

Role of Women in Political Participation in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The study investigates the role of women in political participation in Nigeria. Specifically, the study determines the extent of women participation in politics; identifies main obstacles that stand in the way of women's political participation and assesses the mechanisms that should be adopted in order to help women to get to decision-making positions in Nigeria. Purposive sampling technique was used to select 30 women from various sectors. A structured questionnaire was employed to collect data, while frequencies, simple percentages, mean, standard deviation and chi-square were used to analyze the data. Results indicate that women participation in politics is at low ebb, due to major obstacles such as cultural stereotype and patriarchal societal structures. Subsequently, the study recommends that the federal government should implement the recommendation of 30 percent seats in government as prescribed by the Beijing platform of action. Women's voice should be heard in the budget, establishment of women empowerment centres for Political purposes should be encouraged and governments at various levels should appoint women in the public offices on equal basis. This will dissolve any form of discrimination of women by men.

Keywords: Women, Politics, Patriarchal Society, Participation, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Globally, women constitute over half of the world's population and their contributions to socio-economic development cannot be underestimated. Women have been recognized as an asset to society in terms of mother, producer, home-manager and community organizer, socio-cultural and political activists (Oloyede,nd). According to Mounzer (2013), socio- political work of women is generally considered to be a corner stone of a woman civic engagement which is a key role in a woman's public and private life. Women's participation in politics has become today an urgent need adopted by humanitarian and women movements all over the world, which is associated with calling for the presence of women in decision making positions and fair representation in structures of local and international institutions (Mounzer, 2013).

Several arguments for a gender-balanced representation have been brought up including one of the ground pillars of democracy; equal right to participate in politics and in decision making processes (Held, 2010; Dahl, 2007). Positive measures such as convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women which was adopted by the UN in 1979, the international conference on women in Beijing in 1995 and quotas are increasingly being considered as effective strategies for redressing gender

imbalance in power relations, and have been adopted by more than 130 countries across the globe (Dahlerup 2014; IDEA 2013; Inter- Parliamentary Union 2013; Krook 2011). In spite of the clamor for women's political empowerment by international organizations, studies consistently show that in many parts of the world, women still linger on the fringes of political realm and their participation in government structures and the democratic process remains low (Nnaji, 2009).

In Nigeria, evidence had proved that women have for long been playing crucial role in the political life of the country, and they have contributed immensely to the socio-political system of the country, but over the years women have been relegated to the background especially in the issues of political representation. This is largely due to the fact that Nigerian politics is highly patriarchal in nature, with men often in the lead of the political affairs and women occupying insignificant roles.

Having recognized the political potentials of women, concerted efforts had been made by successful governments to bridge the gap of gender inequality by launching a number of socio-economic development programmes such as universal basic primary education, gender equality and women empowerment, child mortality, and quotas for women's participation in politics. Current government has remained committed to appointing women to federal and state council, and also as board members and chairpersons. Despite past efforts of government at integrating women into the political agenda, gender inequalities remain pervasive within most Nigerian spaces. The poor representation of women in politics implies that women in Nigeria are suffering from patriarchal bias. This indicates that women who constituted almost half of the Nigerian population are not allowed to exploit their potentials and this may cripple Nigeria from becoming a world leader in economy, politics, commerce and culture by 2030.

Pertinent questions are: What is the extent of the political participation of women in Nigeria? What are the main obstacles that stand in the way of women's political participation in Nigeria? And what are the mechanisms that should be adopted in order to help women to get to decision-making positions?

Research Objectives

The general objective of this study was to examine the role of women in political participation in Nigeria, The specific objectives were to;

- i. Determine the extent of the political participation of women in Nigeria
- ii. Identify main obstacles that stand in the way of women's political participation in Nigeria.
- iii. Assess the mechanisms that should be adopted in order to help women to get to decision-making positions.

