
Gender and Labour Force Participation in Nigeria: Issues and Prospects.

Ngozi M. Nwakeze

1.0 Introduction

The objective of this paper is to highlight the importance of gender issue in understanding the labour market processes. Specifically, the paper examined the structure of Nigerian labour force and the dynamics of Nigerian labour market from a gender perspective. The trend of female participation rate is equally analysed. The paper also identified the constraints and challenges facing working women. Finally, the paper suggested some strategies for enhancing their participation, both in terms of quantity (rate of participation) and quality (job satisfaction and increased productivity).

By the United Nations projections, Nigeria's population by mid 2001 was put at 116.93 million. According to 2006 national population and housing census, Nigeria's population was 140.4 million (FGN, 2009). This, by extension, implies that Nigeria's labour force has been increased. One of the issues that is likely to agitate the discerning mind is the distribution of this work force in terms of age, sex and other demographic characteristics. The focus of this paper is more on the sex distribution.

In recent times, there has been a great deal of concern about the discriminatory practices in the labour market based on gender considerations. Specifically, several practices, beliefs and stereotypes are held against the female gender as regards their suitability for certain jobs, eventual employment and advancement on the job. It is extremely difficult in some societies for women to go beyond a particular career level. Some jobs are taken as the exclusive preserve of the male gender, while women are taken to be the weaker sex and therefore, should be employed in those areas where their weakness can be managed or tolerated. Even in the face of modernization, most people still hold on to the view that the woman's place should be in the kitchen and therefore it is non traditional for women to engage in paid jobs outside the home. The implication of these is that the rate at which women participate in the labour force is dictated by societal norms and stereotypes.

The participation of the females in the labour force of Nigeria is still considered relatively low. The low participation rate may be because the males most of the time constitute the main employers of labour. This in turn gives them the opportunity to express their feelings and attitude towards the employment of the female gender. Effa et al (1995) findings support this notion. The author posits that 75 percent of male employers prefer employing the males to the females. The study goes further to suggest that the males are preferred to their female counterparts because the former are presumed more likely to ensure maximum productivity and efficiency.

Other reasons being given include the number of times the female is likely to absent herself from work due to sickness, maternity leave, childcare and other domestic issues. An important question then arises: should the female gender be denied employment in the labour market and thereby reducing the participation in the labour market because of their natural/traditional roles as mothers and home makers which society has assigned to them?

2.0 Framework and Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Underpinning

The theoretical underpinning of most studies on the labour force participation rate of women is the model of the allocation of time. This model was championed by Gary Becker in 1965. The idea is now popularly known as the “New Household Economics Model”. Many writers have used this model among whom is Schultz (2001)

The model recognizes the household rather than the individual concerned as the basic decision-making unit. For example, decisions about the use of time by an individual, especially wives, are dependent on the approval or acceptability of such decisions to other members of the household. Thus, a decision by a married woman to take up a paid job in the labour market will, to a large extent, depend on her husband’s approval (that is, his willingness to allow her work outside of the home) and his income. In societies where the role of women is seen from the context of keeping the home, caring for the children and providing for the non- economic needs of the household, women’s labour force participation will be low.

According to Becker (1965) a household, as an economic unit, produces utility yielding commodities. The basic inputs for the production of these commodities are “goods” and “time”. Time could be used for three things. In the first place, it could be put to income yielding activities in the labour market. Secondly, time could be used in household production; and thirdly household’s time may also be utilised in the consumption of goods and services. It is important to note that the total time available to the household is limited and the alternatives to which time could be put are competing with one another. The implication of this is that in a household where both spouses are equally participating in the labour market, there will be limited time allocated to other alternatives. This creates some problems and challenges for the family especially for the woman. These are what we attempt to highlight in this discourse.

In a country, such as Nigeria, where we have household division of labour and domestic activities including child caring fall strictly under women’s domain, the labour force participation rate of women will be lower relative to that of men. In other words, the labour force participation of women has become the opportunity cost of working at home. Unfortunately, these household commodities being produced by the women in the home are largely unrewarded. This makes the computation of such contributions into the national income of Nigeria very difficult and therefore are often omitted, the energy and time spent on such activities notwithstanding.

