholding this patriarchal attitude have unhealthy cultural value system where most societal institutions and structures are seen as the world of men. But men and women are first of all humans before their social interpretation of their biological positions as male or female!

Thus, without losing focus from the *raison d'être* of this presentation, the task before us here therefore is, to tackle this intellectual treatise along the following lines: 1) why Gender Balance? (With special considerations on the deplorable status of women and the need for the amelioration of human conditions); 2) the inter-linkages between Gender balance and a credible-successful election; and in the final analysis, 3) a way forward or recommendations. It is hoped that a meticulous and adroit handling of the above adumbrated rubrics will help in the achievement of the purpose of this presentation. We shall return to these shortly in the furtherance of the discourse.

Objective of the Study

The objective of this paper is, to review the concept of gender balance and to appropriate its implications to achieving a credible and successful election in our political processes.

Conceptual Clarification

There are certain peculiar terms that are preponderant in the process of this paper which we intend to de-mystify for a better understanding. It is to this that we now turn:

Gender

Sex and Gender are often confused with each other, hence the need for distinction between the two here. Sex refers to either of the two divisions of organism identified as male or female. It is determined at conception and it is fixed. It is the province of biology (Ostergaard, 1992:6). It has to do with the chromosomes and hormones - that is, the 'XX' chromosomes for female and then 'XY' for male.

Gender, according to Bammeke (1990), "is the social interpretation of being male or female". That is to say, the social conception of the expectations and behaviours considered appropriate for those who occupy the sexual positions of male or female. Unlike sex which is fixed, gender is dynamic. Thus, gender identities do

change and are culture bound. In other words, the expectations/privileges considered appropriate for those identified as male or female vary from society to society, also do change over time.

Gender Balance

By gender balance, we mean gender equity. Literally speaking, the word "equity" simply means: 'fairness', 'justice' or egalitarianism. Gender balance or gender equity may therefore be defined as, the process of being fair to both women and men. At the risk of over simplification, Gender balance (Gender equity) means that, both women and men enjoy the same status. To be sure, gender equity (Gender balance) means that, women and men have equal conditions for actualizing their full human rights and potentials which would enable them participate in the development process, be it political, economical or social (Nwakeze, 2006).

Ultimately, gender balance as a panacea for a credible and successful election suggests gender mainstreaming. By gender mainstreaming, we mean integrating gender issues into policy-making and over all development process (Nwakeze, 2006). Confirming this, United Nations (1997), stated that, "gender mainstreaming is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally, and inequality is not perpetuated".

Successful Election

Election can be defined as a process where candidates under the platform of political parties are selected to assume political powers having emerged as winners in the process. By way of a heuristic conceptualization, a successful election, on the other hand, denotes an electoral process in which the desired election objective to elect a candidate into power is achieved without hitches/impediments; or achieved inspite of hitches/impediments. However, election can be successful but not credible. We shall see this shortly in the conceptualization of credibility.

Credible Election

Credibility, according to Horby (2002), is the quality of being generally accepted and trusted. To be sure, a credible election is one, that not only is it successful but the processes of its success and manner of conduct is generally accepted and believed by the generality of the people to be true and acceptable. Hence, elections can be successful but not credible. That is to say, there exists a credibility gap between the acclaimed "successful" election versus what the generality of the people believe about its success story. Typically, the ongoing election tribunals and petitions in some sub-Saharan African countries like, Nigeria, presently corroborates the fact that most

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acclaimed "successful" elections are not credible! The public do not generally trust and accept that the acclaimed winners are the actual winners!

An election where a candidate "successfully" emerges as the winner but through the political vices of rigging, thuggery and political manipulations is not a credible election, albeit "successful"!

Having clarified some of the concepts peculiar to this thesis, we shall now proceed to review some literatures about the main task at hand. To this we now turn.

Literature Review

Why Gender Balance?

"The ultimate goal of development in Africa is to ensure the overall well-being of the people through a sustained improvement in their living standards. It is the quintessential human aspect of development that underlies all other objectives that Africa will have to pursue, be they economic, social, cultural or political..." Adedeji (1989:10).

