



**UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA**

***POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN'S RIGHTS ORGANISATIONS  
IN DEMOCRATIC PRACTICE THROUGH LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY  
FOR VIOLENCE AGAINST PERSON PROHIBITION ACT IN NIGERIA***

**GAMBO MAIMUNA HAMMAWA**

**FEM 2018 32**



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By

**GAMBO MAIMUNA HAMMAWA**

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia,  
in Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

**May 2018**

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## **DEDICATION**

This thesis is dedicated to my parents for their wisdom and optimism and to all other members of my family for their generosity and vigour.



Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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**May 2018**

**Chairman : Murni Wan Mohd Nor, PhD**  
**Faculty : Human Ecology**

The evolvement of democracy in Nigeria encouraged political participation in Nigeria. Women right organisations (WROs) have exploited such opportunity to get their voice heard, but their freedom of expression remain repressed. This study explored the political participation of Women right organisations (WROs) in the democratic practice through legislative advocacy of Violence against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) Act in Nigeria. Specifically, the study explored reasons that prompted the participation of WROs and identified WROs activities . It also explored the strategies employed and efforts to overcome challenges in the legislative advocacy. The study utilised a qualitative case study approach and data were retrieved through in-depth interviews, photo elicitation, document reviews and observation methods. The findings of the study revealed among others prevalence in women right abuse, poor legal response and inconformity to international ratified protocols on women's rights protection as reasons for WROs participation. The result of the study also showed that WROs engaged in information enquiry and dissemination geared towards sensitisation of the general public on the issue of violence against women and by extension influence the government. These were accompanied with strategies such as unified coalition, maximising media opportunities and utilising policy moments employed to influence the policy makers and gain support from the populace. WROs made efforts to overcome challenges through incorporating development partners and collaboration with male champions and National Assembly administrators. However, the outcome of the political participation was unfavourable as WROs were challenged by patriarchal values of the policy makers. The study concluded that WROs were able to utilise their freedom of expression and association to influence the promulgation of the VAPP Act which is a considerable progress in Nigeria's political and legal development. Yet, they were faced with biases that deterred the VAPP Act from reflecting their complete goal. The findings offered theoretical and policy implications central to understanding the political participation of WROs in legislative advocacy of the VAPP Act in Nigeria.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Doktor Falsafah

**PENYERTAAN POLITIK ORGANISASI HAK ASASI WANITA DALAM  
AMALAN DEMOKRASI MELALUI PENYOKONGAN PERUNDANGAN  
TERHADAP AKTA LARANGAN KEGANASAN KE ATAS MANUSIA DI  
NIGERIA**

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Pengembangan demokrasi di Nigeria telah menggalakkan penyertaan politik di Nigeria. Justeru itu, Pertubuhan Hak Asasi Wanita (WROs) telah mengeksploitasi peluang tersebut bagi suara mereka didengari. Namun demikian kebebasan bersuara mereka terus ditindas. Kajian ini meneliti penyertaan politik organisasi hak wanita (WROs) di dalam amalan demokratik melalui advokasi undang-undang khususnya Akta Keganasan Terhadap Manusia (VAPP) di Nigeria. Kajian ini meneliti isu-isu yang mendorong penyertaan WROs dan mengenal pasti penglibatan WROs. Ia juga meneroka strategi dan usaha yang digunakan untuk mengatasi cabaran di dalam advokasi perundangan. Pendekatan yang di ambil di dalam kajian ini bersifat kualitatif dan data diperolehi melalui wawancara mendalam, penggunaan foto, ulasan dokumen dan kaedah pemerhatian. Penemuan kajian mendedahkan bahawa kelaziman pencabulan hak wanita, tindak balas undang-undang yang lemah dan ketidakpatuhan kepada protokol yang disahkan oleh pihak antarabangsa terhadap perlindungan hak wanita adalah sebagai sebab-sebab penyertaan ke dalam WROs. Hasil kajian juga menunjukkan bahawa WROs terlibat di dalam penyelidikan dan penyebaran maklumat yang disasarkan terhadap kepekaan masyarakat mengenai isu keganasan terhadap wanita dan pengaruh pemerintah ke atas isu tersebut. Ini disertai dengan strategi seperti penggabungan, memaksimumkan peluang media, penggunaan momen dasar bagi mempengaruhi pengubal dasar dan meraih sokongan dari penduduk. WROs berusaha untuk mengatasi cabaran melalui penglibatan rakan pembangunan, kerjasama daripada figura lelaki yang berpengaruh dan pentadbir Dewan Undangan Nasional. Namun demikian, hasil dari penyertaan politik ini tidak menyebelahi WROs kerana ia ditentang oleh nilai-nilai patriakal pengubal dasar. Kajian itu menyimpulkan bahawa WROs telah dapat memanfaatkan kebebasan bersuara dan kebersamaan bagi mempengaruhi penyebaran luas Akta VAPP. Ia merupakan

kemajuan yang besar di dalam pembangunan politik dan undang-undang Nigeria. Namun, mereka masih berhadapan dengan masalah berat sebelah yang menghalang Akta VAPP dari mencerminkan matlamat mereka. Penemuan ini menawarkan implikasi teoritikal dan dasar yang penting bagi memahami penyertaan politik WROs di dalam advokasi perundangan Akta VAPP di Nigeria.