Given the above scenario, how then do the household members allocate their time among these alternatives? Becker proposed that since the household wants to maximize its utility, then the principle of comparative advantage should form the basis for allocation of time. Simply put, the principle of comparative advantage by David Ricardo suggests that each member of the household should specialise in the productive endeavour which he or she can perform with the highest level of relative efficiency and less opportunity cost. Based on this principle, individual members of a household tend to allocate more time to those activities which they have greater proficiency. The differences in age, educational attainment, sex and previous labour market and non labour market experience of the members of a household also account for the variation in their relative efficiency.

In most cases, societal norms and expectations on a particular individual may influence him or her in decisions about the choice of the productive endeavour to undertake. Also, the choice of the areas of productive endeavour to develop comparative advantage could be due to the individual's preferences. Other factors such as culture, role definition and so on could determine the choice. Whereas in the former case, the individuals may not be agitated, in the later case, most of the individuals may be agitated, most especially, if they possess requirements that would have helped them to develop comparative advantage developed the comparative advantage. The income accruing to an individual who developed comparative advantage in the labour market activity, other things being equal, will be greater than the income of those whose comparative advantage are in non labour market activities. It is also clear from the foregoing that an individual might decide to change from non labour market activity to labour market activity because of income and substitution effects.

When there is an increase in wage rate, the household as a rational being that maximizes utility would want to seize the opportunity offered by the increased wage rate to make more income. This leads the family to make adjustments in both the production and consumption of commodities so as to have more time for paid work in the labour market. This in turn may lead to an increase in the labour force participation rate of the household members, including women.

2.2 Definition of Important Concepts

2.2.1 Gender

According to Ostergaad (1992), the term '**gender**' refers to qualitative and interdependent character of women's and men's position in society. On the other hand, **Sex** refers to the biological state of being male or female. **Gender relation** instead of referring to women or men, focuses on the social relationships between them. Gender relations are socially constructed and they vary across culture and time. **Gender roles** are those activities that are considered appropriate to a man or woman in a given society. That means that division of labour is done along gender lines. There is no consideration for the actual suitability of the individual for a given role. Individuals merely accept whatever role society assigned to them as given and this often results in gross inequality. Gender based inequality starts at the household level where women are left with the burden of most domestic chores.

2.2.2 Participation Rate

The labour force participation rate could be defined as the ratio of the actual labour force to the potential labour force. In this definition, the potential labour force would refer to all the people who are qualified to work under the law, that is, people who are 16 years and above, who are healthy (i.e who are not receiving treatment in the psychiatric hospitals or who are invalid). Thus the potential labour force is taken to be the entire population minus young people less than 16 years of age, people who are mentally ill, and those above 60 years of age who may have retired. The actual labour force on the other hand refers to those people who are employed or willing to work but have no job and/ or are currently seeking for job.

Labour participation rate can be measured as:

$$\frac{\text{Actual labour force}}{\text{Potential labour force}} \times 100$$

Alternatively, it can be calculated as:

$$\frac{\text{Non institutional population 16 years or over in the labour force}}{\text{Non institutional population 16 years or over}} \times 100$$

In the second formula non institutional population refers to all who are not in the prison or reformatory homes, mental institutions, nursing home and so on.

From the above formulae we can calculate the participation rates based on sex, age, tribe etc if the data on these are available.

From the definition above, female labour force participation rate can be defined as the actual number of women in the labour force relative to the potential labour force. Put differently, it refers to the number of women willing to work and are qualified by law to work that are actually employed relative to the total number of the people employed in Nigeria.

2.3 Determinants of Female Labour Force Participation.

Several factors can determine the labour force participation rate of women. Some of such factors are discussed below.

2.3.1 Female Education

Education has a positive effect on female labour force participation. An enhanced level of education for women can ensure higher wage in the labour market. Consequently, an increase in the relative wage rate of women could increase their labour force participation, other things being equal. As discussed earlier, an increase in wage rate has both income and substitution effects. The income effect acts to reduce the number of hours of work while the substitution effect will tend to increase the number of hours given to labour market activities. Consequently, the wife's time devoted to household non-labour-market (unpaid) activities can be freed and devoted to labour market activities if there was an increase in the wage rate she will earn.

A change in women's preferences can also affect their labour market participation rate. Greater education for women makes them to have self esteem, realize their worth and the potentials in them which could be harnessed for their upliftment. As a result their taste for labour market activities or jobs increases since they needed some level of independence to achieve an enhanced self esteem, which in turn depends on their capacity to have income of their own.

