



IGBO LEADERSHIP AND THE GENDER RIGHTS DIMENSION: ANAMBRA STATE IN FOCUS

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ABSTRACT

The paper observes that despite the UN resolution on 35% Affirmative action plan, Nigerian women generally and Igbo women in particular still face a legion of institutionalized marginalization and relegation to the background in Nigerian political elections and appointments. It dissects the progress made by women in political leadership at both federal and state levels with particular focus on Anambra state. The paper observes that the Nigerian government at the federal level has fulfilled its promise of 35 percent appointment of women in key political government positions, however, most of the state governments, (Anambra state in particular) are yet to achieve this feat, from available statistical data. The paper further dissects the factors that have hindered Nigerian women generally and Igbo women in particular from making giant strides in Nigerian politics and leadership. The paper concludes by recommending inter-alia the full implementation of UN affirmative plan in Anambra state, in view of the fact that the few women who have been given the opportunity to serve have excelled and carved a niche for themselves in Nigerian political scene.

Keywords: Igbo women, Nigeria, politics, leadership, participation

INTRODUCTION

2014 marks 15 years, Nigeria embraced democracy, and within this period, Nigerian women have encountered a galaxy of problems or obstacles while venturing into politics and leadership. Women in Nigeria are faced by deeply entrenched large scale gender discrimination from the men folk, both in voting for candidate and in allocation of political offices. This paper aims at evaluating how women have fared in political elections and appointments both at federal and state levels within these 15 years of democratic dispensation in Nigeria, with particular reference to Anambra state. In this discourse, many questions are bound to agitate ones mind, they include inter-alia; firstly, has Nigerian government both at the federal and state levels fully complied with the UN 35% affirmation action plan, in its political appointments? Secondly, can anyone argue convincingly that our social, political, economic, educational and cultural environments have offered women a level playing ground in Nigerian political space? Thirdly, can one assert affirmatively that Nigeria's brand of democracy has enhanced the opportunities available to women to engage in politics? Finally, one could go further in this enquiry by asking; what are the factors that have exacerbated the seeming abysmal level of participation of Nigerian women in governance especially at the state level?

BRIEF HISTORY OF WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN POLITICAL LEADERSHIP IN NIGERIA

African women generally and Nigerian women in particular have been relegated to the background in consequence of our cultural background, which is patriarchal in nature and determines gender power structure in favour of men (Ifemeje, 2012). Our culture accords little or no rights at all to women. Despite

the Constitutional provisions in Nigeria prohibiting gender discrimination (Section 42), women are still often discriminated against in virtually all sectors of the society. However, in spite of all these glaring discriminations, very few women in Nigeria who have found their way into political offices have over the years made **giant strides and have contributed in no small measure in shaping the political system of the nation** (Ganyok 2003).

(i) Nigerian Women and Leadership Role in Pre-independence Era

Legends such as Queen Amina of Zaria, Moremi of Ile-Ife, Emotan and Queen Idia of Benin kingdom and women of Aba who protested against imposition of tax on them in 1929, all played important roles in their local communities. Queen Amina of Zaria, even in a male dominated society like the Hausa land of her time became a queen in a kingdom founded by her mother. She led her people to war. Moremi of Ile-Ife was also a powerful female leader in Ile-Ife. Titles like “Iyalode or Iya-loja” in Yoruba land were presented for fearless and outspoken women leaders in their immediate communities.

(ii) Leadership Role of Women in Modern Nigeria

In modern era, late Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti the mother of Fela Anikulapo Kuti stood out as a strong woman activist in her days. She was a teacher and a politician. In 1949 she led a protest against the native authorities. She single handedly accused the Alake of Egbaland, Oba Ademola II of abuse of authority; this eventually forced the Alake to abdicate his throne.

In spite of that, women generally across the country in the 1950s only succeeded in creating a small impact in Nigeria leadership. In 1950s three Nigerian women, Chiefs Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti, Margret Ekpo and Janet Moku were appointed into Western Nigeria House of Chiefs and Eastern Nigeria House of Chiefs respectively. No woman could achieve such feat in the Northern House of Chiefs at that time. It would be recalled that it was only in the 1950s women in the Southern Nigeria were given voting rights. This obviously facilitated the appointment of 3 women into the House of Chiefs. At this time (1950s) women in the North were not permitted to vote, hence despite the political activism of a woman like Gambo Sawaba, she could not vote or be voted, therefore, unlike her contemporaries in the West or East, there was no vent for her activism. Consequently, she could not represent women through any political platform in the North. Despite the difficulties encountered by women in politics in this era, they continued with their political ambition, contributing greatly to the political and national development as much as they could.