Concept of Political Participation

Political participation may be defined as individual or collective action at the national or local level that supports or opposes state structures, authorities, and /or decisions regarding allocation of Public good (Mounzer, 2013). According to McClosky (2013), political participation is a voluntary activity by which members of a society share in the selection of rulers directly or indirectly, in the formation of public policy. The political participation involves voting, seeking information, discussing and proselytizing, attending meetings, contributing financially, and communicating with representatives. The more of 'active' forms of participation include formal enrollment in a party, canvassing and registering voters, speech writing and making, working on campaigns, and competing for public and party office." (McClosky 2013).

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Women Participation in Nigerian Politics

Nigerian women have been involved in politics since pre-colonial Bornu, when women played active roles in the administration of the state, complementing the roles played by their male counterparts, such as Queen BakwaTuruku of Zaria, Moremi of Ife, Emotan of Benin and Omu Okwei of Ossomari. In 1950s, women in Southern Nigeria were given the franchise. Three women were appointed into the House of Chiefs, namely Chief (Mrs) Olu Funmilayo Ransome Kuti (appointed into the Western Nigeria House of Chiefs); Chiefs (Mrs) Margaret Ekpo and Janet Mokelu (both appointed into the Eastern Nigeria House of Chiefs). Their contributions to socio-political development cannot be over emphasized. Subsequently, 1979 Nigerian constitution guaranteed the rights of women to participate in active politics, since then Nigerian women began to play very active roles. For example, in 1960, Mrs. Wuraola Esan from Western Nigeria became the first female member of the Federal Parliament. In 1961, Chief (Mrs) Margaret Ekpo also contested and won the election, became a member of the Eastern Nigeria House of Assembly till 1966 (Oloyede, nd, Nnaji, 2009; Agbalajobi, 2009). Also, Mrs. Janet Mokelu and Miss Ekpo, Young also contested the elections and won. They became members of the Eastern House of Assembly, while women in the Northern Nigeria were denied of their franchise even after independence until 1979.

During the Second Republic (1979-1983), a few Nigerian women won elections into the House of Representatives at the national level and also few women won elections into the State Houses of Assembly respectively. Chief (Mrs) Janet Akinrinade and MrsAdenike Ebun Oyagbola were appointed as Minister for Internal Affairs and Minister for National Planning respectively. In 1983, Ms Franca Afegbua became the only woman to be elected into the Senate. Also, very few women contested and won elections into the Local Government Councils during this period (Oloyede, nd).

According to Oloyede (nd), the third republic saw few women emerge as councilors and only one woman emerged as Chairperson of a Local Government Council in the Western part of the country.. Only two female Deputy Governors emerged, namely: Alhaja Sinatu Ojikutu of Lagos State and Mrs. Cecilia Ekpenyong of Cross River State. In the Senatorial election held in 1992, Mrs. Kofo Bucknor Akerele was the only woman who won a seat in the Senate. Very few women won election into the House of Representatives.

National Bureau of Statistic (2016) specifies the elective position of women from five administrations, between 1999 and 2015. President Obasanjo occupied the office of president, between 1999 and 2007; President Umaru Musa Yaradua (2007-2010), President Goodluck Jonathan (2010-2011; 2011-2015) and President Muhammadu Buhari (at present) as indicated in Table 1

Table 1: Representation of Women in Elective Positions from 1999 to 2015

Position	Vacancy	1999	2003	2007	2011	2015
		Election Women	Election Women	Election Women	Election Women	Election Women
President	1	0	0	0	0	0
Vice President	1	0	0	0	0	0
Governors	36	0	0	0	0	0
Deputy Governors	36	0	2	4	6	5
Senators	109	3	4	8	9	7
House of Representative	360	12	21	23	27	14
State National Assembly	990	12	38	52	27	27

It can be deduced that women were poorly represented in decision making. This implies that women who constituted almost half of the Nigerian population are not allowed to exploit their potentials and this may cripple Nigeria from becoming a world leader in economy, politics, commerce and culture by 2030.

The Main Obstacles that Stand in the Way of Women's Political Participation in Nigeria

Previous studies identified various obstacles that stand in the way of women's political participation in Nigeria as indicated in Table 2.