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This thesis was submitted to the Senate of the Universiti Putra Malaysia and has been accepted as fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. The members of the Supervisory Committee were as follows:

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AAAC	African Anti-Abortion Coalition
ACHPR	African Charter on Human and people's rights
BBOG	Bring Back Our Girls
BLRW	Better Life for Rural Women
BPA	Beijing Platform for Action
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women
CIRDDOC	Civil Resource Development and Documentation Center Nigeria
CMT	Critical Mass Thesis
CSOs	Civil Society Organisations
D	Document
DFID	Directorate for International Development
FIDA	Federacion Internacional De Abogadas or International Federation of Women Lawyers
FEAP	Family Economic Advancement programme
FOMWAN	Federation of Muslim Women Association of Nigeria.
FRCN	Federal Radio Corporation Of Nigeria
GBV	Gender Based Violence
GTU	Gender Technical Unit
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
INEC	Independent National Electoral Commission
J4C	Justice for All
LACVAW	Legislative Advocacy Coalition on Violence against Women
NCWs	National Commission of Women's Societies

NHRC	National Human Rights Commission
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisations
OXFAM	Oxford Committee for Famine Relief
RHB	Reproductive Health Bill
RHV	Raise her Voice
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UN	United Nations
UNIFPA	United Nations population Fund
UNICEF	United Nation Children Fund
VAPP	Violence against Person and Prohibition Act
V4C	Voice for Change
WACOL	Women Aid Collective
WRAPA	Women's Rights Advancement Protection Alternative
WROs	Women Right Organisations

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a background of this study, statement of the research problem, the research questions and research objectives. In addition, the chapter discusses the significance of the study, the scope and limitation, definitions of key terms as well as the conceptual terms employed in the study. Finally, a summary of the chapter and structure of other chapters are presented

Democracy has spread across the globe over the last two centuries and is widely accepted and understood as a political system par excellence. This is connected to its institutional attributes of majority rule, maximum protection of civil and political liberties, political legitimacy, pluralism, freedom of engagement and absence of restraint (Plattner, 2010; Diamond & Morlino, 2004; Dahl, 2006). In addition, it supports and recognises popular sovereignty, political legitimacy and as such the citizens can hold and pressure governments to be accountable and responsive to the people's interest (Beetham, 2006; Diamond, 1997). Whether viewed from institutional or practical perspectives, human rights protection and political liberty are currently part of the prevailing practices that democracy supports. Nevertheless, inherent in these attributes are free citizens participation in the form of interaction. This implies that democracy is inconceivable without citizen's free participation.

Over the past decade, political analysts and scholars on citizen's participation in democratic systems have affirmed that political participation has a balancing effect. It has been asserted that the participation of citizens guarantees consensus and integration, combats inequality, strengthens the relationship between government and citizens, builds social trust and capital in the populace (Teorell, Mariano, & José Ramon, 2007). Realization of the above goal is imperative to the fulfilment of civic obligations and needs (Teorell, 2006; Verba, Schlozman, & Brandy, 1995), attainable through unrestrained actions and decision (Sen, 1999). In addition, "informed and unregimented development of values necessitates openness of communication and arguments of which political freedoms and civil rights are central" (Sen, 1999:152). Participation is about process and result, people need to feel that they have access to political participation. Therefore, *men and women* should have equal rights and opportunities to participate in the political process.

Political participation is globally recognised by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) 1948 Article 21 and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) Article 25. It states that *everyone* has the right to participate in the conduct of public affairs, directly or through chosen representatives (United Nations Human Right, 1976; United Nation, 1948). These articles have important implications

for reasoning that women like men have equal rights to participate in socio-cultural, economic and political practices across countries. Specific emphasis on women participation was echoed by the United Nations (UN) through the Beijing Platform for Action (BPA), which stated that “women’s equal participation in political life plays a pivotal role in advancing women’s rights (United Nation, 1995:Para181)By implication, the participation of the historically oppressed and marginalised group in decision-making is significant for a genuine democratic practices. Therefore, women need to be active to incorporate their perspectives at all levels of decision-making in order to accomplish the goals of equality, development and peace (United Nation Division for the Advancement of Women, 2005).While this holds important implications for enhancing essential global and national values in democracy, it matters a great deal to women generally considering the opportunity it affords for their direct intervention in addressing their problems.

