



## Beyond Cheerleading: eGovernance, Political Communication and Political Behaviour of Nigerian Women

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**Abstract:** E-governance, which is the application of Information Communication Technology (ICT) in the public domain, has become an increasingly important vehicle for political communication. It allows people to select and choose the extent of their exposure to political information. Its potential for interactivity between people and sources, and its wealth of information are all thought to facilitate widespread political change. The use of e-governance as a tool has altered the flow of information throughout society and as a result, it has made a lot of impact on the political behaviour of the general public. However, in Nigeria, the accessibility of women to the application of information communication technology is limited compared to their male counterparts. This paper examines how e-governance can address the documented challenges facing Nigerian women such as low income, educational and sociocultural factors, among others, to improve their participation in political issues. The paper, which utilizes secondary sources of gathering information, explores how e-governance can help improve women's participation in Nigerian politics beyond being a voter, a cheer-leader or campaigners alone. It submits that, strategies for enhancing women's political participation must take into cognizance the use of e-governance for accessing relevant political information that minimizes their disadvantages in the electoral process.

**Keywords:** *E-governance, Political Participation, Political Communication, Political Behavior, Cheerleading*

### Introduction

Women's participation in politics and political communication can be enhanced through social networking, which can be referred to as e-governance. They seek power, equation and equitable distribution for themselves and that of the society as a whole. eGovernance, according to Sharma and Sardana (2007:21) is

the information and communication technology (ICT) which is making it's in – road and impact on everything like commerce, health, agriculture and governance which ease the process of communication. eGovernance is a democratic practice that applies to the process of government functioning to accomplish simple accountable,

speedy, responsive and transparent governance. This is referred to as eGovernance (electronic governance) Okwueze, (nd). It is the introduction of government websites and portals that give information services and facilitate government process for the governed, business and government itself. Henry (2007:139). Through government websites and portals, women can participate in decision that concern them and can give their own opinions via e-governance thereby minimizing women's disadvantage in the electoral process. Political participation is an important element in democracy. It is essential because it is a medium through which every citizens can participate in the electoral process of a nation. The influence of ICT has brought about extensive changes in the levels and style of political participation. Internet is the major medium that enhances political participation. Political issues are raised and discussed through social networking sites like Face book, You Tube, Twitter, Link-den and many more Binoj (2014:1).

However, there are some documented challenges like educational, economic and sociocultural factors among others that have hindered the smoothness of political communication thereby limiting the accessibility of women to ICT. This is the position in which most women are, in Nigeria, restricting them to participating as cheerleaders and voters alone most times in electoral process.

Therefore, in other to improve on women political participation in the electoral process in Nigeria, there is need to put into consideration the use of e – governance, which is the main focus of this paper. The paper is thus divided into three major topics, namely, a review of women political behaviour in Nigeria, e-governance and political communication in Nigeria and women political participation in Nigeria beyond the traditional cheerleading.

### **Conceptual Clarification**

**Governance:** The term governance needs to be understood before the conceptualization of e- governance. The origin of governance as a concept can be traced to ancient philosopher in their postulation, from Plato through Aristotle, St. Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, to African political thinkers such as Azikiwe, Awolowo Nyerere, Ibn Khaldum and many more (Isola & Nwogwugwu, 2012:30). The concept of “governance”, according to Fatile (2012:123) is as old as human civilization. It is the process of decision making and the process by which decisions are implemented or not implemented. The term “governance” can be used in several contexts such as corporate governance, international governance, national governance and local governance. It covers every institution and organization, from the family to the state. It has to do with exercise of political, economic and administrative authority to manage the affairs in the manner in which

power is exercised in the management of a country's economic and social resources for development (Fatile 2012: 123-124).

*eGovernance:* E-governance as a concept may not have a straight-jacket definition. For Rossel and Finger (2007) e-governance is the use of the technologies that help both government and the governed. It is the use of Information Communication Technology that can improve the ability of government to aggregate societal demands and to identify solutions. The Centre for African training and research in Administration and development (CAFRAD) defines e – governance as the application of ICTs to adopt a new conception and attitude of governing and managing where participation and efficiency are required of all the partners linked in a network” (Misuraca, 2007). The ‘partners linked’ can be referred to as both the governed and the government itself. It involves enhancing relationships between government to government, government to citizens, citizens to government, government to private sector and NGOs to government, using ICT. Therefore, it is a special tool for the enhancement of political communication.

