insights

Breaking Cultural Barriers

Toba Caleb Akanmu and Bukky Shonibare

As the world celebrate Women's Month, it is essential to reflect on the persistent challenges hindering women from attaining key leadership positions across various sectors, including politics, government, and industries. While significant strides have been made in the fight for more inclusiveness of women in leadership, cultural practices, perceptions, and worldviews continue to pose formidable barriers, limiting the potential of countless capable women.

Our Womanity Index, **(Womanity Index (GBV) 2023 - Invictus Africa)***, at Invictus Africa provides a sobering snapshot of the challenges women face in achieving gender equality across different domains: Gender-Based Violence, Women's Health, Women's Economic Empowerment, Women's Political Representation, and Educational Parity. The 2023 edition of the Womanity Index focused on the GBV theme. The statistics provided in the edition,

*https://invictusafrica.org/womanityindex/

across the 36 states and the FCT in Nigeria, underscore the urgent need for concerted efforts to dismantle systemic barriers that hinder women's progress.

One glaring obstacle is the prevalence of gender-based violence, which not only inflicts physical and emotional trauma but also perpetuates a culture of fear and silence. In many societies, patriarchal norms condone or trivialize violence against women, making it difficult for survivors to seek justice and support.

Consider the case of Anike, a young, determined girl in Nigeria, who dreamt of becoming a Mechanical Engineer, but faced resistance from her family and community due to entrenched gender roles. Despite facing societal pressure and occasional harassment, if she did not persevere, and leveraged support from any opportunity available, her dream would be dashed.

Another concern is women's health, with limited access to healthcare services and persistent disparities in treatment and outcomes. Cultural taboos and stigmatization often deter women from seeking essential medical care, leading to preventable illnesses and maternal deaths. Some respondents to the Womanity Index research reported that many women who do not have access to post-GBV healthcare was due to negative cultural norms that women who have one ailment or the other should be separated from society with the belief of the women being possessed.

In the realm of politics and governance, women continue to be vastly underrepresented, reflecting deeply ingrained biases and discriminatory practices. Political systems dominated by men perpetuate power imbalances, sidelining women from decision-making processes and policy formulation. Evidence of this can be seen in the data we promoted through our "WRAPs Series." For instance, data from our Women's Representation in African Politics (WRAPs) series show that since 1999, despite the population of women almost equaling of men, women have got a meagre portion of representation in politics.

Women Representation in African Parliaments (WRAPs) Ranking
(Africa: Q4, 2022)

