**BEING A LECTURE DELIVERED BY THE REGISTRAR, HAJIYA FATIMA BINTA ISIAKU MOHAMMED, *FIICAN*, *MNIM* ON “THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN PUBLIC SERVICE” ON THE OCCASION OF SSANU WOMEN’S WEEK HELD AT MAHMUD TUKUR THEATRE, OLD CAMPUS, ON THURSDAY, 23RD NOVEMBER, 2017**

**Introduction**

Mr. Vice Chancellor, Sir,

SSANU Chairman, Comrade Haruna Aliyu,

Other SSANU Officials,

Directors,

Deputy Registrars,

Comrade Fellow SSANU Women

My Colleagues,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

May I begin in the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful. It was in this same theatre, a couple of months ago, that SSANU invited me to deliver a lecture on “The Role of Non-Teaching Staff in the Administration of Nigerian Universities”. This time the topic is: “The Role of Women in Public Service”. There is no doubt that women have a role to play not only in public service, but also public administration, politics and nation building in general. While I was brainstorming on the topic given to me, I came to the conclusion that women’s role in nation building encompasses their role in public service and politics. Therefore, in presenting this paper I have delved considerably into the contribution of women in national development. I made a retrospective examination of the past, discussed the present and made suggestions of what I expect to see in the foreseeable future with regard to the role of women in national endeavour.

**Public Service**

In discussing the topic, it is important to ask the question ‘what is public service?’ Public service is a [service](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Service_(economics)) which is provided by [government](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Government) to people living within its jurisdiction, either directly (through the [public sector](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Public_sector)) or by financing provision of services. The term is associated with a social consensus (usually expressed through [democratic elections](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Democratic_election)) that certain services should be available to all, regardless of [income](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Income), [physical ability](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Physical_ability) or [mental acuity](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Intelligence), that is keenness of hearing, sight or intellect. Even where public services are neither publicly provided nor publicly financed, (for social and political reasons) they are usually subject to [regulation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Regulation) going beyond that applying to most [economic sectors](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Economic_sectors). [Public policy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Public_policy), when made in the public's interest and motivations, can provide public services. Examples of public services are the [fire brigade](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fire_brigade), [police](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Police), [air force](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Air_force), [paramedics](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paramedics), health care, transport, or the removal of waste which is organized by the government or an official body in order to benefit all the people in a particular society or community.

**Men and Women in Public Service**

Having said that, there is no arguing the fact that public service involves both men and women. I stand to be corrected that there is no society across the globe whose public or private sector is driven by only men or only women. If this is true, then I make so bold as to say that both genders have equal role to play not only in the public service, but also in politics, governance, public administration and nation building in general.

**Good Governance**

But before I explore the topic proper, it is pertinent to examine the concept of good governance, which is an integral part of public service. Indeed, public service without good governance is like a fish out of water.Good governance is an indeterminate term used in the [international development](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_development) literature to describe how public institutions conduct public affairs and manage public resources. [Governance](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Governance) is "the process of decision-making and the process by which decisions are implemented (or not implemented)". The term *governance* can apply to corporate, international, national, local governance or to the interactions between other sectors of society.

**Role of Women in Nation Building**

According to *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary*, the term “woman” is an adult female human being or female human in general, while “nation building”, based on my own understanding, is the contribution of both male and female citizens of a country or nation to provide adequate ideas or support in order to move their nation forward.

To all intents and purposes, the role of women in nation building cannot be overemphasised. Over the years, women have been relegated to the background on issues of development, especially in developing countries such as Nigeria. The reason may have been that the views of women are always sentimental. While women have contributed positively to the progress of humanity, this lecture will focus on the role played by women in the development of Nigerian politics.

Women have been playing leading roles in shaping our nation, and this dates back to the pre-colonial era. In the history of this country, we have read about women who played active part in the administrative system and business. Women, during the pre-colonial period, were allowed to participate in the administration of communities. For instance, the exploit of Iyalode (women leader) of the old Oyo Empire has remained the reference point on how political involvement of women can engender a free society. Not only did they shape the political system of the period, they also acted as mediators in inter-ethnic rivalry. This can be seen in the exploit of Moremi during the Ife-Modekeke war.

The advent of colonialism made women to disengage in political participation in the country. During that era, women’s role was limited to trading and other social activities, leaving out politics for the men. The colonial masters could be said to be chauvinistic in nature, having left out the local women in their indirect rule policy. That is not to say, however, that women did not participate in government employment.

Nowadays, the role of women in the public sector as well as in supporting the welfare of the family is gaining much more attention. The objective of this lecture is to determine the role of women in the public sector and its impact on the welfare of the family. In other words, this paper is about the role and extent of women involvement in national development process. The paper examines the contributions of women to national development using examples from the civil service. Indeed, today there are a number of women in different administrative capacity. My findings reveal that women dominate in teaching and nursing professions in the country and form more than 35% of workers in other professions. The future of the civil service, especially education and health in the country seems to depend on women. However, by a contribution of factors women could contribute more to national development if deliberate efforts are made to encourage them.