Most countries are reported to have opened up the political system with the electoral mechanism of quota, to fast-track the incorporation of women into the mainstream of decision making at national legislatures. Studies on gender and politics in some countries such as Uganda, South Africa and Rwanda registered connection between the numerical strength of female parliamentarians and pro-women legislation (Wang, 2013; Franceschet & Piscopo, 2008; Powley & Pearson 2007).This is good development because it instils the commitment to women’s rights protection as an international and national indicator of good governance and social development (United Nations, 1995). However, the following challenges seem to contradict the said developments. First, it is reported that only a few countries have attained a numerical critical mass of thirty percent (30%) which is requisite for women to promote their rights (Inter Parliamentary Union, 2013). For this reason, legislative power still remains inaccessible to women in most countries (Inter Parliamentary Union, 2013). Second, most women parliamentarians are challenged by executive dominance, a strong patriarchal system and prevalence of socio-cultural stereotypes (Powley & Pearson, 2007). In this regard, the support of women’s rights organisations (WROs) is sought for to get strategic women’s issues onto government agenda (Devlin & Elgie, 2008; Powley & Pearson, 2007). Perhaps, it is the combination of these challenges which seem to provide some support for the conceptual premise that WROs have to increasingly demand legislative change (Powley, 2006).

Currently, studies outside Nigeria have documented that WROs have successfully been engaging in political participation to address women’s situations of discrimination and abuse. For instance, studies from Guatemala, Turkey and Canada on violence against women respectively revealed successful engagements of women’s organisation struggles against violence due to the absence of laws that protect women against violence:- as well as weakness and inadequacies in the law (England, 2014; Ozdemir, 2014; Sheehy, 1996). In a related development, varied activities such as training, public education, campaigns and dialogue are embarked upon to sensitise, mobilise and garner populace support around issues raised (Weldon, 2004; Howell, 2003). More often, such activities are also strategized through alliance, dialogue and use of media to influence the government (Blackwell, 2012; Kunkler, 2004).

Furthermore, women's organisations were able to overcome challenges faced in their struggles through utilising strategic partnerships and institution building (Costa, Sawyer, & Sharp, 2013). Women's organisations are aimed at protecting and simultaneously changing the condition of women especially through law reform.

In Nigeria, previous literature on the political participation of WROs prior to the 1999 democracy remain predominant on restriction, such literature reported the subordination of WROs by the military government to the grip of the state. For instance, the federal government established and funded a non-confrontational umbrella organisation (National Commission for Women's societies [NCWs]) that controls and constitutes a significant percentage of WROs in Nigeria (Seotan, 2013; Fagge, 2002; Tripp, 2001b; Mama, 1995). Furthermore, the NCWs, community base national programmes such as the Better life for Rural Women (BLRW) and Family Economic Advancement programme (FEAP) entrapped women's associations with token credit facilities but the initiators remain the primary beneficiaries (Soetan, 2013; Fagge, 2002; Ikelegbe, 2001). Women were taught vocational skills and served as entertainers of political figures at public functions and the aim of each organisation to transform women subordination and marginalisation through collaboration with the government were trivialised (Onayemi, 2007; Tripp, 2003, 2001b; Ikelegbe, 2001; Mama, 1995). The implication of these practices are that most women remained politically inexperienced and government dependent. WROs member(s) that acts contrarily are tagged "troublemakers", intimidated, brutalised and imprisoned by State security (Okome, 2013). Other women induced to participate in such programmes were exposed to spousal battering as a result of the masculinized culture which views politics as a males' domain and a threat for women participation (Okome, 2013). While in crises ridden societies, security forces use the power of the gun to rape, murder and repress women (Ekine, 2008). Perhaps, such militarism may have contributed to the widespread practice of violence, political and social insecurity which renders women vulnerable to assaults. Yet victims are expected neither to report nor seek for justice, those who act otherwise, suffer embarrassment (Nnadi, 2012).

Currently, studies on women in Nigeria's democracy equally place WROs participation as a theoretical rather than a practical right to free assembly and pursuit of interest, being that WROs are still faced with intimidation, violence and police brutality. For instance, it was reported that the River State Government in 2015 employed tear-gas to disperse women protesting against the electoral fraud in Port Harcourt (Demirel-Pegg & Pegg, 2015). More so, the gathering of women for Peace and Justice (Bring Back Our Girls [BBOG]) voicing concern over government inaction on the abduction of 250 school girls by the "Boko Haram militia" was disrupted by the security forces and later banned before it submitted the case of deprivation of freedom of expression and association and was acquitted by the court (Oladayo, Ayakpat, & Adisa, 2014). Few empirical studies on political participation, environment protection justice for women and advocacy for law reform on abortion have been conducted (Arum & Agagu, 2017; Shochat, 2014; Ekine, 2008; Oye-Adeniran, Long, & Adewole, 2004). Similarly restriction of WROs may lead to the



conclusion on these grounds that the participation of WROs is not promising in Nigeria's democracy. However, researchers have not treated the issue of WROs in legislative advocacy in Nigeria, "there is gross inadequacy on women associational participation in process and institutions" (Okome, 2013:140). The bulk of what exists on women participation focuses on participation of individual women in formal politics. This implies that most studies on women political participation are general in context despite emerging fresh perspectives.