An appropriate response, under this rubric, to the above germane question should be captured in two ways:

- a) Gender balance, because lack of it reproduces itself in inequality as epitomized in the deplorable status of women conditions;
- b) Gender balance, because of the need for the amelioration of human conditions (especially, women conditions) for a sustainable human centred development. We shall address these two points, in sequence:
 - A. The deplorable social status of women as a factor necessitating the crusade for Gender balance in a political process:-

As Bammeke (2006) rightly pontificated, "the social distinction between male and female forms the basis for division of labour, and influences power relations in social institutions. It often manifests as male dominance and female subordination".

In African socio-cultural milieu, women are not socially recognized to play any leading role either in the family, religious community or elsewhere (Oyekanmi, 1999). This is as a result of male preference and male dominance (patriarchy) which is endemic in African culture.

Despite the fact that male and female roles shape society, the female gender is still regarded as playing "second fiddle" to the male counterpart (Oyekanmi, 1999). This is quite glaring as females are generally pushed to the rear in the scheme of things both in the family and the community at large. As a consequence, UNFPA (1993)

observed that, this low status of women restricts their access to productive assets and social services, affecting their health and education, their working conditions and participation in public life. Women in many developing countries are denied the right to own land, inherit property, establish credit or rise in the professional world. In sub-Saharan Africa where women produce up to 50% of food grown for local consumption, only 8% of these women hold titles to the land they work (UNFPA, 1993). This gender imbalance as well as its constraints is hydra-headed and impinges on almost every area of the women's life - their literacy, marriage, reproductive health, economic empowerment and political participation etc. Many girls have been withdrawn from school for marriage even at young ages. Some have been withdrawn in order to give chance to their brothers who "deserve" education more (Oyekanmi, 1999).

By the same token, when it comes to employment women are marginalized, used as sex stereo types and instruments because wherever they turn, it is patriarchy, the world of men! In as much as women now take up white-collar jobs (although not without discriminations in those fields), majority of them are still in the rural areas with very little or no education, lack of good medical care, low income and lack of other socio-economic human centred development facilities. Moreover, in political participation, it is considered as a strange occurrence where a woman vies for political power, not because she lacks the political will or potential but because she has been judged, first, on her biological position as a "woman" without considering that she is first of all human, and as such has human rights! But kudos to Mrs Ellen Johnson-Sir Leaf the present president of Liberia (and the first female president in Africa) who took the bull by the horn and has demonstrated with much credence to the cliché that, "what a man can do, a woman can also do, even better".

Ultimately, empirical evidence confirms the fact that what we have in our society presently is Gender imbalance and not gender balance. Typically, as regards political participation, evidence shows that the proportion of seats held by women vis-a-vis men in the national parliament of some African countries, e.g. Nigeria, between 1999-2011 was very low and shows a wide gap of gender disparity between men and women as indicated below.

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Table 2.1.1: Women Elected to Public Office in Nigeria 1999 - 2011

Office	1999		2003		2007		2011	
	Seats available	Women	Seats Available	Women	Seats Available	Women	Seats Available	Women
President	1	0		0		0		0
Senate	109	3(2.8)	109	4(3.7)	109	9(8.3)	109	7(6.4)
House of Representatives	360	7(1.9)	360	21(5.8)	360	27(7.5)	360	25(6.9)
Governor	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)
SHA Committee Chairpersons								
LGA Chairpersons	710	13(1.8)	774	15(1.9)	740	27(3.6)	740	-
Councillors	6368	69(1.1)	6368	267(4.2)	6368	235(3.7)	6368	-

Source: NBS (2009:63-65).

