

Women's Empowerment and Political Participation in Cross River South Senatorial District

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ABSTRACT: *This research empirically examined the level of women's empowerment and political participation in the Cross River South Senatorial District (CRSSD), which comprises Akampka, Akpabuyo, Bakassi, Biase, Calabar Municipality, Calabar South, and Odukpani Local Government Areas. A purposive sampling procedure was used to select the study's sample population. Two hundred and fifty-nine (259) structured questionnaires (used as data) were evenly distributed to respondents in the aforementioned local government areas. Using the split-half, test, and re-test procedures, these structured questionnaires were validated and evaluated for reliability to assure the credibility and use of the data collected for this study. The data obtained from our survey was subjected to descriptive and inferential statistical analysis to confirm the hypotheses generated to guide the study. The results revealed that women are underrepresented in governance and decision-making positions in the Cross River South Senatorial District. It was also noticed that women did not react favourably to the limited possibilities for increased political participation that were presented to them. Traditional gender roles, gender-based stereotypes and discriminatory attitudes, violence against women in politics, and a lack of financial resources were significant factors discouraging women from participating in politics. This work concludes that marginalised women's views must be heard for societal progress and development.*

Penelitian ini secara empiris bertujuan mengkaji tingkat pemberdayaan dan partisipasi politik perempuan di Daerah Senatorial Selatan Cross River (CRSSD), yang terdiri dari Wilayah Pemerintah Daerah Akampka, Akpabuyo, Bakassi, Biase, Kota Calabar, Calabar Selatan, dan Odukpani. Prosedur purposive sampling digunakan untuk memilih populasi sampel penelitian. Dua ratus lima puluh sembilan (259) kuesioner terstruktur (digunakan sebagai data) didistribusikan secara merata kepada responden di wilayah pemerintah daerah tersebut.

Menggunakan prosedur split-half, test, dan re-test, kuesioner terstruktur ini divalidasi dan dievaluasi reliabilitasnya untuk memastikan kredibilitas dan penggunaan data yang dikumpulkan untuk penelitian ini. Data yang diperoleh dari survei kami menjadi sasaran analisis statistik deskriptif dan inferensial untuk mengkonfirmasi hipotesis yang dihasilkan untuk memandu penelitian. Hasil penelitian mengungkapkan bahwa perempuan kurang terwakili dalam posisi pemerintahan dan pengambilan keputusan di Distrik Senatorial Selatan Cross River. Juga diperhatikan bahwa perempuan tidak bereaksi positif terhadap kemungkinan terbatasnya peningkatan partisipasi politik yang disajikan kepada mereka. Peran gender tradisional, stereotip berbasis gender dan sikap diskriminatif, kekerasan terhadap perempuan dalam politik, dan kurangnya sumber daya keuangan merupakan faktor signifikan yang menghalangi perempuan untuk berpartisipasi dalam politik. Karya ini menyimpulkan bahwa pandangan perempuan yang terpinggirkan harus didengar untuk kemajuan dan pembangunan masyarakat.

Keywords: *Women Empowerment, Political Participation, Sustainable Development, Patriarchy and Governance.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Women's empowerment and political participation are prerequisites for any nation's sustainable development and growth. Given this fact, the global community has taken a keen interest in these two concepts following the Beijing conference of 1995, which led to the adoption of two sets of objectives by the United Nations called the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2000 and 2015, respectively. These concepts are significantly captured in the Global Agenda as one of the Sustainable Development Goals Targets, which is "to ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic, and public life" (Teshager, A & Abebe, 2018). Exploring the contributions of women in politics, decision-making, and implementation can provide a master key to understanding the dynamics of growth and development in many countries of the world (Oloyede, 2015). Many feminists believe that excluding women from governance and decision-making is tantamount to "cutting the nose off to spite the face" because the underrepresentation of women in governance and decision-making has negative effects on society because government decision-making bodies will miss the perspectives and contributions of half of the population, which consists of women (Phillips, 2012). In his opinion, Chadwick opined that "Politics and governance are not a birthright or privilege reserved for men." In a country where almost half the population is female, the abysmal number of women in political offices is certainly not representative of reality. It is not indicative of modern-day democracy." (Chadwick, 2018).