Recent developments are evident in the pursuit and participation of autonomous, independent and heterogeneous WROs in the legislative law reform on violence against women otherwise known as Violence against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) Bill. Essentially, the struggle began in 2003 with the harmonisation and reinitiating of abandoned bills on violence against women by legislators, whereby WROs struggled and influenced its passage in 2015. These attempts have important implications in understanding the WROs' political participation especially against an unrecognised, ignored yet accepted attitude of violence against women (Htun & Weldon, 2012; Tripp, 2003 & Reichert, 1998). Currently, the Act is appraised as the most comprehensive law on violence in Nigeria (Onyemelukwe, 2016; Nwankwo, 2008). The issue of participation is not only in the outcome or valence of the ballot box, it is also about the procedure focusing on aspects such as the reasons that prompted participation, activities embarked by WROs, strategies employed in the advocacy and means adopted to overcome challenges. These are aspects that need to be explored to understand the political participation of the WROs in the legislative law reform of the VAPP Act.

Building from the above understanding, three main issues have been raised with regards to the participation of women in Nigeria's democratic process. Firstly, women issue is a globally acknowledged feature of the political landscape in contemporary liberal democracy (United Nations, 1995). Yet, women in Nigeria, let alone active WROs are an understudied population, studies on women organisations are often detailed descriptions rather than empirical (Okome, 2013; Soetan, 2013; Tripp, 2003, 2001b). The bulk of studies on women focused generally on individual women's formal participation in politics (Eme & Onuigbo, 2015; Eme, Onyishi, & Nwaoha, 2014; Okoronkwo-Chukwu, 2013; Omotola, 2007; Egbokare, 2007). Moreover, such researches are mostly dismissed as something of little relevance to the genuineness of ordinary women due to their vulnerability to the vagaries of political and social uncertainty (Adamu, 2005). Part of the reason could be the continued stigmatization assigned to women which leads to the conclusion that they have nothing to contribute to the on-going democratization process (Soetan, 2013). It is recommended that relevant stakeholders like women's movement should unite and struggle against women dispossession (Okome, 2013). Given the participation of WROs in the VAPP Act struggle, it was essentially thought that this could be contributory to understand the political participation of WROs in Nigeria's democracy.



Secondly, WROs were previously traditional in their activities and linked to the government. Recently however, they have transformed and widened the spectrum of activities such as struggling for women's rights against violence through law reform. The VAPP Act struggle is a product of the 14 years struggle of WROs and the first time such a struggle was embarked in Nigeria. Focus on this topic was strengthened by the observation that Africa's democracy is a mere replacement of single party authoritarianism with multi-party authoritarianism but the growing WROs participation in politics places them as challengers of the status quo (Fallon, 2008; Tripp, 2003). Therefore, it was essential to understand WROs new engagement, viewpoints and reason in the legislative struggle of the VAPP Act in Nigerian democratic settings.

Thirdly, there are both growing evidences of freedom and simultaneously disappointment in the restrictive participation of women in politics (Falade, 2014; Ijaiya, 2006). Yet, little is known about the participation of WROs in the VAPP Act pursued. It is a known practice that despite women's population in Nigeria as elsewhere, they are faced with several obstacles in the form of structural hurdles and discriminatory practices which makes decision making inaccessible to them. Yet, such ideas are either concealed by scholars or explained from the negative perspective (Ekundayo & Ama, 2014). So far, there has been little qualitative analysis of women's experiences on their struggles on law reforms in Nigeria. The focus of this topic is a promising way of documenting women's struggles and ideas in relation to law reform.

Taken together, it was expected that WROs would participate in Nigerian politics consistent to the present constitutionally guaranteed rights and within the ambit of democracy. However, undergirding this study is the liberal democratic theory of citizen participation which adopts a pluralist or group lens that was promoted among others by David Truman (1905) and Robert Dahl (2006, 1956). The theory postulates that "the existence of diverse, competitive interests in a complex political system is the base of democratic equilibrium and of the favourable development of public policy" (See Held 2006: 159). In other words, the participation of people especially in groups is an essential source for the protection of rights of diverse powerful groups seeking to enforce specific interests upon elected rulers. Put together, WROs are expected to freely participate in consistence to the constitutional guaranteed rights and within the ambit of democracy. However, the concern is that the participation of WROs is still challenged (Tripp, 2003). It is against this backdrop therefore, that this research employed a qualitative approach to explore the political participation of WROs in legislative advocacy on violence against women law reform in Nigeria.