2.3.2 Availability of Household Technology

An increase in the use of technologically advanced household equipment which is substituted for human labour reduces the amount of time which a woman spends in production and consumption within the home. Such devices as microwave ovens, vacuum cleaners and so on being used by housewives in recent times have greatly reduced the amount of time spent on housecleaning and food preparation. Thus, the availability of these labour saving devices in the household helps the household members, especially women, to free more of their time for labour market participation. It is important for us to emphasize here that the availability of the technology alone is not just enough, the appropriateness of the technology is equally important. By appropriateness we mean that the technology should be affordable, culturally acceptable, environmentally and gender friendly. Unfortunately, these could not easily be granted in Nigeria because of the high level of poverty. We should recall that poverty is increasingly being associated with women hence the concept of "feminization of poverty" or poverty with a "woman face". This implies that with the rising levels of poverty in Nigeria, many women cannot afford the improved technology even when they are available. The situation may lead to women wanting to have many children who will assist them in their enormous responsibilities which society has assigned to them.

2.3.3 Fertility

Writers have different opinions on the likely effect of employment on fertility. However, there appears to be a general consensus that women who are employed outside the home tend to have fewer children than those who have familial employment and work inside the home. This appears intuitively correct since both activities (ie child care and outside jobs) compete for women's limited time and energy.

For example, Feyisetan (1985) investigated the relationship between fertility and female employment in Lagos. The study, which centered on married women in reproductive age bracket, is principally a test of the maternal role incompatibility hypothesis. The major tenet of the hypothesis is that maternal role and function of workers are incompatible with each other. The results demonstrate that mothering and working tend to conflict only if employment is undertaken in the formal sector of labour.

Using data from U.S.A, Jones (1981) assesses the impact of women's employment on marital fertility. The results revealed several distinct mechanisms that link work to child bearing. Generally, employment tended to depress both intended and unintended fertility. The findings clearly support the notion that working can have the effect of depressing fertility through the mechanism of competition for a woman's personal resources, especially time.

Also, in a study of female labour force participation, Lim (2002) observed that there was a recent increase in female labour force participation in intermediate fertility countries. The author however noted that increase in labour force participation rate may not necessarily lead to lower fertility. According to Lim an inverse relationship between labour force participation and fertility will be observed if and only if certain conditions prevail. The conditions include among others that the job seriously conflicts with childbearing and that the satisfaction that women derive from their job exceeds that which they would derive from having children. The author finally suggested that attempts to link women's labour force participation to fertility should go beyond the participation rates and examine the quality of employment (such as security of income provided by employment) and whether employment provides incentive to the use of child labour.

Child bearing and caring are time consuming functions carried out mainly by females. The presence of children, especially the relatively younger ones, reduces the labour market participation rates of women. As a corollary, the greater the number of children in this category that a woman has, the lower the participation rate of such a woman. Although it may be possible to substitute the services of baby sitters, nannies and day care centres for the time of a woman (who may want to engage in labour market production) the cost of those services (particularly as there are other household wants which need equal attention) may discourage such expenditures.

One way of reducing the effect of high fertility on labour participation rate of women is to imbibe the culture of birth control. For instance, adequate birth spacing may ensure fewer number of children per woman. The shorter the span of time given to child bearing the longer the available time for participating in labour force, for the woman concerned. Recently, as a result of female education, the fertility rate is declining, especially for those women earning higher wages. On the other hand fertility is higher among low income and uneducated women. This is consistent with the views of Lim (2002), on the relationship between work and fertility. According to McConnell and Brue (1986), child rearing is time consuming and the opportunity cost of children which is the income sacrificed by not participating in the labour market is higher for more educated women than the less educated women. Other opportunity costs include leisure not enjoyed.

In leisure-work analysis, it is a widely held notion that as income increases more leisure and less work would be preferred given that leisure is a normal good.

2.3.4 The Male Bread winner Concept

There is need to explain the postulation in terms of the wife in a household. The model tries to equate family income to that of the husband alone despite the fact that most women contribute substantial amount to family income. The model further assumes that there is intra-family income transfer from the husband to the wife. If the income of the husband increases, it is possible for an expanding intra household transfer of income from the husband to his wife to make her less interested in participating in labour market activities.