During the Second Republic (1979-1983), Nigeria experienced further progress as a few Nigerian women won elections into the House Representatives at national level from their communities. Some of the women were Mrs. J.C Eze of the Nigerian Peoples Party (NPP), Mrs. Nnaji Abo of NPP and Mrs. Abiola Babatope of Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) who represented Mushin Central II Lagos State. However, only a few women were able to win elections into the various State Houses of Assembly at that time. During this period under discourse only two women were appointed Federal Ministers. They were Chief Janet Akinrinade, (Minister of Internal Affairs) and Mrs. Adenike Egun Oyagbola, Minister of National Planning, Mrs. Francesca Yetunde Emmanuel was the only female Permanent Secretary. In 1983, Ms Franca Afegbua became the first woman to be elected into the Senate.

With the return of military rule in December 1983, the Buhari led-administration directed that at least one woman should be appointed a member of the Executive Council in every state. This was strictly complied with. In early 1990s two women were appointed Deputy Governors. They were Alhaja Latifat Okunnu of Lagos state and Mrs. Pamela Sadauki of Kaduna state.

The Third Republic, saw few Nigerian women playing active roles in the political arena, more were elected as Councilors, and Chairpersons of local government councils. In the senatorial election held in 1992, Mrs. Kofoworola Akerele won a seat in the Senate, very few women won election into the House of Representatives.

With the inception of the Fourth Republic, Nigerian political terrain has witnessed a significant increase in the number of women holding political appointments; however, very few women still hold elective positions. The Fourth Republic could not produce a female governor via election but two female Deputy Governors, namely; Bucknor Akerele and Virgy Etiaba, Virgy Etiaba later became a governor by succession for a very brief period when Peter Obi was forced by an order of the court to step aside, he

later went on appeal and was reinstated. In the National Assembly, there are only three women in the Senate and 12 women in the House of Representatives.

President Olusegun Obasanjo at this stage must be commended for initiating genuine efforts to comply with the Beijing declaration of September 1995, by increasing Nigerian women participation in governance and politics. President Goodluck Jonathan, the current President of Nigeria, has however from all indications further improved greatly and consolidated on what he met on the ground, on assumption of office after the demise of his predecessor President Yar'dua. His administration has succeeded in creating an enabling environment which has allowed women to play active roles in Nigerian politics.

President Goodluck Jonathan at the inception of his regime pledged to uphold scrupulously the 35 percent affirmative action plan on his appointment. (The affirmative action plan is an agenda initiated in the 1960s, designed to counteract historic discrimination faced by ethnic minorities, women and under-represented groups.) President Goodluck, Jonathan has been commended for fulfilling his promise of implementation of the 35 percent affirmative action plan. Under his administration many women were given Ministerial portfolios, for example, Dr. Okonjo Iweala, (Minister of finance); Stella Oduah-Ogiewonyi (Minister of Aviation); Diezani Alison-Madueke (Minister of Petroleum Resources) Mrs. Omobola Olubusola Johnson (Minister of Communication Technology); Hajija Zainab (Minister of Women Affairs). Others include Olajumoke Akinjide, Prof. Viola Onwuliri. These Ministers are making tireless effort in their respective areas, thereby giving credence to the fact that women are achievers and can help to take Nigeria to the next level.

Therefore, at the Federal level one could boldly say without fear of contradiction that gone are the days women were used as tools to win elections and dumped thereafter. Today, a woman, Hon. Justice Aluma Mukhtar is the first female Chief Justice of the Federation. She was appointed in 2012, by Goodluck Jonathan to head justice administration and dispensation of justice in Nigeria. These women have excelled exceedingly in their respective areas. They have not been found wanting or indicted and this is definitely a clear pointer to the fact that women are nation builders and if given the chance cannot be relegated to the background any longer.

WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN LEADERSHIP IN NIGERIA: ANAMBRA STATE

The past three decades in Nigeria, have witnessed a lot of activities and fireworks on gender issues. These activities are not limited to Nigeria or Africa but have been a global phenomenon (Ezeudo, 2011). This paper shall at this juncture x-ray the Igbo leadership and the gender rights dimension in Anambra State.

The paper aims at discovering if Anambra state (Ndigbo) is moving in tune with the current trend in favour of affirmative action plan or is still lagging behind. Has the state government like the Federal government succeeded in achieving 35 percent UN affirmative action plan.

Women leadership in Anambra State from available statistical data is regrettably growing, however, it still falls short of UN Affirmation action plan, which demands that at least 35% of women should be appointed in leadership position. For example, Anambra State Self Assessment Report as at March 2013 reveals as follows:

1. Seven out of thirty members of Anambra State House of Assembly are women; incidentally the Speaker of the House for the first time is a female.
2. Six women in Anambra state judiciary are judges.
3. Ten out of twenty-five Permanent Secretaries are female.
4. No female local government chairman in the twenty-one local government areas of Anambra state.
5. Three out of twenty-one Heads of Local Government Administration are females.
6. Only one woman was appointed Special Assistant to the Governor Peter Obi while five are men.
7. Four women out of the sixteen Commissioners in Governor Peter Obi regime are females.