### **1.1.1 General Background on WROs Development in Africa and Nigeria**

The historical development of African women's movements is understood within the confines of African tradition on one hand and colonial patriarchy and modern capitalist development on the other. Renowned women movement scholar in Nigeria argued that gender control and subjugation are integral to African culture but the experiences

of slavery, colonialism and imperialism exacerbated women condition (Aina, 1998). She further affirmed that the best means to understand women organizing is through the “historic epochs” of “pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial” (Aina, 1998:69). It is against this backdrop that this approach is similarly adopted in this study. A cursory consideration of the practices in pre-colonial Nigeria demonstrates that although it was stateless, there existed various groupings with distinct indigenous political system and culture. For instance, there were centralized and non- centralized institutions but activities were fulfilled to the advantage of the community where the entire citizens devoid of sex were active participant (Mayowa, 2014; Gudhlanga, 2013). This paved for the recognition of women legends such as Queen Amina of Zaria, Princess Moremi of Ile-Ife; Oba Orumpoto and Wuli Emotan (in Nigeria), Queen Awura Pokou of Ghana and Ivory Coast ( Soetan, 2013; Luka, 2011; Fallon, 2008). More so, consanguineous associations such as the Kono women in Sierra Leone, the kikuyu and Lelemama of Mombasa-Kenya, the Anlu of Cameroon were formed for mutual support (Chima & Nnaemeka, 2011; Fallon, 2008). Obviously, women had been free to participate in all societal activities and they contribute to societal progress without activism.

The dignity enjoyed by women during the pre-colonial era was greatly eroded during colonial era as a result of entrenched practices of slavery, exploitation of cheap labour and raw material into the political system. Accordingly, the system witnessed changes that suitably concur with the colonial interest. Consensus among scholars revealed that women like men suffered exploitation and oppression but women were worst hit due to the initiation of unethical practices of tax imposition, deprivation of girl-child education, adoption of export-oriented economy and monopoly of the agricultural sector by European companies (John Holt, United African Company [UAC.], Lever Brothers) which directly affected them (Kies, 2013; Okome, 2013; Bryce son, 2010; Fallon, 2008). These colonial experiences considerably discriminated against women, exposed them to violence and situated them in the private realm while public life was masculinized (Gudhalanga, 2013; Okome, 2013; Fallon, 2008). These situations were further compounded by political disenfranchisement and issuance of agricultural incentives such as loans, cash crops, innovations and technology know-how to only men who previously were less involved in agriculture (Johnson, 1982). The resultant effect of these development led to the emergence and resistance through protest of the Lagos Market Women Association [LMWA], Nigerian women’s party [NWP] and the Abeokuta Women’s Union [AWU] in 1930s at South-Western Nigeria (Olasupo, 2013; Johnson; 1982) and the Aba women riot of 1929 in South-Eastern Nigeria (Okome, 2013; French, 2008) and Federation of South African Women in South Africa (Hassim, 2007). In 1953, all women organisations in Nigeria merged to form the Federation of Nigerian Women Societies to press for expansion of women economic and social opportunities (Sani, 2000; International IDEA, 2000). In Nigeria as in all African countries, the anticipated change of reversing the system by women collective action had been unsuccessful but women have partly made distinct contribution and negotiations significant to promote their interest during the strive for independence (Kies, 2013; Sani, 2000). Colonialism amplified growth in WROs and served as a spring board for women struggle for liberation.

The post independent Africa is predominantly an interchange from military to civil rule. Under the military regime, constitutions were suspended and human rights constrained (Dada, 2013; Tripp, et al., 2009; Hon, 2004). In Nigeria as elsewhere in Africa, women's activism was dominated by 'First Lady' state-sponsored projects, WROs were co-opted into a state-run umbrella organisation and incorporated into state politics on the pretext of providing women with the necessary resources for development (Adamu, Para-Mallam, Ajala, & Lanre-Abass, 2010; Tripp, 2003). Though, WROs were heterogeneous, they lacked transformative agenda and depended on the State (Adamu et al., 2010, Tripp et al., 2009). However, women were able to pressure the government to establish a National Commission for Women in 1989 which further encourage networking among women (Adamu et al., 2010). The advent of democracy in late 1990s paved for a post-colonial civilian regimes in Africa accompanied with "freedom" that afforded WROs opportunity of participate in politics and struggle for their rights. For instance, WROs formed networks, gained independence in priorities and employ the constitution, international and regional protocols (of CEDAW and the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa) as instrument for promoting women's rights (Adamu et al., 2010; Tripp, Casimiro, Kwesiga, & Mungwa, 2000; Manuh, 2007; Abdullahi, 2007). However, while other WROs in Ghana, South Africa Uganda have visible effect on legislative and constitutional reforms (Hassim, 2006) attempt by those in Nigerian had been abortive (Adamu et al., 2010) except for the VAPP Act. This implies that despite the constitutionally granted associational autonomy, WROs are repressed in terms of contributing to the decision making process.