This implies that women who receive little or no transfer of income from their husbands should be working harder to make ends meet, and therefore, participate more in labour market activities. Whether relatively poor women or rather women in the low income stratum of a society participate more in labour market activities than the relatively richer women is an interesting subject for another study. But suffice it for us to say that the opportunity cost of a woman not participating in the labour force is not limited to the income unearned but also to the career ambition unrealized. In other words, a woman may desire formal employment not only because of economic necessity but also to derive psychic satisfaction from her chosen profession.

2.3.5 Other factors

Other factors also account for the participation rate of women in labour market. Onyejiaku (1987) identified psychological, physiological and sociological needs as the factors, that influence the choice of occupation among women. Specifically, the author went further to suggest that the personal perception about an occupation and environmental factors to which women are exposed are strong influence on the choice of career. The study specifically identified, personal needs and values, prestige and self-concept, sex, age, ability, family and home climate and chance as the proximate determinants of women's choice of occupation in Nigeria.

Another issue is sex typification in the labour market where some jobs are specified as feminine while others are "branded" as being for male. This specification indicates the actual role and responsibility for the job. Oakley (1974 cited in Udosen 2000) posits that housework, catering for the needs of the family and childcaring constitute the main work of women. In other words, women's work is synonymous with "housework". This implies that much of women's job are done in the home. Sometimes when they work outside their homes, women are largely employed in the informal sector. According to Standing (1992), Indian women are employed mainly in the unorganized sector which is seldom captured in official statistics. Besides, employment in the informal sector offers low levels of remuneration and poor conditions of service which in turn may negatively affect the interest of women in getting employed. Agriculture is an important sector where majority of women are employed, especially in Sub Saharan Africa (example, Nigeria) and South East Asia (example, India).

3.0 Structure of the Nigerian Labour Force.

In this section we discuss the structure of Nigerian Labour force in terms of sex, occupational and age on. This will enable us to appreciate the extent of female participation in labour market activities. On the basis of age, the structure of Nigerian population clearly indicates that she has a young population.

Nigeria's labour force, that is, economically active population consists of people in the age group 15-59 years. Excluded from this category, however, are students who are having full

time education and the housewives engaged in non-labour-market household productive activities.

The tables I and II below shall highlight the labour force participation rates by sex and age composition respectively.

Table 1: Adult (15+) Labour Force Participation Rate (%) by Sex.

| Gender | 1990 | 2010 |
|--------|------|------|
| Female | 37 | 40 |
| Male | 75 | 69 |

Source: The World's Women 2010

From the table I, it was clearly obvious that the labour force participation rate of men is higher than those of women. As at year 2010, the percentage of women that participated in labour force is still as low as 40% which is less than half. This is consistent with the view that "women generally have higher rates of unemployment and especially of under-employment and disguised unemployment than men and finds it difficult to re-enter employment once they lose their jobs" --- Lim (2002). Although there was a slight increase from the 37% in 1990, the gender gap is still very wide.

Table II: Employment Rates in Nigeria within Age Group.

| Age Group | Men | Women |
|-----------|------|-------|
| 15-19 | 25.5 | 11.7 |
| 20-24 | 59.6 | 28.1 |
| 25-29 | 90.1 | 39.7 |
| 30-34 | 97.7 | 41.9 |
| 35-39 | 98.9 | 51.6 |
| 40-44 | 98.8 | 57.2 |
| 45-49 | 99.2 | 67.0 |
| 50-54 | 97.9 | 69.5 |
| 55-59 | 97.6 | 61.0 |
| 60-64 | 78.5 | 41.9 |
| 65 + | 49.1 | 29.6 |

Source: ILO (2010) cited in Onyejeli (2010)

The table II confirmed that there is gender inequality in the labour force. The employment rates for men are higher than that of women in all the age brackets. A striking observation is that the highest percentage of men are employed within the age group 45-49 (99.2%) while the highest percentage (69.5%) of women that are employed are within the age group 50-54. This is not surprising since it is outside the childbearing age bracket of 15 - 49. It can easily be inferred that women get more actively involved in labour force after the childbearing age.

A further break down of the labour into occupational or sectoral distribution is shown below in Tables III and IV.