Nigeria has yet to achieve gender parity in political representation at national level, let alone meet the target it set in the NGP. The 2011 election results suggest a regression from the apparent progress that followed the return to democracy in 1999. Only 9% of the candidates for the National Assembly elections in April 2011 were women. Only 13 of the 340 candidates who contested on behalf of various political parties for the office of governor were women. A mere 909 of the 10,037 candidates for available sets were women (9.06%). After only 25 women were elected to the 360 member House of Representatives, Nigeria is now ranked 118 out of 192 countries in terms of gender parity. The low 9% representation of women in Nigeria's House of Representatives is significantly below the global average (15%), and far behind South Africa's and Rwanda's representation (43% and 56% respectively). Nigeria's 63 registered political parties have failed to deliver gender parity in political representation at national level.

The import of these records is that, men are still more economically empowered than women and at a very wide gap. More so, the Gender Development Index (GDI) - which adjusts the average achievement of human development index to reflect the inequalities between men and women in the areas of life expectancy, adult literacy and gross school enrollment ratio - in Nigeria in 2005 was very low at 0.439 (UNDP, 2005); an indication that inequality between men and women (Gender imbalance) still exists in some sub-Saharan African countries like Nigeria despite the ongoing MOGs reforms. The situation is even better when compared with other countries GDI like Ghana (0.517) and South Africa (0.652) (UNDP, 2005). To be sure, with the growing poor conditions of women vis-a-vis their male counterpart, it

becomes difficult to submit that the situation has become better presently over the years.

With the above situational analyses of the deplorable women conditions, it is quite glaring that any political process that any sub-Saharan African nation should embark upon should give the amelioration of human conditions (especially, women conditions) an urgent attention.

B. Amelioration of Human conditions as a factor necessitating the crusade for Gender Balance in a political process:-

The proposal here for the amelioration of human conditions invokes the need for the provisions of human centred development facilities in any pursuit of development process. To be sure, a vital component of the desideratum for human centred development has to do with the quality of life of the people and their general welfare. This has to do with readily available access to adequate nutrition, housing, individual personal security, basic formal education, health care, communication facilities as well general democratic permissiveness and tolerance (Ninalowo, 2004). Contrariwise, it is quite unthinkable to envisage human centred development without a liberal access to these basic opportunities and facilities for both men and women.

Ideal typically, in a true democratic society where fundamental human rights are not only entrenched but practiced without lip-service, the above adumbrated human centred development provisions are guaranteed for the enjoyment of both men and women. Unfortunately, in reality; the scenario has been a situation where men enjoy most of these provisions more than women - this is gender imbalance! It is this gender imbalance and its negative implication to sustainable human centred development that has triggered off many international, regional and national treaties, conventions and policies to advocate that gender imbalance should be eliminated and be replaced with gender balance. Such treaties and conventions include: African charter for Human and Peoples' Rights (1986) - which predominately dwelt on women rights or the need for gender balance; the Convention on Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), by UN (1979); UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) declaration, year 2000 (which profoundly emphasized the need to mainstream women in governance and development process), and several women world conferences in Nairobi, Vienna, Beijing; 1985, 1993 and 1995, respectively - all evolved to address the issues of Gender balance and the recognition of women's rights as human rights, and as a sine qua non for any human centred socio-politico-economic development process.

For instance, one of the sub-Saharan African nations, Nigeria is not left out in this crusade. Former Nigerian president, Olusegun Obasanjo in his administration

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(1999-2007) in his 9-point agenda as contained in the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS), addressed predominantly the issue of Gender balance as a necessary condition for a truly sustainable socio-politico-economic development process. To be sure, the chapter four of NEEDS document (the social charter) presents the social agenda that under pins NEEDS (Nwakeze, 2006). The social agenda seeks to fully integrate women by enhancing their economic, political, social and cultural life in the country (National Planning Commission, 2004). A few of the specifics of the 9-point social agenda of NEEDS include, to ensure equitable representation of women all over the country in all aspects of national life; to implement the provision of UN convention on elimination of all forms of discrimination against women; to support legislation for the abolition of all forms of harmful traditional practices against women; to mainstream women concerns and perspectives in all policies and programmes, etc. Moreover, in his successor's administration; late president Umaru Musa Yar'dua, in his emergent 7-point agenda equally sought to address the issue of gender balance as a topical issue in the desired sustainable human centred development as was emphasized in the MDGs proposal. Thus signifying that the issue of gender balance is imperative for any credible political process that could usher in a robust sustainable human centred development process in a nation's polity. Although, inspite of these initiatives, the issue of gender equity in development has been hampered by socio-cultural factors like the case of male bias (patriarchy), permeating all parts of the African socio-economic structure has been advanced for this limitation (Abane, 2000).