## 1.2 Statement of Problem

The political participation of WROs in legislative advocacy especially on strategic issues are mostly suppressed through the repression of WROs freedom of expression. For instance, from 1999-2004 the Campaign against Unwanted Pregnancy (CAUP) led an advocacy for reform on abortion law considering the growing rate of unsafe abortion. However, it was kicked against by policy makers (Oye-Adeniran et al., 2004). From 2005-2007, WROs embarked on legislative advocacy on domestication of CEDAW provisions (CEDAW Bill, 2005), Reproductive Health Bill (RHB), 2006 and the abolition of all forms of discrimination against women in Nigeria and other related matters Bill, 2006, considering legitimised violation of women right, harmful traditional and religious practices and the need to ensure gender equality and empowerment but all the Bills were dismissed by legislators as being sentimental and lacking merit (Okoye, Egboh & Chukwuemeka, 2012; Adamu & Para- Mallam; 2012; Adamu et al., 2010). The millennium and sustainable development goals afforded WROs to raise issue regarding gender equality. Thus in 2017, WROs made submission on Gender and Equality opportunity (GEO) Bill aimed at affording equal educational, political and employment opportunities for both sexes in Nigeria but it was rejected on grounds of being incompatible with the cultural and religious belief of Nigerians (Makinde, Onyemelukwe, Onigbanjo-Williams, Oyediran, & Odimegwu, 2017). The VAPP Bill is the only long pursued (2003 to 2014) Bill rejected by three Assemblies but transform to Act in 2015, aimed at protection against violence.

Prior to the current democracy, the participation of WROs were subordinated to the grip of the State through a State-run umbrella organisation established by the military to regulate and fund their activities (Tripp 2003 & 2001b). WROs lack autonomy in purpose and their concern were mainly focused on religion and domestic issues despite their agenda being directed towards the struggle for women's rights (Soetan, 2013; Okome, 2013; Ikelegbe, 2005, 2001; Tripp, 2001b). This practice of domination constrained women's visibility in the public domain except for government's course. In addition, deviant women were subjected and exposed to violence (Okome, 2013). With democracy, some of these control are still maintained. Recent developments revealed that even with the return to democracy in 1999, the political environment remain volatile and detrimental for political participation of women governance, due to repression (Demirel-Pegg & Pegg, 2015; Oladayo, Ayakpat, & Adisa, 2014; Akubor, 2011; Ekine, 2008). However, women emerged independent with autonomous agenda and activities, they have moved beyond practical (domestic and religious issues) to strategic issues (combating violence against women, struggle for Reproductive rights). They network and demand their rights in a way not evident during military regime, they challenge gender inequality and are taking advantages of new but limited political openings that occurred in the 1990s (Tripp, 2003, 2001b). Specifically, WROs participation and advocacy led to the emergence of the VAPP Act in 2015 (Nwankwo, 2008; Onyemelukwe, 2016).

Remarkably, while scholars have neglected to focus on such developments, it has raised exploratory questions such as what reasons motivated WROs participation in the legislative advocacy? What activities did WROs embarked upon? How did they employ their strategies? How did they overcome challenges faced in the advocacy struggle? Focusing on this aspect reveal insights on the nuances in the participation of WROs in the democratic process. It is in line with this development that this study explores the political participation of WROs in the legislative advocacy of the VAPP Act.

### **1.3 Research Questions**

This study explores the political participation of WROs in democratic practice of Nigeria through legislative advocacy of VAPP Act in Nigeria. The study is guided by the following specific research questions:

- 1 What reasons prompted the participation of WROs in the legislative advocacy of the VAPP Act?
- 2 What activities have WROs embarked upon in the legislative advocacy of the VAPP Act?
- 3 How did WROs employ their strategies in the legislative advocacy of the VAPP Act?
- 4 How have WROs overcome challenges encountered in the legislative advocacy of the VAPP Act?



#### **1.4 Research Objectives**

In line with the research questions, the research would be achieved through the following research objectives:

1. To explore reasons that prompted the participation of WROs in the legislative advocacy of the VAPP Act
2. To identify the activities embarked upon in the participation of WROs in the legislative advocacy of the VAPP Act.
3. To explore the strategies employed in the participation of WROs in the legislative advocacy of the VAPP Act.
4. To explore means adopted by WROs to overcome challenges encountered in the legislative advocacy of the VAPP Act?

#### **1.5 Significance of the Study**

In the field of political studies especially in the area of political participation, the finding of this study remains significant in the following ways. Firstly, the participation of WROs in legislative advocacy and specifically on the VAPP Act provides indigenous new knowledge in Nigeria's democratic practice in the aspect of struggle for law reform on violence against women. Similarly, gaining form the viewpoint of WROs in collective action as they relate in practical terms and reflect on their own social context and experiences, enrich the growing amount of literature on women political participation in Nigeria. This is significant considering the bulk of desk analytical and individual researches on women participation in Nigeria.

Liberal democratic theory is an American and European scholarship. The theory acknowledges group diversity, opinion and interest as imperative to the attainment of organisational goal and stabilising democracy. Using this framework in developing democratic environment (like Nigeria) where institutions of government and public decision-making are still evolving is of great importance as there is need to understand the practice of democracy in Nigeria especially from the perspective of collective action. Liberal democracy theory of the pluralist viewpoint uphold the participation of diverse groups while the state is placed as an umpire or a neutral body that balances relation among groups. However, the findings of this study revealed that the coalition was a vital asset that enabled WROs strategic participation. In addition, the state was bias and neutrality was not adhered to due to biases of legislators. This finding contrast the postulation of the liberal democracy theory, this probably could be as a result of the application of a theory in a developing country. This implies that the practices of democracy may not necessarily be uniform inspite its universal features.