Table III: Percentage Distribution of Person by Industry.

| Industry | Both Sexes | Male | Female |
|---------------|------------|------|--------|
| Agriculture | 54.5 | 61.4 | 43.4 |
| Mining | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 |
| Manufacturing | 3.0 | 3.1 | 2.9 |
| Utility | 0.3 | 0.5 | 0.1 |
| Construction | 0.5 | 0.7 | 0.1 |
| Trade | 24.9 | 13.6 | 43.2 |
| Transport | 2.6 | 4.0 | 0.2 |
| Finance | 0.5 | 0.7 | 0.2 |
| Service | 13.7 | 16.0 | 9.9 |

Source: UNIFEM 2000

It can easily be seen from the table III that Agriculture and Trade ranked high for both sexes followed by service, while mining recorded the lowest, also, for both sexes. However on a closer look, the table reveals that more women relative to men are engaged in occupations such as Trade which is mostly carried out on retail basis under the informal sector. Similarly, the difference in percentage points between the proportion of males engaged in agriculture is not much which support the views of Standing (2000) that women are mostly employed in agriculture and informal sectors.

Table IV: Economic Participation by Occupation and by Sex.

| Occupation/Sector | Male | Female | Gender Parity Index (GPI)* |
|-------------------|-------|--------|----------------------------|
| Agriculture | 41.48 | 22.41 | 0.54 |
| Trade & Industry | 35.08 | 44.95 | 1.28 |
| Oil & Gas | 3.77 | 1.59 | 0.42 |
| Services | 11.32 | 13.81 | 1.22 |
| Others | 8.36 | 17.25 | 2.06 |
| Total | 100.2 | 100 | 1.00 |

GDI is the ratio of the female to the male measure of a variable.

Source: Federal Government of Nigeria, 2008.

The tables III and IV indicate that there are hardly any sector where women do not participate in. In most of those sectors the labour force participation rate of females are as much as those of the males. In other words, bearing in mind the peculiarities associated with each occupation, women are trying as much as their male folks, relatively speaking.

According to United Nations (2010), the adult female labour force participation rate for Nigeria in 2010 was 40%, an increase of 3% from the 1990. For the male it was 69% in 2010; a decrease of 6% from the 1990. This implies that the situation of Nigerian women is gradually changing for the better. In other words the wind of change is blowing in Nigeria; but to what extent and will it be sustained? Only time could tell. In order to ensure sustainability, the women need to be encouraged via gender responsive labour policies.

3.1 Labour Act of Nigeria

The Labour Act of Nigeria seems to favour women participation in the labour market, at least on paper. It makes allowance for maternity leave. The Act ensures that women are not engaged in night jobs except if absolutely necessary. Also, the act protects women from being employed in underground work of any mine.

Specifically, the Act provides in section 54 (1) that a woman:

- (a) shall have the right to leave her work if she produces a medical certificate by a registered medical practitioner stating that her confinement will probably take place within six weeks;
- (b) Shall not be permitted to work during the six weeks following her confinement; etc.

In section 55 (1), the Act provides that:

subject to this section, no women shall be employed on night work in a public or private industrial undertaking or any branch thereof, or in any agricultural undertaking or any branch thereof.

(2) Subsection (1) of this section shall not apply to women employed as nurses in any public or private industrial undertaking or any agricultural undertaking nor to women holding responsible positions of management who are not ordinarily engaged in manual labour: and in any proceedings brought under or in connection with the said subsection (1) of this section, it shall be a good defence if it is shown to the satisfaction of the court trying the proceeding that:

- (i) The night work in question was due to an interruption of work which was not impossible to foresee and which is not of a recurring character; or
- (ii) The night work in question had to do with raw material or materials in course of treatment which are subject to rapid deterioration and it was necessary to preserve such materials from certain loss.

From the above section, it is evident that the Nigerian Labour Act means well for women; especially considering their natural roles in reproduction (child bearing and caring). As we said earlier, the act indicates the commitment by the Nigerian government to ensure gender equity and fairness, at least in principle. This commitment can further be confirmed by Nigeria's ratification of the United Nations 1979 Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women CEDAW.

However, some people may argue that the Labour Act was a reflection of societal belief about gender division of labour or stereotypes. It is often seen as one of the ways of

endorsing child caring roles entirely to the woman knowing fully well that it is a serious obstacle to women's participation in labour force. On the other hand, some may argue that since biologically women only bear children they should be prepared to take on all the "maternal" responsibilities as a matter of necessity no matter the difficulties and challenges. Any thing to the contrary will mean questioning the natural course of life. Therefore, the answer to the question as to whether the Labour Act enhances or re-enforces women's disadvantages in the labour market is neither here nor there. We can only conclude that theoretically, the Nigerian Government is committed to equal employment opportunities for all, irrespective of sex. By implication the Labour Act encourages women to seek employment in the labour market. If we talk about quality of job (job satisfaction, security and advancement) we may be singing a different song. For instance, according to Standing (2000), the Labour Legislation could be blamed for retrenchment and other discriminatory practices against women in the labour market of India. In the next section, we shall focus on the problems and challenges confronting Nigerian women in their attempt to participate in the labour market.