For democracy to thrive, men and women should be given an equal opportunity to participate in political processes in their nations. If this right of participation is denied, then the fundamental nature and future of democracy are lost because the success of the electoral process of a country depends on the number of people (men and women) participating in the process. Women's empowerment is critical for achieving sustainable

development in a country. Political participation is one of the best ways for women to contribute positively to governance and significantly impact their communities and countries. However, research shows that many countries, including Nigeria, are still far from achieving gender parity in political participation at the national, state, and local government levels. Sama affirmed that without the participation of women in national activities, a country's social, economic, and political progress would stagnate (Aliogo, 2022);(Sama, 2017). This is why this research deemed it necessary to conduct an empirical study on women's empowerment and political participation in the Cross River South Senatorial District. This is in accordance with the declaration made at the fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing (1995), which advocates 30 per cent affirmative action for the participation of women in politics, and the National Gender Policy's (NGP) recommendation of 35 per cent affirmative action for Nigerian women in elective, political, and administrative positions (Oluyemi, 2019).

Chalaby remarked that half of the world's population are women, but currently, women only hold 23% of all seats in parliaments and senates globally (Chalaby, 2017). This assertion buttresses the fact that women are systematically underrepresented in decision-making processes shaping societies. This observation was recently affirmed by the current United Nations Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres (Guterres, 2020). He stated that "women's political representation in parliaments around the world stands at less than 25 per cent. At the highest levels, that drops to 9 per cent." (Remarks on United Nations International Women's Day. March 2019). Oluyemi posits that in Nigeria, women's participation in politics has remained at an average of 6.7 percent in elective and appointive positions, which is far below the Global Average of 22.5 percent, the Africa Regional Average of 23.4 percent, and the West African Sub Regional Average of 15 percent (Oluyemi, 2019). These indices prompted this research to question why women are underrepresented at all levels of government and have made little progress in attaining political power in legislative bodies after more than two and a half decades of adoption and domestication of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BDPFA). These and other questions form the wellspring of this study. This research will assess the structures, measures, and policies to promote women's empowerment and political participation in the Cross River South Senatorial District. It will also examine how women in the District have responded to the opportunities and challenges militating against their full participation in politics.

Other objectives of the research include: assessing the progress made by the Cross River South Senatorial District in implementing the framework for women's empowerment and participation in politics; and identifying the barriers to women's engagement in politics. To determine the present situation of women's engagement in the three levels of government (local, state, and national) and the government's efforts to promote women's empowerment and political participation in the Senatorial District of our research. To identify the most significant barriers preventing women from engaging in politics in our field of study. And last, to provide strategies for addressing the aforementioned challenges/obstacles.

The overuse has distorted the meaning of the term "empowerment." Activists use the phrase to mobilise around diverse agendas, while academics mention it in research

studies. Whom do they seek to “empower”, and what do they mean by “empowerment”? These concerns will arise when “empowerment” is applied to gender problems. According to Kosec, empowerment is tied to a society's norms, values, and beliefs; consequently, it may vary (Kosec et al., 2022).

The term “empowerment” means different things to different people. Most Nigerian politicians see empowerment as alleviating poverty, and the man on the street understands empowerment as gifts from politicians to win votes during an election. Rappaport defines empowerment as “a process in which people gain control over their lives, democratic participation in the affairs of their community, and a critical understanding of their environment.” On the other hand, Couto defines empowerment as (Rappaport, 1987);(Couto, 2010);

- a. A process,
- b. Which occurs in communities,
- c. It involves active participation, critical reflection, awareness and understanding,
- d. It also involves access to and control over important decisions and resources.