**Information Communication Technology (ICT):** Information Communication Technology (ICT) refers to communication tools that have modernized, improved and eased exchange of ideas and information of various kinds between

and among people within or across distant boundaries. It is a generic name used to refer to a number of communication hardware adopted in ensuring instantaneous dissemination of information and social values across the globe (Tiamiyu, 2003). Similarly, it comprises a complex and heterogeneous set of goals, applications and services used to create, allocate, develop and transform information (Ojokoh, Zhang, Oluwadare and Akinsola, 2013). It is a delivery mechanism and communication device that is becoming more and more a part of our daily lives (Horie, 2003).

**Political Participation:** Political participation refers to any voluntary action successful or unsuccessful, organized or unorganized, episodic or continuous, employing legitimate or illegitimate methods intended to influence the choice of public politics, the administration of public affairs or the choice of political leaders at any level of government, local or national. Nwankwo (2009) argues further that political participation should cut across other aspects of political process. For most women, political participation is confined to voting and cheerleading which comes in form of chanting, singing and hailing, most times male counterpart during rally and campaigns. However, political participation goes beyond this. It includes all those activities in which the citizen engages in order to influence governance and decision-making of the country they belong.

## **Women's Political Participation and eGovernance in Nigeria**

Women's role in national development is an issue that cannot be overemphasized. The United Nations Declaration of 1997 stated that the total development of any country requires the maximum participation of women in all aspects and women have proved to be agents of change. In recent times, government of the nations in the world, international agencies, non – governmental organizations and other key policy makers have all emphasized the importance for women to adequately participate in the economy, government and overall growth of their countries (Chukwemeka and Eze, 2011).

Women's involvement in political actions, social projects or economic activities, processes of dialogue, critical reflections and community involvement are all fundamental leveraging tools for advancing women's equality and influencing policy outcome. Therefore, to nurture and support women's participation in Nigeria it will be necessary to establish a conducive environment, which in the context of e – governance characterized by state – sponsored policies that promote gender equality (McNutt, 2004:3).

Global institutions such as the G8's Digital Opportunities Task Force (DOT force) and the World Bank espouse agendas for connectivity and attachment that are premised on effectiveness. The DOT force's strategy incorporates a number of equalizing

measures designed to bring developing countries into the folds of the information economy. The desire to exploit these unexploited markets has led to an International move towards advertising ICTs as the portent for global competition while, the World Bank and the DOT force are obviously far more concerned with economic developments than social inequalities (McNutt, 2004: 14- 15).

The pomposity displayed in selling the neoliberal hegemony hijacks the language of inclusion and equality to promote the compulsory acceptance of the profitable ICTs sector in order to embrace the involvement of women in political issues. Despite all the pretences of altruism, the programmes adopted by these profit-driven groups are unlikely to increase women's point of access or promotes women's inclusion in the global information society unlike that of their male counterpart.

However, at the fourth world conference on women in 1995, participants reflected on the issues of ICTs and gender and the two topics were addressed in formal conference documents and in non-governmental forums (Hijab and Zambrano, 2008: 8). Likewise, at the World Summit of Information Society (WSIS) in 2003 and 2005, women explicitly addressed the issue of the use of ICTs for governance and their involvement in such forms of governance. To expand UNDP's contribution to e-governance programme, an extensive mapping was, at the end of 2005, completed

of all related programmes supported by the organization and its partners. The exercise uncovered and revealed 195 projects in 100 countries and revealed that the demand for support covers five key areas of UNDP's e-governance programmes: (1) access to ICTs (2) e-administration; (3) e-service delivery (4) access to information via ICTs; and (5) e-participation via ICTs network and networking (Hijab and Zambrano, 2008: 10). This shows that e-governance especially in the aspect of women's participation in decision making, is a critical issue that is not only national or local, but also a global concern.

Also, e-governance has been used in some countries of the World and has helped improved women's political participation. According to the International Knowledge Network of Women (iKNOW), around the world women politicians have been using different communication technologies in their political campaigns such as SMS, Blogs, Twitter, Mobile Phones among others. A very good example is that of the just concluded 2015 election in Nigeria, When a twitter conference was held, which was organised by *The Nigerian Women Trust Fund*, and supported by the *Department for International Development (DFID)* and *Voices4Change*, themed, "2014 Primaries: What the Numbers tell us," which sought to analyze the performance of women in the 2014 party primaries with an eye on the

2015 general elections and what this entailed for women's political participation in Nigeria. Among the 4 panelists present during the twitter conference was the KOWA party presidential candidate, Remi Sonaiya, a woman (Sogbesan, 2015). However, in Nigeria, few women are using ICT to carry out their political ambition while many are still left behind. Similarly, from North Africa, Fatima Sadiqi shares the experiences. She said,

I must say that women's groups and civil society organizations in North Africa are still relying on the use of fax and phone to disseminate info. Some of these groups are aware of the importance of newer technologies in promoting their ideas and, hence, often organize workshops or seminars to sensitize their members to the importance of e-campaigning, etc.