4.0 Problems of Working Women In Nigeria

One of the most formidable problem the working women have in Nigeria is their acceptability in their chosen professions. Because of the gender stereotype which brands some jobs as "male jobs", any female in such jobs is seen as one trying to "close rank" with or equal men. As a result of this some of the assignment which they should undertake are some how taken away from them, ostensibly, under the assumption that women are the weaker sex.

Maliki (2000) summarized the various beliefs about and attitudes towards female personnel of the criminal justice system in what was termed "Ritual Arguments". The study which focused on policewomen and women lawyers in Nigeria, found that the "ritual arguments" affects decisions about recruitment, deployment and advancement of women in those professions. The study went further to explain that in the police force it is believed that women lacked the stamina needed for the job and could not cope with the risk of violence associated with it. As a result, women were found more in the administrative section and less in the crime section. Thus, job placement rather than being made objectively on the basis of eminence in qualification is made subjectively on the basis of ostentatious pity. Suffice it to say that the problem faced by Nigeria working women were captured by Maliki (2000: 2) in what was termed "Ritual Argument". These arguments and constraints include;

- (i) The view that some professions are not feminine in nature, that is, such jobs are inappropriate for women and therefore a woman going into such profession is an aberration of a sort. This follows from the erroneous perceptions of differential working abilities for men and women.
- (ii) The non-stability of women in some jobs in terms of building a career because they quit, more easily from the job than men, to get married and have children. Investment in them in terms of training is often regarded as uneconomic.

- (iii) Women lack the emotional stability required for some jobs and tasks. It is often argued that naturally women are emotional and can get easily upset about unpleasant situations. therefore may not withstand stress sometimes.
- (iv) It has also been suggested that women are not amenable to discipline in organisations.

The effect of these “ritual arguments” is that most times women are misunderstood in the organisations where they work. Thus, putting them in a state of confusion and undue stress. Maliki (2000;8) describes it as “a source of tension and conflict for all women”.

Another problem which Nigerian working women have could be attributed to the perception of the employers as regards their stability on and commitment to their jobs. Due to family burdens which married women shoulder, it is widely held by most employers that women lack commitment and are less productive when compared with their male counterpart. According to Effah et al (1995) women spend a lot of time on telephone chatting up their loved ones and are not meant to work in profit oriented organizations. Besides, women workers are perceived to absent themselves from official work often because of domestic duties, marriage and child birth. Consequent upon these, most employers are reluctant to employ, train or promote women. However, the extent to which this view can be true remains contestable because some married women are known to have occupied and are still occupying positions of great importance in the corporate world.

In some cases, the female-labour is subject to some sort of discrimination in wage and tax policies. Usually married working women pay more taxes than their married male colleagues. The reason being that there are some part of the male’s income which are tax free because of the assumption that men are the bread winners and take care of their wives’ needs. This practice however glosses over the fact that there are some women bread winners who also take care of their husbands. This applies to other benefits. For example, while medical facilities cover a male worker, his spouse and children in the case of a female worker it covers only herself and her children, excluding her spouse. Anecdotal evidence has shown, in recent time, that women (both married and unmarried) contribute substantially to family income and support their husbands and or parents.

Also, at workplace some women are often made to take tasks which serve men’s interest and thus reinforcing the gender role which starts from the home. In essence the argument here is that since the female worker normally depends on her boss (who pays her), her roles are those assigned to her by her male boss and not necessarily the ones for which she is qualified and or has interest on. After the task is accomplished, they have to get approvals from their male supervisor or boss. In fact, the male domination of the female which is observed in the workplace is a mirror image of what obtains in the home.

But, to a great extent the difficulty or otherwise that a woman experiences at work depends on the type of supervisor or boss she has and also how ambitious she is. Some supervisors are known to give some women “preferential treatment” while they give other women difficult task to perform. In giving task, sometimes, these women who are “friendly” with their boss are favoured while those who have a “less friendly” posture are discriminated

against. Besides, women who are ambitious but with less credentials to match their ambition have to play along with their boss or forget about their desire to move up the ladder.