According to Maschietto, empowerment has roots in the Protestant Reformation, Quakerism, Jeffersonian democracy, capitalism, and the Black Power Movement (Maschietto, 2016). The study states that in the mid-1980s, women's empowerment developed to oppose patriarchy. According to Cornwall & Rivas, in the 1990s, the word shifted from communal to individual self-transformation (Cornwall & Rivas, 2015). According to Nasir & Halim, women's empowerment was promoted to state actors and governments during the 1995 Fourth World Conference in Beijing (Nasir & Halim, 2022). The signatories of the World Conference promised to promote women's empowerment globally. Their idea of women's empowerment emphasised three things:

- a. Sociopolitical process,
- b. Empowerment required power,
- c. The process encouraged power transfers between and among people and organisations.

These Core Principles of Empowerment Were Included in Women's Empowerment Literature

According to Kabeer, women's empowerment is the process by which women who have been denied the capacity to make strategic life decisions gain this ability (Kabeer, 2001). Ishrat views women's political engagement as a movement that allows them to participate in their government's decision-making and, therefore, their everyday lives and social welfare (Ishrat, 2014). It also includes actions in which women voice their thoughts on problems in their communities and nations, how they are governed, and how they participate in and influence choices that impact their lives. It also includes activities where women express their opinions on issues in their communities and countries, how they are governed and take part in and shape the decisions that affect their lives. Monteiro & Ferreira, Colombo, Einhorn, Kadwan & Weber, 1981, and many other

feminist theorists confirm that Europe is the model upon which feminist movements in many societies today are built (Monteiro & Ferreira, 2016);(Colombo, 1981);(Ozoya et al., 2017);(Kawan & Weber, 1982);(Einhorn, 1981). Judith Bennett, a feminist historian, avers that these movements were primarily aimed at combating discrimination against women and violations of their rights, as well as toppling the patriarchy, or what she called "Patriarchal Equilibrium," which was a key obstacle to women's liberation (Bennett, 2006).

According to Berger, women's activism started in Africa in the middle of the twentieth century as many African nations became independent (Berger, 2008). According to Dagunduro and Adenugba, women's empowerment in Nigeria can be attributed to the efforts of Fumilayo Kuti (1900–1978) and Margaret Ekpo (1924–2006) (Dagunduro & Adenugba, 2020). Both women contributed to the early awakening of women's rights in Nigeria to formal education, work, and political engagement. In recent years, advancing women's rights has gained pace as the United Nations has declared days for the celebration of women and incorporated women's rights and equality into their charter. It is unproductive to empower women economically without their participation in politics and exercising power in their communities and countries.

According to Orisadare, the absence of women in politics has recently been acknowledged as one of Nigeria's most significant impediments to economic progress (Orisadare, 2019). The study claimed that women's organisations are a strong foundation for grassroots politics, and a push for more women to engage in politics at the grassroots still faces many hurdles, making it difficult for them to utilise existing chances for economic growth. Thus, the women's organisations in Nigeria have not grasped the possibility of increased women's engagement in politics and women's empowerment.

Jacob believe that the prospects of Nigerian women in politics are bright as some of the hurdles listed above are already being eliminated (Jacob et al., 2012). However, a subtle but crucial social revolution is essential for women if they are to acquire the desired position in Nigerian politics. It says that the necessity to educate women and their female offspring, which is inevitably a source of political, economic, and social power, cannot be overstressed.

Leke observed that the Nigerian government has persistently displayed a lackadaisical attitude and a "let-my-wish-be-done" approach to women's issues and their political empowerment, which has been largely based on regime-type, personifying the interest and intention of the leader that uses them as add-ons without any democratic policy-making process towards their upliftment. The study contends that the Nigerian policy climate has not been democratised to involve more women in political engagement (Leke, 2015).