In addition, Sandrine Simon points out that particularly in Africa, women in urban areas are acquiring skills and awareness regarding the power of new communication technologies in politics. She however points out that these communication technologies need to be understood as all inclusive of both traditional and new media as the rural-urban divide will warrant the contextual use of different technologies and women politician's use of those different communication means.

Women's accessibility to participate in political issues in order to seek to so as to influence decision making via their participation can be improved beyond cheerleading with the use of ICT. Women's representation is important when it comes to creating the conditions and regulations that will enable women to maximize their possibilities of benefiting from ICT, and ensuring the responsibility of the institutions that are in authority for developing ICT policies. In order to ensure the maximization of benefit in the application of ICT.

However there is an under representation of women in all ICT decision-making structures at both the global and national levels, mainly because ICT is generally treated as a purely technical area (typically for male experts), where civil society viewpoints are given little or no space, rather than a political domain further compounding decision-making and control of resources for women (Trauth, Queensberry & Morgan, 2004).

### **Inaccessibility of Women to ICTs Compared to Men in Nigeria**

Women's inaccessibility to the utilization of ICT for women's development is a global phenomenon but it is more obvious in developing countries. Women in their search for enablement and societal recognition have embraced and accepted ICT as an instrument for their progression and empowerment. This was revealed in the previous two world women conferences in Nairobi, 1985

control, acquire and dispense power

and Beijing, 1995, where among several areas of concern, the role of the media. But unfortunately, despite the much emphasis placed on the use of ICTs in Nigeria, women are often underrepresented in terms of access and use (Sanda and Kurfi 2013). Nigeria as a developing country has lots of challenges when it comes to the use of e-governance, which includes the use of websites and portals. This is why some initiative studies presage the promises of e-governance as utopian since the benefits apply only to an elite few.

The gap between women and their male counterparts in accessing the application of ICT is still wide. Gallagher (1995) posits that issues relating to policymaking in technological fields often ignore the needs, requirements, and aspirations of women unless gender analysis is involved. Similarly, Okunna (2000) avers that despite the fact that this is the twenty-first century, tradition, culture, religion and other factors have continued to widen the disparity between Nigerian men and women at the expense of women. The reason for this is that income, education and skills, lack of infrastructure, urban-bias, and sociocultural and economic challenges among others are important social determinants of ICT access (Okwueze, nd).

Maritz (2008) stated that most Nigerians still only have access to the internet through internet cafes. It

was also revealed that the main problem with internet access in Nigeria is the high cost of access. Hence, poor, illiterate or semi – illiterate women may not be able to access the internet. The chronic lack of qualified staff and inadequate human resources training is another problem why e – governance cannot flourish in Nigeria when it comes to women’s involvement in electoral process using ICT as a tool for political communication. The problem hinges on the availability of human capacities that have technical skills, for installation, maintenance designing and implementation of ICT infrastructure. Therefore, there is need for government to show more commitment when it comes to issues that pertain to ICT training and implementation.

### **Way Forward**

eGovernance, the utilization of ICTs by both government and the governed in the electoral process in Nigeria and ensuring smoothness in political communication and influence political behavior of Nigerian women, is a very important tool that Nigerian women should consider in order to make their opinions about the decision of government on issues that concern them and the society at large. Since e-governance will ensure the smooth running of government in terms of accountability, transparency, freedom of speech, political participation to mention a few this vital tool must be embraced by both

government and the citizens and this will bring about gender equality when it comes to political issues in Nigeria.

Hence, women’s involvement in political issues will go beyond voting and cheerleading. Nigerian Women will as a result of this have a sense of belonging when it comes to the issue that has to do with politics. It is therefore recommended that, there is need for government to organize training workshops and teachings on how to use innovative tools which aims at active participation of women in politics to enhance their skills in anything that has to do with Information and Communication Technology. There is need for government to provide an increase in economic opportunity and promoting education for a girl child. In addition, to plan for capacity building through the use of mailing as a means of advertising programs to voters, campaigning more than before, via internet to gain political information and establish a direct relationship with both electorate and other candidates.

Finally, government should make effort to enhance easy access to internet facilities in each political constituency and should be free of charge. All these can be possible if government will take necessary steps to ensure the stability of power supply to make e-governance a reality and to facilitate political communication.

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