A few women may sometimes exhibit poor work attitude and low aspiration. Such women do hide under the excuses of sexual gratification as a means of gaining promotion to escape being blamed for their lack of advancement in their workplace. Once this notion is internalized, women begin to undervalue and under utilise their capability. They become complacent and non challant about their jobs and some may take up gossiping as their “stock in trade” or “part-time business”. Consequently, such women loose the competence and credibility necessary for their advancement. The male critics often capitalize on this to discredit hardworking and serious minded female colleagues.

Those women who have high ambition and are prepared to work hard are also criticized by male rivals or bosses, sometimes making their work unnecessarily difficult. They also peddle malicious rumours and propaganda. It is not unusual to hear such comment as “*if you cannot stand the heat, you get out of the kitchen*” - Collinson & Collinson (1989: 99). This comment illustrates the way in which men can seek to use sexuality as a means of enhancing or sustaining their power and status within organizations.

From the foregoing, the problems which working women face in Nigeria could be to a great extent due to the stereotypes in the workplace dominated by men and to a lesser extent attributed to the attitudes of the women themselves. Specifically, the problems could arise due to the following:

- Low level of education particularly as regards expertise and training in science and technology.
- Role incompatibility especially of reproductive and productive roles.
- Male dominance and sexuality at workplace.
- Limited access to appropriate technology.
- Problems inherent in the women themselves.

5.0 Strategies for Enhancing Women’s Participation in the Labour Market.

One of the major strategies necessary for enhancing female participation rate in the Nigerian labour market is socio-cultural re-orientation of both men and women. This is to change the erroneous belief that women are meant only for non market domestic activities. The argument here is not as to whether a woman should play her biological role or not, rather it is seen from the point of view that such biological role of women as mothers should not hinder them from realizing their potentials in public endeavours.

At work women should be made to carry our task based on qualification and competence rather than other considerations. The working place should be patterned along the lines of team work and mutual respect for both the men and women. Co-workers should be playing complementary roles.

A situation where jobs are typified according to sex in the work place and society at large should be discontinued. Sometimes it is possible to find some women who are as strong as men, while it is also possible to have some men who are weaker than women and would rather prefer that difficult tasks are given to someone else.

Each woman seeking for job or that is on the job should be appraised, recruited, trained and promoted strictly on her individual merit without any recourse to the “Ritual” arguments.

The Labour Act and Convention the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women should be implemented with deep sense of purpose. There are instances of situations where women are assigned duties even while on maternity leave or are assigned more duties on resumption to make up for what they ought to have done during the period of maternity leave. This situation is too challenging rather than encouraging for such a woman. It would appear as if such a woman is being penalized for going on maternity leave. But, this should not be so because the woman, at least, is contributing to bearing and nurturing of labour force which the economy needs. The best that could be done is to reduce the number and frequency of maternity leave that a woman should enjoy.

Flexible working hours should be arranged for nursing mothers to enable them take time off work to care for their children. Alternatively, child care services and facilities should be provided at workplace. This has a tremendous benefit to both the woman, the organization and society at large. For example, it would greatly improve the concentration and consequently the productivity of the woman.

Most importantly, women should mentor rather than antagonize each other. In particular, those women who have made it to the top should encourage the younger and upcoming ones by sharing their experiences with them.

6.0 Summary and Conclusion

In this paper the participation rate of women in the Nigerian labour market was discussed. Available statistics showed that, in Nigeria, both men and women work, but most aspect of their works and conditions of work are different. The differentials may exist either in total hours worked, kind of work done, rates of pay, etc. Generally speaking, the share of women in labour force has been on the rise because of education and the process of modernization. However, their participation is more in areas of agriculture and trading while still very limited in areas of administration, managerial occupations and transport. Several reasons were given as responsible for this. They include gender stereotypes and perception of the employers about women. Also, several other factors facing working women in Nigeria were identified, notable among them is male domination in workplace, which can take various forms.

The paper also noted that although legislation and regulations in Labour Act ensures equal employment opportunities for both men and women, more needs to be done to ensure effective participation of women in the labour market. In particular, the government, employers, workers’ unions, women’s groups and NGOs should initiate social support

services to promote the harmonization of work and family responsibilities. Thus, making women's reproductive and productive roles less incompatible.

In conclusion, there is need to transform the gender-segregating and gender-hierarchising structures so as to brighten the prospects of women participating in the labour market.

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