The literature on women's empowerment and political involvement in the Cross River South Senatorial District is scarce or nonexistent. This research only explores a few of the many works on women's empowerment. This study is crucial and relevant because it exposes the obstacles impeding women from active political involvement in the Cross River South Senatorial District and proposes remedies to these obstacles. This study is

significant because it will assist in sensitising and encouraging women to expand their political involvement in several government organisations.

This investigation was driven by Zimmerman's Empowerment Theory. He argues that empowerment theory is the process of giving marginalised people or groups the ability to exercise control and influence over their lives and decisions. He argued firmly that the empowerment thesis encompasses both methods and results. Empowering individuals involves aiding them in acquiring the skills necessary to become autonomous problem-solvers and decision-makers. Similarly, empowered outcomes relate to people's efforts to achieve more influence over their neighbourhood and the enhanced accessibility of community resources. The philosophy of empowerment ties people to the political environment. People need chances to actively engage in decision-making in their communities to exert power and influence (Zimmerman, 2000).

People are given the opportunity and resources necessary to demonstrate their abilities and operate autonomously when empowered. Women's political engagement, leadership, and basic contribution to society are contingent on the possibilities provided by the structures and programmes of political parties.

II. METHOD

The Research outlined in this study was executed through the empirical survey design; whereby some of the research questions and assumptions were subjected to empirical validation through a combination of structured questionnaires and personal interviews. This research was carried out in seven locations, the seven Local Government Areas that make up the Cross River South Senatorial District. The population of the study consisted of key women political and economic leaders and other individuals that were considered relevant to the study. This work also carried out a purposive sampling procedure. Primary attention was given to the Chairpersons of the designated Local Government Areas, and members of National Council of Women Society in the district and other affiliate organizations, relevant men and youths were interviewed to contribute their own insights into the problem of study. The structured questionnaire used in this research was validated and tested for validity through the split-half method, and the test and retest method was used to test the reliability of the instrument. These procedures ensured that the data obtained were credible and useful for the purpose of this research. A structured questionnaire was used to obtain data for analysis. The data obtained from our survey was subjected to both descriptive and inferential statistical analysis in order to confirm the hypotheses generated to guide the study (Adiyanta, 2019); (Efendi & Ibrahim, 2016).

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Data Result and Analysis

Table 1: Percentage distribution of retrieved and non-retrieved questionnaire

Questionnaire	No. of Questionnaires	Percentage
Non-retrieved	14	5%
Retrieved	245	95%
Total	259	100%

Table 1 indicates that out of the 259 questionnaires sent out, 14 which represented 5 % were not retrieved, while 245 which represented 95% were retrieved.

Table 2 : Percentage distribution of Respondents by Sex

Sex	No. of Questionnaires	Percentage
Male	115	47%
Female	130	53%
Total	254	100%

Table 2 shows that out of the 245 sampled population, male respondents were 115 representing 47 % while 130 representing 53 % were females.

Table 3 : Percentage distribution of Respondents by Age

Age	No of Respondents	Percentage
20 -30	61	25%
31- 40	84	34%
41 - above	100	41%

Table 3 shows that out of 245 respondents, 61 representing 25% were between the ages of 20-30, 84 respondents representing 34% were between the ages of 31-40, while the remaining 100 respondents which constituted 41% were 41 years and above.

Table 4: Percentage distribution of Respondents by Educational Qualification

Edu. Qualification	No of Respondents	Percentage
FSLC	44	18%
SSCE/GCE	49	20%
NCE/OND	66	27%
HND/BSC & above	86	35%
Total	245	100%

Table 4 indicates that out of 245 respondents, 44 represented by 18% were FSLC holders, 49 representing 20% were SSCE/GCE holders, while 66 representing 27% were OND/NCE holders, the remaining 86 respondents which represented 35% were holders of HND/BS.C and above, making a total of 100% of the population.