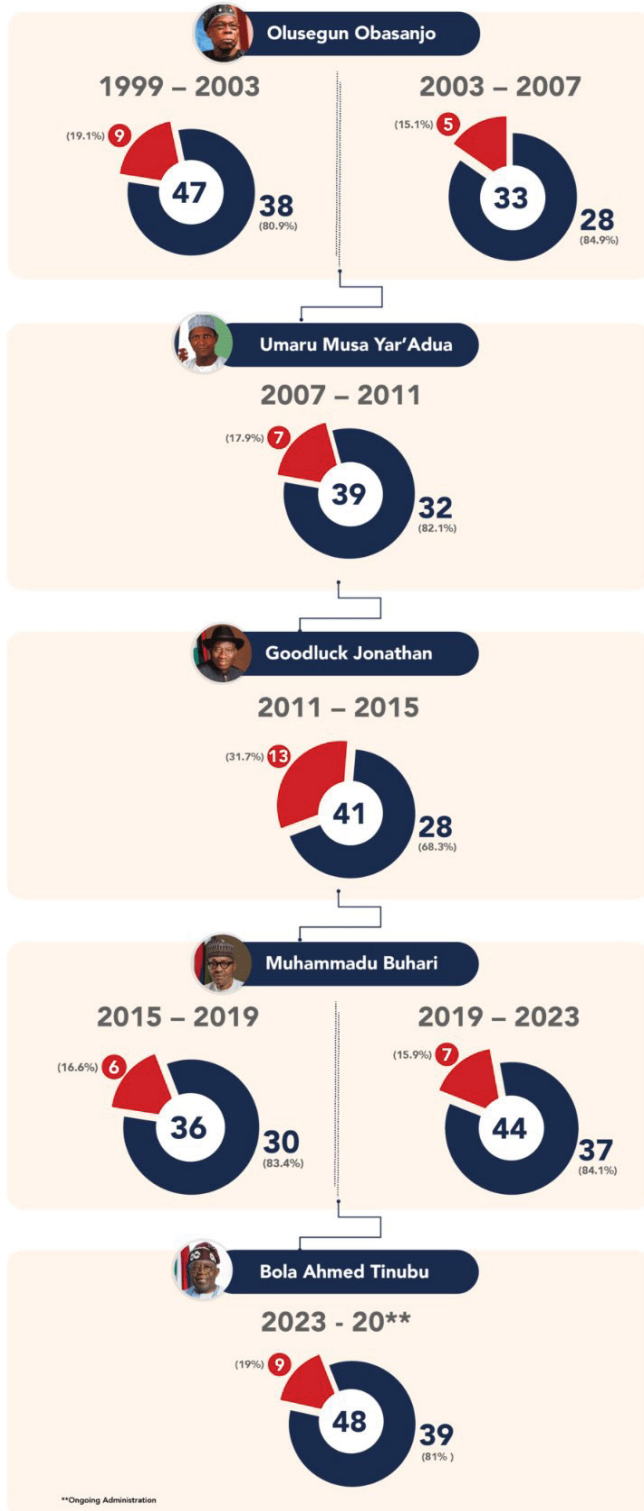| Rank	Country	Women Representation (%)		Average or Total %
		Lower Chamber or Unicameral Legislature	Upper Chamber	
1st	Rwanda	61.3%	34.6%	47.95%
2nd	Senegal	44.2%	-	44.20%
3rd	Mozambique	42.4%	-	42.40%
4th	South Africa	46.2%	37.0%	41.60%
5th	Burundi	38.2%	41.0%	39.60%
6th	Cabo Verde	38.9%	-	38.90%
7th	Zimbabwe	30.6%	44.2%	37.40%
8th	Tanzania	36.9%	-	36.90%
9th	Ethiopia	41.5%	30.6%	36.05%
10th	Uganda	33.8%	-	33.80%
11th	Angola	33.6%	-	33.60%
12th	South Sudan	32.4%	32.1%	32.25%
13th	Chad	31.2%	-	31.20%
14th	Sudan	30.5%	-	30.50%
15th	Cameroon	33.9%	26.0%	29.95%
16th	Guinea	29.6%	-	29.60%
17th	Namibia	44.2%	14.3%	29.25%
18th	Kenya	23.4%	31.8%	27.60%
19th	Eswatini	13.5%	40.0%	26.75%
20th	Mali	26.5%	-	26.50%
21st	Tunisia	26.3%	-	26.30%
22nd	Djibouti	26.2%	-	26.20%
23rd	Niger	25.9%	-	25.90%
24th	Seychelles	22.9%	-	22.90%
25th	Malawi	22.9%	-	22.90%
26th	Somalia	19.7%	25.9%	22.80%
27th	Lesotho	24.4%	21.2%	22.80%
28th	Eritrea	22.0%	-	22.00%
29th	Egypt	27.7%	13.3%	20.50%
30th	Mauritania	20.3%	-	20.30%
31st	Mauritius	20.0%	-	20.00%
32nd	Burkina Faso	19.7%	-	19.70%
33rd	Gabon	15.4%	23.9%	19.65%
34th	Equatorial Guinea	22.0%	16.7%	19.35%
35th	Togo	18.7%	-	18.70%
36th	Democratic Republic of Congo	12.8%	23.9%	18.35%
37th	Morocco	24.1%	12.5%	18.30%
38th	Cote d'Ivoire	14.2%	19.2%	16.70%
39th	Republic of Congo	14.6%	18.8%	16.70%
40th	Comoros	16.7%	-	16.70%
41st	Libya	16.5%	-	16.50%
42nd	Zambia	15.1%	-	15.10%
43rd	Madagascar	18.5%	11.1%	14.80%
44th	Ghana	14.6%	-	14.60%
45th	Sao Tome and Principe	14.6%	-	14.60%
46th	Guinea-Bissau	13.7%	-	13.70%
47th	Central African Republic (CAR)	12.9%	-	12.90%
48th	Sierra Leone	12.3%	-	12.30%
49th	Botswana	11.1%	-	11.10%
50th	Liberia	11.0%	-	11.00%
51st	The Gambia	8.6%	-	8.60%
52nd	Benin	7.4%	-	7.40%
53rd	Algeria	8.1%	4.3%	6.20%
54th	Nigeria	3.6%	7.3%	5.45%