Table 2. Obstacles that Stand in the Way of Women's Political Participation in Nigeria

Area of challenges	Challenges	Source
Access to finance	Women generally appear to have little or no financial backing. This is working against them (women) in favour of man.	Tor and Terkula (2011)
Virility Deficiency Syndrome	Women cannot cope with “do-or-die” affairs syndrome in Nigeria politics	Agbalajobi (2009)
Illiteracy or low Level of Education:	A major social disadvantage for women in politics is mass illiteracy or low levels of education.	Ngara and Ayabam (2013)
Discriminatory customs and laws.	The customary practices of many contemporary societies are biased by subjugating women to men and undermining their self-esteem.	Agbalajobi (2009)
Patriarchal bias	Patriarchal cultural norms remain obscured and protected within traditional institutional structures held in abeyance, and most in sacredness.	Ngara and Ayabam (2013)
Political Violence	Political violence is another aspect that reduces women participation in Nigerian politics. Involvement of thugs before, during and after elections.	Kolawale et al., (2012)
Lack of Self-Confidence	Most women lack confidence in their own ability and capacity to lead. In most cases, they feel the game of politics is an exclusive reserve of men and dare not venture into it; and those who manage to venture are usually content with the back seat.	Ngara and Ayabam (2013)
Negative attitudes towards gender quotas	Lack of implementation of gender quotas has relegated women in Nigeria to back seat.	Ngara and Ayabam (2013)

Mechanisms for increasing women’s Political Participation in Nigeria

Studies have suggested various mechanisms for increasing women’s Political Participation in developed and developing countries. For instance, Nnaji (2009) argues that empowering women to have a voice in the budget, women access to education, capital, labour, entrepreneurial skills, building chains of solidarity network and targeting young women are the major strategies for increasing women’s Political Participation in Nigeria. National Gender Policy (2006) asserts that establishing accountability towards women in different constituencies, exchanging information on women’s experience in identifying the conditions necessary to create sustainable linkages among different governance actors and dialogue among all the actors to increase the impact of women’s political participation.

World Bank Report (2001) also avers that the implementation of the Affirmative Action in countries like Nigeria and many others suggests that political reservation can be effective in increasing women’s political participation. According to a UNDP report (2005), there is need for government to develop career advancement programmes which will include career planning, tracking, monitoring, coaching, training and retraining for women of all ages.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design: Descriptive survey is adopted for this study. Descriptive survey is a method of collecting information by interviewing or administering a questionnaire to a sample of individuals (Orodho, 2003). It can be used when collecting information about peoples’ attitudes, opinions, habits or any of the variety of educational or social issues (Orodho & Kombo, 2002).

Sampling Technique and Sample Size: Purposive sampling technique was used to select 5 women Lawyers, 5 Lecturers, 5 Doctors, 5 Politicians, 5 Journalists, and 5 Business women from Osogbo metropolis, totaling 30 women as a sample for the study.

Research Instruments: The instruments for the study were in line with the qualitative and quantitative data collection tools; these included the use of a questionnaire. According to Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) questionnaires are used to obtain important information about the population. To succeed in getting the expected data, closed and open ended questions were designed in line with the research objectives.

Reliability and validities of instruments: Reliability and content validities of the research instrument was determined by making use of a test - retest method and experts respectively. Method of Data Analysis: Percentage, frequencies, mean, standard deviation and chi-square

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Extent of the Political Participation of Women in Nigeria

Table 3: Extent to which women participate in politics

	Frequency	Percentage %
Great extent	2	6.6
Moderate extent	4	13.3
Low extent	24	80.1
Total	30	100

The study seeks to determine the extent to which women participate in politics. From the findings 6.6% of the respondents indicate to a great extent, 13.3% of the respondents indicate to a moderate extent whereas 80.1 % of the respondents indicate to a low extent. This implies that women in Nigeria have been deprived of their rights to exploit their potentials. The study is consistent with Ofong (2002) that women do not enjoy their full political rights as their male counterparts in Nigeria. Also available statistics reveal that women’s overall political representation in government is less than 7 percent (Agbalajobi, 2009). This implies that women in Nigeria have not still attained the recommended 30 percent seats in government as prescribed by the Beijing platform of Action to which Nigeria subscribes.