Table 5: Cross River South Senatorial District has not domesticated the ideals of women empowerment and participation in governance and national development

Response	Male	Female	Total	Percentage
Agree	90	97	187	76%
Disagree	20	26	46	19%

No Opinion	5	7	12	5%
Total	115	130	245	100%

Interpretation: Table 5 indicates that 187 (76%) respondents out of 245 agreed that CRSSD has not domesticated the ideals of women empowerment and participation in governance and national development. 46 (19%) disagreed, while 12 (5%) did not have any opinion.

Table 6: There are no existing structures/measures put in place by the state government to enhance women political participation in CRSSD

Response	Male	Female	Total	Percentage
Agree	77	86	163	66.6%
Disagree	26	33	59	24.0%
No Opinion	12	11	23	9.4%
Total	115	130	245	100%

Interpretation: Table 6 shows that 163 (66.6%) respondents out of 245 agreed that there are no existing structures/measures put in place by the state government to enhance women political participation in CRSSD, 59 (24.0%) disagreed while 23 (9.4%) did not have any idea.

Table 7: Women in CRSSD have not responded positively to the improved opportunities offered them for greater participation in politics

Response	Male	Female	Total	Percentage
Agree	76	73	149	61%
Disagree	30	44	74	31%
No Opinion	9	13	22	8%
Total	115	130	245	100%

Interpretation : Table 7 shows that 149 (61%) respondents out of 245 agreed that women in CRSSD have not responded positively to the improved opportunities offered them for greater participation in politics, 74 (31%) disagreed while 22 (8%) were undecided.

Table 8: Challenges affecting women's full participation in politics are many, but not insurmountable

Response	Male	Female	Total	Percentage
Agree	82	90	172	70%
Disagree	25	33	58	24%
No Opinion	8	7	15	6%
Total	115	130	245	100%

Interpretation: the table above shows that 172 (70%) agreed that the challenges affecting women's full participation in politics are many but not insurmountable, 58 (24%) disagreed while 15 (6%) were undecided.

Discussions of Result

After more than 25 years of many countries adopting the Beijing Declaration and Affirmative Action, gender-based prejudices and cultural norms continue to marginalise women in the political realm. Mrs. Blessing Obidegwu, Deputy Director of the Gender Division at INEC, stated: "Nigeria is a signatory to a number of regional and international

protocols and treaties pertaining to the protection of women's rights, including guarantees of access equality, especially in the realm of politics. Despite Nigeria's signature on each of these agreements, Nigerian women continue to be disadvantaged in all areas of activity, including government" (The Guardian, 22nd January 2020). There is an urgent need for members of society to comprehend the substantial economic and financial advantages associated with gender equality and increased female representation in decision-making positions. From this research findings it was noticed that CRSSD has not really domesticated the ideals of women empowerment and participation in governance and national development.

More findings revealed that not much has been done in terms of existing structures/measures on ground to promote women empowerment and political participation. Government should be more proactive and committed in advancing the cause of women and ensuring that, they participate in politics by implementing gender friendly policies. Basically there must be feasible, working existing structures/measures that are supposed to empower women and ensure their massive participation in politics. However another finding from the study showed that women in CRSSD have not responded positively to the improved opportunities offered them for greater participation in politics, though the opportunities are very few, due to the many challenges confronting them. A greater percentage of the respondents agreed that these challenges are surmountable if the government and all stake holders can encourage and create opportunities to ensure greater representation of women in politics. The findings of this study proved that women in CRSSD are grossly underrepresented at the three tiers of government. Currently there is no female from the area in the Senate and the Federal House of Representatives. At the State level, only one woman, representing Akpabuyo constituency was elected into the State House of Assembly. In the Local government elections, three women were elected as Chairpersons into Biase, Calabar South and Odukpani LGAs.

Table 9. Elective Positions occupied by women in Cross River South Senatorial District (CRSSD) 2022

Office	Seats Available	Men	Women
Senate	1	1	0
House of Representatives	3	3	0
CRS House Of Assembly	7	6	1
Local Government Council	7	4	3
Chairpersons in the CRSSD			

This table shows the abysmal level of women representation in political offices in CRSSD. There's still a lot to be done by the government to boost this low representation of women in parliaments.