Hence, for any political process (like election) to succeed and become credible with the people, the issues of the amelioration of human conditions - without the exclusion of women conditions - must be addressed. Now, having answered the question, "why Gender balance?", in the foregoing discourse; we shall proceed to the *raison d'etre* of this presentation - that is, the inter linkages between gender balance and a credible successful election. To this we now turn.

The Interconnections between Gender Balance and a Credible Successful Election

Perhaps, a useful starting point in the demonstration of the inter linkages between the twin concepts of 'gender balance' and a 'credible, successful election' - in view to examine the extent to which gender balance is a panacea to a credible and successful election – is to capture their interconnections via the mediations of a few helpful notions namely, the notions of social contract, democratic culture; participatory electoral process; with an admixture of the notion of political passivism, as a fall-out. We shall demonstrate this taking each of the notions, sequentially.

On the Notion of Social Contract

According to the notion of the symbiotic social contract, the state qua state is supposed to provide instrumentalities toward the amelioration of the human condition. That is to say, the state in terms of its historical reason for being, must be oriented towards the quality of life of the people and their general welfare (Ninalowo, 2007) through the provision of the human centred development facilities like access to housing, health care, nutrition, formal education, employment etc for its citizenry. While the citizenry on the other side of the contract is expected to pay taxes and other civic obligations like political participation in electoral process. To be sure, where the state fulfils its part of the bargain by providing the above human centred development facilities for the generality of its citizenry without any disparity there would be semblance of order and the citizens would be law abiding.

However, where the state provides these facilities only to the favour and enjoyment of men more than women, this is tantamount to gender imbalance and a dear case of breach of contract with the generality of the citizenry, and in all ramifications reducible to a case of legitimation - crisis!: that is, a disjuncture between "what is" and 'what ought to be'! Such anomaly further reproduces itself into political passivism of the female gender. By political passivism, we mean that the female gender being marginalized would lose interest in the political process and boycott exercising their voting rights since their interests are not represented.

A situation where the female-half of a nation's universal adult suffrage population boycotts election, would definitely not lead to a credible and successful election! We shall see more of this in the discourse of the notion of participatory electoral process later. We shall now like to turn to the notion of democratic culture.

On the Notion of Democratic Culture

Democracy connotes representative government and equally invokes the rule of law. Representative government suggests the representation of the interest of the generality of the people in government and the fulfilment of their aspirations for their general welfare.

The rule of law on the other hand preaches the principle of equality, inter alia. That is to say, that everybody is equal before the law no matter status, class or sex. To be sure, both the immediate and ultimate abiding interest in the democratic project is towards the goal of improving the human condition. That has to do with readily available access to adequate nutrition, housing, personal security, basic formal education, health care, etc (Ninalowo, 2007).

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In ideal typical sense, it is expected that a truly democratic state should represent the interests and aspirations of both the female and male gender of its citizenry. By the same token, it is equally expected that the principle of equality should prevail no matter the sex, as provided in the rule of law.

However, in a situation where Gender inequality exists in contradiction to the rule of law, and the interests of the citizenry not mutually represented in government but with disparity, it is practically inconceivable to expect a total political participation from the female gender, the female gender must naturally develop political apathy or political passivism to participate in the electoral process which may not give room to a credible and successful election. We shall now turn to the notion of participatory electoral process.

On the Notion of Participatory Electoral Process

The notion of participatory electoral process is very much in tune with the idea of universal adult suffrage, a key defining component of citizenship as a fundamental inalienable human right (Ninalowo, 2007).