Table 4: Obstacles Facing Women in Participating in Politics

Statement	Mean	S.D	Rank
Cultural stereotype	3.9211	1.2203	1 st
Traditional practices	2.3772	.88638	5 th
Negative attitudes towards gender quotas	2.4211	1.1741	4 th
Patriarchal societal structures	3.5965	1.3679	2 nd
Access to finance	2.1501	1.1709	8 th
Lack of Self-Confidence	2.2703	0.4136	7 th
Sexual harassment	2.1035	0.3808	9 th
Illiteracy or low Level of Education	1.9123	0.7591	10 th
Discriminatory customs and laws.	2.8596	1.2821	3 rd
Political violence	2.3246	1.2229	6 th

It can be deduced from Table 4 that majority of respondents agreed that cultural stereotype is a major obstacle facing women in participating in politics in Nigeria with the highest mean of 3.9211 followed by

patriarchal societal structures (Mean = 3.5965), discriminatory customs and laws (Mean = 2.8596), negative attitudes towards gender quotas (Mean = 2.4211), traditional practices (Mean = 2.3772), political violence (Mean = 2.3246), lack of self-confidence (Mean = 2.2703), access to finance (Mean = 2.1501), sexual harassment (Mean = 2.1035) while illiteracy or low level of education was rated lowest among the challenges facing women in participating in politics. This implies that cultural stereotype and patriarchal societal structures have been the major hindrances to women participation in politics. The study is in agreement with work of Ogbogu (2012) who found that patriarchal attitude is major hindrance to women's participation in politics and governance. In another study, Agbalajobi (2009) found that cultural stereotype, abuse of religion, traditional practices and patriarchal societal structures are major obstacles facing women in participating in politics.

Table 5: Mean Response Scores on the perceived mechanisms that should be adopted in order to help women to get to decision-making positions.

Statement	Mean	SD	Chi-Square	
Implementation of gender equality	3.1559	.86452	726.016 P = 0.000	Accepted
Girls' education inclusion	3.3221	.76989	692.96 P=0.000	Accepted
Implementation of recommended 30 percent seats in government as prescribed by the Beijing platform of Action.	3.3279	.71987	727.013 P=0.000	Accepted
Establishment of women empowerment centres for Political purposes.	3.1529	.84785	577.265 P=0.000	Accepted
Changing the negative perception of political women	3.1471	.87789	529.456 P=0.000	Accepted
Allowing women a voice in the budget	3.1515	.88632	548.338 P=0.000	Accepted
Family governance, Political party and electoral system Reforms	3.2074	.85964	792.625 P=0.000	Accepted

Table 5 reveals that respondents agreed that the above listed items are perceived mechanisms that should be adopted in order to help women to get to decision-making positions with the Chi Square values of 726.016, 692.96, 727.013, 577.265, 548.338, 529.456 and 792.625 respectively. This implies that women inclusion in politics can only be encouraged if the above listed items are fully implemented in Nigeria. The finding is in line with previous studies (Nnaji, 2009; National Gender Policy, 2006; World Bank Report, 2001; UNDP report, 2005).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study investigates the role of women in politics' participation in Nigeria. Specifically, the study determines the extent of the political participation of women identifies main obstacles that stand in the way of women's political participation and assesses the mechanisms that should be adopted in order to help women to get to decision-making positions in Nigeria. The study concludes that women participation in politics is at low ebb, due to major obstacles such as cultural stereotype and patriarchal societal structures. Subsequently, the study recommends that the federal government should implement the recommendation of 30 percent seats in government as prescribed by the Beijing platform of action, women's voice should be heard in the budget, establishment of women empowerment centres for Political purposes should be encouraged and governments at various levels should appoint women in the public offices on equal basis. This will dissolve any form of discrimination of women by men.

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