Enhancers and Challenges

The 21st century is an era of innovations and advancements in science and technology. It is also a century with many challenges, one of which is how sustainable development can be achieved for all while addressing global climate change. Most of these challenges could be addressed by unleashing the untapped potential of women, as it is widely

believed that women's empowerment and political participation are intrinsically linked to the sustainable development of any society. Antonio Guterres declared that the 21st century must also be the century of women's equality and called on men everywhere to support women's rights (Guterres, 2020). He posited, "Just like slavery and colonialism were a stain on previous centuries, women's inequality should shame us all in the 21st." Although several efforts have been made to address women's underrepresentation in politics and decision-making positions in recent years, the progress has been slow, and the Beijing Declaration, which advocates 30% affirmative action for the participation of women in politics, has not been achieved.

The unequal representation of women in governance and decision-making positions is a significant obstacle to achieving gender equality in society. However, the Nigerian government has created awareness and developed some mechanisms that provide opportunities to increase the percentage of women in governance and decision-making positions. Some of these efforts are establishing a women's political empowerment office, the Nigerian Women Trust Fund; the Women Lobby Group; the Institution of INEC Gender Policy; the initiation of several interventions to actualize Affirmative Action; and the Nigerian Women Strategy Conference, etc. (Oluyemi, 2019). These efforts have not yielded many results because Nigeria is a patriarchal society, and male dominance is reflected in all political, economic, and social institutions. Nigerian Senators' recent rejection of women-related bills on March 1, 2022, reflected the country's continuing patriarchal and gender-based stereotype structures. With this negative action of the legislators, Nigerian women have again been denied the opportunity of inclusion and representation in governance and decision-making positions in their country. In other words, the Nigerian government is reluctant to implement bills that can improve women's political participation despite officially adopting the ideals of women's empowerment and political inclusion. The Governor of Rivers State, His Excellency Nyesom Wike, described the rejection of these bills as "a major setback for Nigerian democratic advancement" (Channels Television, 2022). Some of the women-related bills rejected were:

- a. A Bill to provide special seats for women in the National Assembly,
- b. A Bill to provide for affirmative action for women in political party administrations,
- c. The Bill was to allocate 35% of political positions based on appointment to women and create an additional 111 seats in the National Assembly and the state constituency assemblies (This Day. 31st March 2020).

Like most states in Nigeria, the Cross River State government has put in place measures to improve women's empowerment and political participation in the state. However, the government needs to take more significant and more determined strides to meet the required goal. Achieving the 35% affirmative action for women's empowerment and political participation is an onerous task. However, political will, determination, implementation of sound women's-related policies and a long-term commitment and support by the government and other stakeholders can make this noble venture

realizable. Some measures and structures can act as enhancers for rapid and effective growth of women's political participation in Cross River South Senatorial District.

1. Role of Government

Formulation and implementation of women-related policies. Educate and inform the legislators on the benefits of women inclusion in politics and decision making positions. Lobby the legislators if need be to pass bills that support political and social emancipation of women into law. Repeal laws that discriminate against women in politics and legally eliminate all forms of discrimination against women. Ensure that there are structures/measures (financial and other resources) in place to encourage and support women to participate fully in politics. Take a legal stand against violence on women in politics. Provide Training and Educational programmes on the rudiments of politics for women. The government should endeavour to meet the target of 30% set by the Beijing Platform for Action. The economic empowerment of women, along with education and access to relevant information will place women on the right path to political participation.

2. Role of the Political Parties

Political parties must ensure Affirmative Action for women in Political Party administration. The current male standard structure of Political Parties with equally male dominated positions and attitudes are frustrating to women. Moreover, women are usually not elected to positions of authority within party structures because of gender bias and patriarchy attitudes. Most of the time they are made Women Leaders. Also meetings of political parties are held at odd times, mostly at night and these conflict with Women's domestic responsibilities. Party leaders should ensure that women's needs and fair play are taken into consideration while putting political structures on ground and female candidates should enjoy full support of the party as their male counterparts.