Relevant to practice and policy making, the participation of WROs in legislative advocacy of the VAPP Act could address the relegation of women in general and WROs in particular. WROs struggle has influenced the nature of participation needed

by women to increase chances of improving on issues specific to themselves as women, mothers and inherent care givers. The participation of WROs project their ability to struggle over stigmatisation to raise a presumed private issue of violence to the public realm and to struggle over challenges encountered. This finding reveals that WROs are rich in strong ideas and have developed distinctive quality of confidence that can enhance Nigeria's democratic practice. Ideally, inclusive participation in decision making is vital to accelerate socio economic development, reduce gender inequality, build sustainable and vibrant democracy as political and policy debate are enriched with relevant information (Fapohunda, 2011; Falch, 2010). Consequently, this finding offers practical guidelines to other WROs on best practices to make influence and act amidst difficult situations. It can be argued therefore, that the contextual realities of women participation may add to our understanding that WROs are potential driving force and foundations to the accomplishment of women right.

In addition to practice and policy making, the findings of this study revealed that WROs demonstrate innovativeness and were resourceful in getting their voice heard, even though they were challenged by cultural biases from male legislators. The finding also unveiled how the WROs strengthen their vision to bring up a private issue unto the public realm. Ideally, democracy covers a wide range of fundamental practices like freedom, equality and liberty, given such evidence alongside the growing urge for inclusive governance and the ongoing discussion on political transformation aimed at mainstreaming gender equality in Nigerian electoral system (International IDEA, 2016), policy makers could liaise with WROs to get deeper and richer insight on women right and WROs experiences. This could enable the development of comprehensive policies on women right consistent to realities, significant to curb gender inequality especially in decision making body like the parliament. This is a needed contribution for a country like Nigeria in her struggle for a genuine democracy.

## **1.6 Scope and Limitations of the Study**

The scope of the study is to explore the political participation of WROs in the legislative advocacy of the VAPP Act. The study takes into cognisance all the commitments of WROs through the periods of 2003 to 2015 when the organisation began its struggle till the passage of the bill. The WROs exist in a coalition of 50 organisations, but only 10 were very functional out of which only six were used for this study. Particularly, informants of the study were members of the Women Right Advancement and Protection Alternative (WRAPA), Development Dynamic (DD), Project Alert, The International Federation of Women Lawyers or Federacion Internacional de Abogadas (FIDA) Abuja, Voice for Change (V4C), Nigerian Human Rights Commission and Ipas, who have at least five years of experience in the VAPP Act legislative advocacy struggle. These organisations make up the WROs or are otherwise referred to as the Legislative Advocacy coalition on Violence against women (LACVAW). From the purposively sampled WROs, ten informants constituting six (6) females and four (4) males were drawn for the study.

Several limitations of the study have been noted. For instance, data were collected only from WROs. Although, the legislators ought to have been part of the informant but they were inaccessible due to several reasons. First, in an underdeveloped country like Nigeria, getting access to senior government official like the legislators is fraught with difficulties and a cumbersome process of rescheduling meetings which was beyond the researcher's time and resources. Secondly, data for this study were collected in the remarkable year of 2015, the year predicted in 2006 by the United States of America Criminal Intelligence Agency (CIA) for Nigeria's disintegration. The prediction stated that Nigeria "is likely to splinter along tribal and sectarian lines if some inherent fault lines were not properly managed and controlled" (Edeh, 2015:77). Coincidentally, the year 2015 was an election year and political activities and transition programmes were marked with "turbulence, uncertainties and violence" (Falade, 2014: 17). In addition, the Boko Haram crisis in Northern Nigeria, the Niger Delta in the South, the activities of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), a separatist organisation in the East and the 2015 election all culminated to influence tight security throughout the year. These further compounded the possibility of accessing the legislators. However, the use of documentary review and other relevant information in the study has been beneficial to generate conclusions that supports the arguments that WROs were able to exercise their freedom of expression but were constrained by biases from the legislators which affected their purpose of participation in the VAPP Act struggle.

Furthermore, this research adopted a qualitative approach and purposive sampling which is inductive in nature as opposed to generalisation. This implies that findings of this study cannot be generalised unless with organisations or informants with similar characteristics as WROs but transferability can be ensured. Despite these limitations, this study is worthwhile as an academic effort that generates useful information significant to understand the participation of WROs in legislative advocacy in Nigeria.

## **1.7 Definition of Terms**

Based on the scope of this study, this subsection addresses definitions of key terms as shown below:

### **Democratic Practice**

Democratic practice denotes the means towards which political actor's use their rights. It is a practice in which individuals, "groups that are organised or spontaneous and institutional office holders" employ their rights to pursue their activities or interest (Fishman, 2011:236). Democratic practice is expressed in two forms, for the purpose of the political actors' interest and for country's interest. It is for the political actor interest when it embraces the use of rights and interaction within and outside formal institutions in pursuance of the actors' interest. For the country's interest, democratic practice is expressed in terms of "behaviours and outcome" such as policy making, public debate, "the conduct of campaigns and elections" (Fishman, 2011:236). Drèze

and Sen (2002) explained democratic practice from two concepts (democratic ideals and democratic institutions) which they perceive as central to understanding democratic practice. They clarified that democratic ideals are intrinsic tenets of democracy such as public accountability of leaders, freedom of expression, participation of the people, while the means of achieving democratic ideals are through democratic institutions and the process of realizing such ideals is democratic practice (Dreze & Sen, 2002).