Notes:
- The values are based on the most recent elections held in each country.
- The total value (%) is based on the average percentage for countries with bicameral legislatures, and the only percentage for countries with unicameral legislatures.
- Where more than one country score the same total %, the ranking is determined by the country with the most (or more) number of women. Where the figures still tally, the countries are ranked alphabetically.

InvictusAfrica   invictus.africa   www.invictus.ng   invictus AFRICA

Women's Representation in African Politics (WRAPs)

Nigeria: Women in Ministerial Positions (1999 – 2023)

● Male Ministers
● Female Ministers

Olusegun Obasanjo

1999 – 2003
(19.1%) 9
47
38 (80.9%)

2003 – 2007
(15.1%) 5
33
28 (84.9%)

Umaru Musa Yar'Adua

2007 – 2011
(17.9%) 7
39
32 (82.1%)

Goodluck Jonathan

2011 – 2015
(31.7%) 13
41
28 (68.3%)

Muhammadu Buhari

2015 – 2019
(16.6%) 6
36
30 (83.4%)

2019 – 2023
(15.9%) 7
44
37 (84.1%)

Bola Ahmed Tinubu

2023 - 20**
(19%) 9
48
39 (81%)

**Ongoing Administration

• The highest % of women's representation in Ministerial positions was in 2011, at 31.7%.
• The lowest % of women's representation in Ministerial positions was in 2003, at 15.1%
• 35% benchmark of women's representation is set in the National Gender Policy, 2021-2026.

Date Stamp: September 14, 2023

InvictusAfrica   invictus.africa   www.invictusafrica.org

invictus AFRICA

In addition, our WRAPs showed that only five countries in Africa, Rwanda, Senegal, South Africa, Namibia and Mozambique have faired well in terms of representation of women in politics, especially in the Parliaments.

However, there are inspiring stories of women who have defied cultural norms and societal expectations to rise to leadership positions. Take Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, the first female president of Liberia, who navigated entrenched patriarchal systems to lead her country through tumultuous times, earning global recognition for her visionary leadership.

Bearing in mind Ellen's emergence, one can argue that empowering women to overcome cultural barriers requires multifaceted approaches that address root causes and promote systemic change. One is **Education**. Education plays a crucial role in challenging stereotypes and fostering gender equality from a young age. Initiatives that promote girls' education and provide training in leadership and entrepreneurship empower women to assert their rights and pursue their aspirations.

Two is the **creation of inclusive policies.** Creating inclusive policies and legal frameworks is essential to dismantling structural barriers and promoting gender parity in leadership positions. Quota systems and affirmative action measures can help increase women's representation in political institutions and corporate boardrooms, ensuring

their voices are heard and their perspectives valued.

Furthermore, **collaborative efforts** are needed not only at the national level but also on a global scale to advance gender equality and empower women's leadership. International organizations, civil society groups, and governments must work together to prioritize women's rights and ensure equal opportunities for men and women to thrive.

In addition, in Africa, and specifically in Nigeria, **governments must go beyond rhetoric and take concrete actions to support women's empowerment.** This includes investing in healthcare infrastructure, enacting and enforcing laws to protect women from violence and discrimination, and promoting inclusive policies that enable women to participate fully in political and economic life.

Ultimately, empowering women is not about pitting genders against each other but about creating a more just and equitable society where everyone can fulfil their potential. As we celebrate this year's Women's Month, let us renew our commitment to breaking down cultural barriers and building a world where women's leadership is celebrated and embraced.

Together, we can create a future where every woman, regardless of cultural background or societal expectations, can thrive and lead with confidence and dignity.

insights is a publication of **invictus** AFRICA