From all indications it is quite glaring that Anambra state is still lagging far behind in achieving the affirmative action plan of ensuring that at least 35% women hold both appointive and elective positions in governance in Anambra State.

The paper shall presently discuss factors that have impeded women from making giant strides in leadership in Anambra state despite that fact that the federal level has been able to carry along women in compliance with the affirmative action plan.

FACTORS THAT HAVE MILITATED AGAINST WOMEN ACTIVE PARTICIPATION IN POLITICS IN ANAMBRA STATE

Women in Nigeria generally and in Anambra state in particular face a lot of odds when venturing into politics. There is large scale discrimination from the men folk. Princewill Akpakpan of Civil Liberty Organisation, a non-governmental grouping based in Lagos once observed,

Our politics has never been on merit or issues; rather it is about those who have all it takes to force their way into office. The parties often want those who can match violence with violence, those who can coerce people to vote for them

There is obviously no gain saying the fact that men are widely held to be more prepared to engage in violence, hence women are often relegated to the background in politics and this has adversely affected their holding elective and appointive position in governance. At this juncture it is germane to address the issues that have militated against women in politics in Anambra state.

The reasons are numerous and fundamental;

(a) Financial Constrains

Lack of adequate finance according to Effah Attoe, is a crucial hindrance to effective female participation in politics in Anambra state and the whole of Nigeria. A large percentage of our female population is not financially balanced or equipped as their male counterpart. Our politics is money politics and the candidate who is able to spray money would automatically attract more votes. Many women cannot boast of the kind of financial resources that often propel former military dictators to return to political office.

(b) Educational Factor

Igbo cultural male preference syndrome has adversely affected educational attainment level of most Igbo women, as most illiterate parents prefer training their male children instead of their daughters who would sooner or later marry off. These educational limitations have therefore adversely affected women in making headway in Nigerian politics; they consequently lack early exposure to politics as a result of illiteracy.

(c) Cultural Factor

Our cultural background and religious belief have contributed greatly to the subjugation of women in politics. Bewildering cultural practices and religious rules have conspired to reduce women to second class citizens, suitable only to play the roles of child bearers and housewives.

WAY FORWARD

From all indications, we live in a heavily gendered society where it is generally believed that men are pre-ordained by God to rule over women. It is high time we experienced a radical shift in our mind set concerning women active participation in governance in Nigeria with particular reference to Anambra state. Historically, men have been known to be the chief drivers of Nigeria under-development. Most male politicians have been known to embezzle public funds recklessly, to the detriment of the down trodden citizens.

In other African nations evidence abound to show that women if given the chance can make a difference in governance. In Liberia for instance, after many years of brutal civil war, general election was conducted in 2005, which ushered in Ellen Johnson Sirleaf as President. Till date she still stands gracefully as the first African female President. She has proved male chauvinists wrong. She has succeeded in holding Liberia together despite the prevailing myth that African women lack leadership qualities. Also in 2012 Bonda, emerged as the female President of Malawi. In Germany, Angela Merken has been the Chancellor of Germany, (equivalent of Prime Minister in other countries) for the past 9 years and was recently sworn in for the third term sometime this year.

Apart from Liberia, Malawian and German experience, women globally, have held and are still holding leadership positions and these include;

- Britain (Margaret Thatcher)
- India (Indira Gandhi)
- Pakistan (Benazir Bhutto)
- Israel (Golda Meir)
- Sri Lanka (Sirimavo Bandaranaike)
- Norway (Gro Harlem Brundtland)
- Ireland (Mary Mac Aleese)
- Bangladesh (Sheikh Hasina Wajed)
- Philippine (Gloria Arroyo)
- Argentina (Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner)

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion, it is heartwarming that at the national level in Nigeria, women are now participating more actively in political issues and governance than ever before in consequence of political re-awakening and awareness despite the fact that they are still besieged with a legion of discriminations. It is glaring that the idea of women always playing the stereotyped role of full time house-wife is fast giving way in Nigerian political history. It is suggested that Anambra state government, should take a leaf from the Federal government and endeavour to appoint more women into her cabinet. Prof. Okonjo Iweala, Prof. Dora Akunyili and Dr. Oby Ezekwesili to mention but a few have made significant impact in the country's political/ leadership scene, therefore Anambra state governor and other Igbo governors should not hesitate in involving more women to contest important political positions, they should also hold more appointive offices .

The paper therefore, accordingly makes the following recommendations, it is hoped that Anambra state government should as a matter of urgency make the necessary implementations;

- Training of women in politics.
- Training and sensitization of women on the gains of Beijing Platform for action for women.
- Organise Workshop on Civic Education for women in Anambra state.
- Training and mobilization of Anambra women for political participation.
- Anambra State government should be more gender -friendly in its political appointments, she should endeavour to take a leaf from the Federal government.

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