3. Role of the family/Society

The family needs to overthrow patriarchy in our society. Parents have an important role to play on this issue, it is important to raise males and females with equal opportunities and rights, in the home. Women should be encouraged to be leaders from an early age. Hillary Clinton said "I do think that a woman's potential for leadership starts in the family, in the community, and there is evidence, at least in the USA, that the attitude of the father towards the daughter is particularly important. In my case my father was very encouraging of my education and ideas. He didn't have a set of preconceived stereotypes about what I should be like and how I should act. He also never treated me or my brothers any differently. My mother was also encouraging and pushed me to be confident, to stand up for myself, to assume little leadership positions within my neighborhood" (Gillard & Okonjo-Iweala, 2020). Change of attitude is also needed in the family, boys should be encourage to take part in domestic chores at home. Women in politics should not be seen as loose and wayward. Women participation in economic and political activities should be encouraged and valued by the family and society. Gender based stereotyped attitudes and norms against women in politics should be discouraged right from the home.

4. *Role of the Mass Media*

The role of Mass Media in women empowerment and political inclusion cannot be over emphasized. One of the main functions of the mass media is dissemination of information to the public. The press has a great influence on public opinions and can create awareness and educate the masses on prevailing issues in the society. Generally, the media does not adequately inform the public about the contributions, achievements and potentials of women in politics. There's need for the general public to be informed and sensitized on the importance of women in politics and the effects of their underrepresentation in governance.

5. *Role of the women*

After all said and done it still behoves on the women to 'take the bull by the horn', make themselves available for the opportunities that will be offered to them. If they continue to see politics as a dirty game and shy away from it, then not much will be achieved on this issue. The few women who are already in politics and positions of authority should invite female role models to sensitize and inspire others.

There is solid and relentless pushback against women in almost every society. Women are being marginalized, and there are still polarizing reactions to affirmative action today as in the past. Women's rights to participate in politics and decision-making are included in many international treaties and laws. However, unfortunately, women continue to be underrepresented in governance and face substantial barriers that make it extremely difficult for them to participate in politics. Some of the major obstacles are:

- a. lack of financial resources.
- b. Violence, discrimination, intimidation, and sexual harassment against women in politics.
- c. Lack of formal education, training and limited access to relevant information on politics.
- d. The perception of politics as a 'dirty' game is not a good career path for women.
- e. Patriarchy, traditional roles, gender-based stereotypes and norms.
- f. The male-dominated model of politics in Nigeria.
- g. The burden of domestic chores and family responsibilities discourages women from active political participation.

IV. CONCLUSION

Every eighth day of March, the world marks International Women's Day with conferences, symposia, workshops, and seminars. States and local government areas in Nigeria are not often left out. The theme for the year 2022 is "Gender equality for a sustainable tomorrow." However, progress towards gender equity and political participation for women remains elusive. This research shows that in contemporary Nigeria, the male gender still dominates and controls political structures and institutions

in most societies, and women are always relegated to the background. There is a need for urgent steps to address the low representation of women in politics and decision-making positions in the Cross River South Senatorial District. There is evidence that women's empowerment and increased political participation can be achieved through formulating and implementing women's-related policies. Likewise, passing laws that promote gender equality; advocating for affirmative action for women at all levels: in the Senate, House of Representatives, and state and local government, Training and educating women on the fundamentals of politics, as well as financially empowering women to make them credible members of political parties, are all important, not to mention the role of the media in educating and informing the public about the importance of women participating in politics, as well as debunking traditional and gender-based stereotypes and attitudes. By investing in women's political participation, the government is building a united, strong, and inclusive society where sustainable development can easily be achieved, paving the way for robust economies and healthy environments where peace and harmony will thrive.

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