Simply put, democracy embroils tenets such as citizens participation in decision-making, political equality, freedom, equality, transparency, preserving and promoting cohesion, upholding the dignity and fundamental rights of the individual (Ojo, 2013; Patterson 1998; International Parliamentary Union, 1998), the interaction between individuals or group with the State to exercise rights and influence interest is democratic practice. In the context of this research therefore, democratic practice denotes the use of rights such as freedom of expression and association in political participation of WROs in the legislative advocacy of the VAPP Act.

### **Political Participation**

Central to the attributes of democracy is participation of citizens in public affairs. Political participation is the involvement of citizens in “activity that has the intent or effect of influencing public action...by influencing the making of public policy....” (Verba et al., 1995:38). It is similarly a procedure for choosing priorities, setting goals and determining what resources to commit for goal accomplishment (Giniieniewicz, 2007). In the views of these authors, participation requires that the community are vested with the power of *contributing* to the decision-making process. Therefore such participation can manifest in partaking in informal efforts to resolve community problems, policy development, contacting policy-makers, voting and campaigning necessarily aimed towards making policy change. In the context of this study, political participation focuses on all undertakings related to WROs exercising their voice as in freedom of expression and actions in freedom of association to influence the passage of the VAPP bill.

### **Women’s Rights Organisations (WROs) in Legislative Advocacy**

WROs are a complex set of individuals (micro), informal groups (meso) and global organisations (macro) geared towards articulating women interests (Banaszak, 2008). WROs are movements that advocate for improvements in women’s status, monitor the effect of public and private sector activities on women and provide services on bodily struggles around gender violence, sexual choice, reproductive rights and women’s health (Turshen, 2007). WROs in legislative advocacy are organised individuals or groups engaged in a deliberate and strategic process intended to bring about a revision in social policy favourable for the protection of women’s rights. WRO is a constituency primarily built around the central goals of improving and advancing women’s values and interests. The participation of such groups in the political life of a country is an important step to practically ensure respect for women’s rights amongst



the populace. There cannot be true democracy unless citizens especially women are able to participate fully in the issues of their concern and take responsibility for their own lives (United Nations, 1995). In the context of this study, WROs focuses on groups of coalesced bodies constituting women and women defenders (males) with a central goal of pursuing and influencing law reform on violence against women.

### **Violence against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) Act**

Global public policy in preventing and ending violence against women purposefully recognizes women vulnerability and the power of the law as corrective tool (United Nation, 2010). Violence against women is defined by the United Nation Security Council as a human rights violation. All countries are to therefore create a domestic policy that reflects the UN model which provides tools in providing justice, protecting victims and holding perpetrators accountable. The VAPP Act is Nigeria's model framework to address all forms of violence against women, men and children in Nigeria. Nigeria's VAPP Act has partly fulfilled international criteria of being comprehensive, provision for implementation and evaluation, definitions of forms of violence, prevention, protection, support and rights of survivors, investigation, prosecution and sentencing (United Nation, 2010). However, rather than being a women protective legislation, it encompasses both men and women. In this study, VAPP Act is Nigeria's policy framework for combating violence against women.

### **1.8 Structure of Chapters**

This study is organised in five chapters. Chapter one is the introduction and it comprises the background of the study. In addition, the chapter provided the statement of problem, research objectives, research questions, significance of the study, scope and limitation of the study and definition of terms.

Chapter two reviews related literatures. It focused on the conceptualisations of political participation. Based on the research objectives, the review covered literature on the political participation of WROs and issue prompting women political participation, activities embarked upon by women in their participation in politics, strategies employed by WROs in political participation and the means of overcoming challenges in women political participation. The chapter also highlights on the liberal democracy theory, an underpinning in the study. Chapter three covers the methodology section. It outlines the research design and methods used to collect data for the study. Rationale for employing qualitative research and case study design were provided. There is also a description of the data collection procedures and analysis, research instrument, sample and sampling technique, trustworthiness of the finding in terms of reliability and validity of the study, ethical consideration and summary. Chapter four presents the findings and discussions. It provided a brief demographic profile of the informants, the main themes and subthemes of the study and subsequently the discussion. Chapter five presents the summary, implication and recommendation for further research.

## 1.9 Summary

This chapter provides a general description of the process involved in this study. Specifically, the background of the study, statement of problem, the research questions and objectives, scope of the study and definition of terms employed in the study were set out in chapter one. The next chapter provides an expansion of reviews of available literature in relation to the research questions.



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