In the three arms of our government, for example, we have women making major contributions in moving Nigeria forward.  We have in the legislature women councillors and local government chairpersons, elected to lead the people. Also in the National Assembly we have elected women senators and women House of Representative members contributing in the lawmaking process. In the executive arm of government we have some ministers who are women. In the same vein there are women special advisers and special assistants to Mr. President. Likewise in the Judiciary we have women. Not long ago, the Chief Justice of the Federation was Justice Maryam Muktar Alooma. Of course, there are women justices at state and federal levels. In addition we have women lawyers, magistrates and others serving in various capacities in the judiciary. And looking at the civil service in general, we have women permanent secretaries, directors and top civil servants working hand in hand with men. Also in various ministries and local government councils women are appointed in various positions.

In various sectors of our economy we have women employed as Doctors and Nurses including auxiliary staff contributing to our health development. That is not all; we have women in our world bodies, e.g. WHO, UNESCO, UNDP, etc playing prominent roles.

In the education sector, we have had women Vice Chancellors, women Registrars, uncountable women Professors, Senior Lecturers, teachers, administrators, all contributing to educational development of the country as part of our effort in nation building.

Don’t forget that in the security set-up, we have women as army commanders, police officers, officers in SSS (State Security Service). We have women as Customs and Immigration officers, and so on. We also have women journalists serving in the mass media: television, radio, newspapers, magazines and other communication agencies. Also there are female workers in the private sector: banks, insurance companies and other agencies. Indeed, there is hardly any public sector where women’s presence is not felt.

**Women Who Contributed to National Development**

At this juncture, let us examine the role and extent of women involvement in national development process. We shall examine the contributions of women to national development using examples from the civil service. Indeed, there are a number of women in different administrative capacities. We cannot forget so soon the role played by sages like Mrs Margaret Ekpo, Mrs Janet Mokelu and others who were members of the Eastern House of Assembly in the First Republic. The late Mrs Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti was a force to reckon with in the politics of the Western Region. Hajiya Gambo Sawaba waged a fierce battle for the political and cultural emancipation of women in the North. These women made tremendous impact during the pre-independence era and surmounted so many obstacles and limitations, but their exploits still stand today as an unforgettable legacy.

It is in view of the aforementioned contribution of women in the socio-economic and political development of the country that millions of men and women around the world now support the call for gender equality, although there is much to be done, especially in developing countries like Nigeria. As a matter of fact, it has now become apparent that no appreciable development can be made at the local, national or international platform without recognizing women as key players. The nation, therefore, must continue to empower, promote and invest in girl-child education for a better society. I am a strong believer of the aphorism that when you educate a man, you have only educated an individual. On the other hand, when you educate a woman, you have succeeded in educating the entire nation.

Mr. Ban Ki-Moon, the former Secretary-General of the United Nations, was reported as saying: “When we empower women, we empower communities, nations and the entire human family.” To tell the truth, the impact of political involvement of women in public administration has left a patch in the path. We can confidently assert that women are not only loaded with valuable potentials, but also have the legal right to contribute to the development of their societies. I call on our governments – at both state and federal levels – to adequately provide for the position of women in their administrations and make amendments to the primitive and archaic policies that have placed women at the receiving end in spite of their education and intellectual capabilities.

**The Emergence of Women in Active Politics**

The coming of General Ibrahim Babangida’s regime brought the role of women in the country’s politics to the front burner. The office of the first lady was first institutionalized by Maryam Babangida. Other women who have made impact in the country’s politics include Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, the former Minister of Finance. Dr. Obi Ezekwesili also left an indelible mark in the history of Nigerian politics. The late Professor Dora Akunyili, former Minister of Information, also performed creditably when she was the Director-General of National Agency for Food, Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC). Indeed, she waged war against adulterated drug peddlers and dealers, starting in her home state of Anambra. Without a doubt, there are many other women in politics that have done very well and still performing excellently well. The news, which is common knowledge in the media that a former female Minister in the last administration has stolen billions of dollars, is very unfortunate. What she has done is a disgrace to womenfolk. Yes, we have to condemn it. Please do not be put off by the negative exploit of just a few. For every 12, as the saying goes, there is a Judas.

**Discrimination Against Women**

The place of women in any endeavour cannot be overemphasized, and given their enormous contributions to socioeconomic development, there can be no meaningful advancement where women are excluded. In Africa, the vulnerable conditions of women are more critical, given lingering gender inequalities, domestic violence, lack of social protection, among several other issues that exacerbate injustice and deprivation. These and many more limit their ability to reach their full potential. Nigeria is one of the countries where women have faced challenges and discrimination for reasons of their sex and wrongful perception that women belong to a lesser class than their male counterparts, a perception strengthened by traditional and cultural practices. Be that as it may, Nigeria has continued to develop and implement national strategies and plans for the advancement of women in leadership and managerial roles in the form of amending legislation, policy and institutional framework as it affects the full promotion and protection of the rights of women.