Participatory electoral process invokes the concept of political participation. By political participation, we mean, the process whereby individuals get themselves involved in the political activities and in the decision-making of their country. Of great importance is the fact, that it is the political participation of the citizenry that makes relevant the electoral processes of party systems, electioneering campaigns, even the independent electoral commission institution. That is to say, without the political participation of the citizenry the whole gamut of electoral process is meaningless!

To be sure, it is expected that the totality of the citizenry within the universal adult suffrage bracket should involve in political participation; a situation where men have more opportunities than women, and the interests of men represented more in government than women, the female gender is bound to develop lack of trust in the government, fear of intimidation, apathy or lack of interest in politics. These factors tend to hamper political participation, and without political participation there cannot be a successful election; even where the election is successful, it can never be credible because not the totality of the citizenry accepted it or trust in it.

The bit about the inter connections of the twin concepts of gender balance and a credible successful election is that, where gender imbalance exists instead of gender balance, there is every tendency for political passivism or apathy to erupt; and political passivism is anti-electoral process! This equally, may in turn, as a ripple effect lead to social uprisings from some subaltern individuals (civil societies; marginalized women) and anti-state brouhaha from the rabble who felt their interests are not

represented - and these, sure, stifles development efforts!. A case in point is the Aba women's riot of 1929. Therefore, it is the relative infringements of the terms of social contract; democratic culture; the rule of law in relation to the observance or lack of observance of gender balance that partly explains how credible and successful an election can be.

Thus, from the backdrop of the foregoing explorations; we can submit the following propositions:

1. Without gender balance, not many people will participate in the election: a situation which may usher in the wrong candidate since not many people exercised their voting rights for the right candidate.
2. An election conducted without gender balance sensitivity is likely to produce a government that will perpetuate inequality between men and women, such election and the government it produces will never be deemed credible in the sight of the people.
3. An election conducted in the atmosphere of gender imbalance is likely to produce a government that is not human centred development-oriented and hence may cause apathy among the citizenry who may not like to be part of such electoral process.
4. Without gender balance, the existence of the independence electoral commission and other electoral activities lose relevance because the whole exercise does not represent the interests of the totality of the citizenry, hence already undemocratic.
5. Without gender balance, the emergent government of the day will make inefficient policy choices which may tend to maintain the existing gender imbalance without planning to ameliorate the conditions.

Thus, the inter linkages between gender balance and a credible-successful election is reducible to one simple equation:

Democratic election (DE) minus Gender Balance (GB) = Patriarchal Election (PE) = -
VE human development (- HD).

That is,

$$DE - GB = PE + (- HO).$$

Conclusion

From the onset, we told you that the reasons for the crusade on gender balance find expressions in two ways: first, because of the consequences of the absence of it to human centred development process as epitomized in the deplorable low status of women conditions; secondly, because of the urgent need amelioration of human conditions, especially women conditions required as a sine qua non for a sustainable

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human centred development process. Besides, we also informed you that there exists an inextricable affinity or inter linkages between gender balance and a credible-successful election, because without gender balance the whole gamut of the political process will not represent the interests of the totality of the citizenry thereby causing political apathy, passivism from the marginalized female gender which consequently reproduces itself in the election of the wrong candidates since not the majority of the universal adult suffrage of the citizenry would exercise their political rights; for that, such electoral process even though by any means successful cannot be credible with the generality of the people.

From the above findings, therefore, we conclude that for there to be a credible and successful election that could usher in a human centred development, there must be the entrenchment and strict observance of gender balance.

Recommendations

1. There is need for cultural value re-orientation to embrace values of egalitarianism so as to destroy the patriarchal attitude endemic in our culture which breeds gender inequality.
2. There is need for the government to show avid commitment to the provisions of democratic culture and the rule of law so as to maintain a level playing field for the generality of its citizenry and hence encourage political participation.
3. Finally, non-state actors (e.g. NGOs, civil society organization (CSO) and autonomous mass media should continue in their watch-dog roles and advocacy campaigns for social justice so that we can stamp out gender imbalance in our socio-political structure to achieve a credible and successful elections that could usher in a sustainable human centred development process.

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