I must stress that there has been a paucity of research exploring how gender informs theory and practice in public administration which undermines the equitable representation of women in our society and precludes the integration of gender analysis into public sector practice and policies. The female endeavour in public administration from the perspective of female public administrators and academics requires a serious attention and concern. In other words, a**dequate number of women in public administration**in a predominantly male based public sector is fundamental to public administration and policy.  For example, how women administrators have been affected by male dominated labour markets, ethics and law, management, financial institutions, and public service is bothersome.

**Bridging the Gender Gap**

This paper is advocating the bridging of the gender gap in public administration theory and established practice by continuing the efforts of the female public administrators who began to unravel the inequity in our public organizations and the under representation of women in our society. To me, achieving a minimum of just 30% female representation in public service benefits a nation’s society and economy at large and is essential for solving this century’s problems.

Since the historic 1995 [Beijing Platform for Action](http://beijing20.unwomen.org/en/about), women have made notable advancements in safeguarding their human rights, ending workplace discrimination and improving their access to education. Yet when it comes to women’s political participation, the statistics remain staggering. According to the [Inter-Parliamentary Union](http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.htm) and [UN Women](http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/leadership-and-political-participation/facts-and-figures), less than 22% of national parliamentarians and 15% of government ministers are female. This type of under-representation disadvantages countries in a magnitude of ways and serves as a [hindrance](http://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2015/3/press-release-sluggish-progress-on-women-in-politics-will-hamper-development) to international development efforts carried out by national and multilateral institutions.

Achieving economic windfall in Nigeria’s battered economy, in my opinion, cannot be accomplished without women’s equal representation in public service. “Equal”, in this context, means at least 30% -- as I have proposed earlier. As more women enter public service they are able to advocate for the types of policies that impact a woman’s ability to enter the workforce, such as paid maternity leave and equal pay legislation.

**Addressing the Challenges**

Though recently women have become actively involved in the country’s politics, unlike before, they are still faced with some challenges that limit their chances and sometimes have some psychological effect that kills their morale. All the same the role of women can be reenergized and accorded popularity. The following suggestions will go a long way towards addressing some of the challenges faced by the womenfolk:

1. The Women in Public Service Project (WPSP) is a programme of the Global Women’s Leadership Initiative at the Wilson Centre which empowers the next generation of women around the world and mobilizes them on issues of critical importance in public service. Our women leaders, who are top professional in various endeavours, should come together to forge a common ground to rescue the vulnerable women in this male dominated society of ours.
2. While numerous mechanisms exist for ensuring women are entering the top-levels of public service decision-making positions – from national [quota systems](https://www.ndi.org/files/Electoral%20Gender%20Quota%20Systems%20and%20Implem_Europe.pdf) to anti-discriminatory laws   ̶ truly accomplishing 50×50 will require the full support of women and men around the world to encourage women to pursue the challenging, but rewarding goal of entering public service.
3. In this vein, women leaders will have to work hard to aggregate the existing data on women in public service to enable governments (state and federal) to gauge their progress on gender equality in public service. This will also serve as a diagnostic tool to highlight where women are absent from government sectors and, therefore, unable to contribute their unique skills and know-how to these national platforms.
4. They should also endeavour to create a clearinghouse of best practices so that women can access tools to enter public service.
5. Similarly, the women leaders should provide women with the independence to cultivate their own skills and qualifications for entering public office.
6. A crucial aspect of supporting these endeavours, in my opinion, is sharing the stories of female leaders who have confronted the odds and successfully navigated the corridors of public service to inspire those who choose to follow in their footsteps.

**Conclusion**

While there are clear economic and social advantages to having more women in the workforce and political office, one undeniable justification remains. If women constitute at least 50% of the world’s population, then 50% of public service positions should be held by women. When the composition of the public sector reflects that of its population, governments will be more responsive and aligned with the needs of its constituencies. This clear and undeniable fact is one of the justifying factors behind the [Women in Public Service Project](https://www.wilsoncenter.org/program/global-womens-leadership-initiative) (WPSP)’s mission of ensuring that 50% of public service leadership positions are filled by women by 2050. Achieving this “50×50” mission is essential to ensuring that we leverage the full potential of the world’s population to solve this century’s most dire problems. Issues from climate change, to nuclear non-proliferation, to global economic prosperity and stability, can all benefit from the enhanced problem-solving capabilities that result when you adopt inclusive governance structures.

The economic and societal benefits of achieving 50% female representation in public service by 2050 are not for women alone, but benefit a nation’s society and economy at large. As [reports](http://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2016/04/paying-women-equally-would-be-a-boon-for-everyone-else-too/477582/?utm_content=buffer273f3&utm_medium=social&utm_source=twitter.com&utm_campaign=buffer) have shown, investing in women has a distinct multiplier effect on a society. When women are empowered, they are able to provide better lives for their children; they are able to contribute to the national economy; and they are better able to stand beside men to solve the long-standing problems of our time. While numerous cultural and religious barriers still exist that prohibit women from fully contributing to our global society, the emergence of women as leaders does not need to subjugate the cultural and religious identities that so enrich our national landscapes. Men and women need to acknowledge that it is only through joint decision-making and cooperation can we emerge as an adaptable, prosperous, and thriving society that takes into account the well-being of all, and not just the few.

**Thank you for listening.**