
Political Participation Of Nigerian Women: Need For Political Re-Orientation

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Abstract

The study sought to find out the opinion of the female lecturers on the identified inhibiting factors on women's effective participation in politics. The design of the study was a descriptive survey. The study was carried out in the University of Nigeria Nsukka. The population of the study is 90 women lecturers in the faculty of education. Eleven items questionnaire was constructed to elicit information from the respondents on a four point rating scale of strongly agree, Agree, Disagree and Strongly disagree. Data was analyzed using mean to answer research question. Based on the findings of the study the following conclusion and recommendations among others were made: There is need for paradigm shift from mere constitutional provisions to effective policy implementation on matters effecting women's effective participation in politics, Government through National Commission for Women and other relevant agencies should plan for very-active enlightenment programmes aimed at re-orientation of women ideology about themselves in all spheres of life.

Key Words: Politics, Political Participation, Political Re-orientation, women, gender, inequality, class, Socio-political, cultural and economic factors.

INTRODUCTION

The extent of political participation of Nigerian women is very low compared with their men counterpart who dominated Nigerian politics. While men are very much interested in seeking political power, women's interest lies mostly at the level of voting. The large number of women coming out to vote during election attested to this fact. Some authors were of the opinion that in Nigeria, women constitute more than 50 percent of the entire population (Nwufor and Ohuche 1995; Nwafor and Ezegbe 1998), but the number that seek to control state power is very insignificant. Arowolo and Abe (2008:13) opine that, "The essence of political participation in any society, either civilized or primitive, is to seek control of power, acquisition of power and dispensing power to organize society, harness and distribute resources and to influence decision making.... In line with the above view point, Nwabuzor (1992) identified two main modes of political participation relevant to decision making position, as: winning electoral posts and occupying such elective posts, and being appointed by the authorities to decision making positions.

Judging from the above assertion, one believes that other modes of political participation are not relevant to position of power or decision making body. Okwuosa, 1992 logically categorizes Nigerian women in this group in this group of political actors when he asserts that Nigerian women may have indeed registered an effective presence in certain levels of political involvement, the question is how significant are those levels in terms of attainment of real political power. This view is in line with Arowolo and Aluko (2010) which states that, involvement of women in Nigerian politics is largely noticeable at the level of voting and latent support.

However, in the recent time, the upward mobility of women in politics in the area of appointive positions was also very apparent. The number of women representation in the Federal Executive Council (FEC) is an attested fact. Nda, (2003) records that prior to 1999, women representation in the FEC had never exceeded 5% but in 1999-2003, during Obasanjo's regime, 4(13.7%) women out of the 29 senior ministers, 3(16.6%) out of 18 junior ministers, 2 women advisors, 2 senior special assistance, 6 special assistants, 1 special assistant to the vice president and 8 permanent secretaries, were appointed.

Despite this improvement in women involvement in politics, the degree of improvement still remains marginal. Lamenting on this situation, the Women Advocates Research and Documentation Centre (WARDC, 2003;34-38) succinctly states as follows: "In spite of the clamor for women's political empowerment by many international organizations..., women representation in government and other public decision making position is still low, the world over". The women Advocates Research and Documentation Centre further notes that, in spite of the unprecedented number of female aspirants and heightened local mobilization among the generality of women, during 2003 general election, only a handful of women were nominated, but how many won the election?

The above scenario could be attributed to the gender-based norms which assigned women the responsibility of carrying out tasks related to home management (Duncan and Duncan 1992 and Amadi 1995), which does not diminish when women engage in paid employment (Human Rights document 2008). In line with the above is the assumption of Arowolo and Aluko, (2010) that the low level of political participation of women in Nigeria is a function of the biological affinity and natural bond between a woman and her child such that women deliberately restrict themselves to domestic activities in order to oversee welfare of their children and coordinate their home affairs.

From the fore-going, it has been acknowledged Nwafor and Ezegbe (1998) that the issue of women participation in politics in Nigeria has been inhibited by a good number of factors namely: socio-political, socio-cultural and economic factors of life. It is against this background that Ismail (2001) rightly notes that, the battle for women's political rights does not end with enacting laws but also with our ability to have a paradigm shift in our culture and prohibit ourselves from acceptance of all those practices which perpetuate the exploitation and subordination of women.

In spite of the 30 percent representation target by 1995 endorsed by the United Nations Economic Council, which Nigeria among other nations had adopted in her national policy on women, women's representation in the legislative body is far below expectation. In the light of the fore-going, it becomes pertinent to find out why women are being scared from taking

active parts in politics. The problem of this study put in question form is, what are the factors affecting women participation in politics in Nigeria?

Specifically, this study aims at finding out the extent socio-political, socio-cultural, and economic factors affect women participation in politics in Nigeria. The following research questions guided the study

Research questions

1. To what extent do socio-political, factor inhibits women active - participation in Nigerian politics?
2. To what extent do socio-cultural factor inhibits women active participation in politics?
3. To what extent do economic factor inhibits women active participation in Politics?

Method:

The study was a survey of political participation of Nigerian women and the need for political re-orientation. The study was carried out in Nsukka, Enugu state of Nigeria. The choice of Nsukka is because the researcher wants to use women academics at the University of Nigeria situated at Nsukka. The population of the study is 90 women lecturers in the faculty of education, university of Nigeria Nsukka. No sample was conducted due to small population size. All the female lecturers in the faculty of education at the time of this research were used for the study.

Instrument for Data Collection:

A questionnaire titled ‘inhibiting factors to women participation in politics’ (IWOPP) was designed and used to collect data. The instrument has two parts. Part ‘A’ sought information on the personal data of the respondents, while part ‘B’ consists of information on the extent the identified socio-political socio-cultural and economic factors inhibit women from taking active part in politics. The instrument was validated by experts in social studies and measurement and evaluation in the department of Social Science Education, University of Nigeria Nsukka. Eleven possible inhibiting factors against Nigerian women’s active participation in politics were listed. The respondents were requested to indicate response of Strongly agree, Agree, Disagree and Strongly disagree to the statements that best describe their opinion listed in the questionnaire.

Data analysis:

The instrument was administered to 90 female lecturers in the Faculty of Education and data was analyzed using mean score to answer research questions. The bench mark for the acceptable mean score is 2.50 on a 4 point rating scale of strongly agrees, agree, disagree and strongly disagree. Any item with a mean of 2.50 and above is accepted value, while any item with the mean of 2.49 and below is not accepted.

Results:

The findings presented in table 1 give a break down of socio-political socio-cultural and Economic factors that inhibit Nigerian women active participation in politics.

Table 1: Inhibiting factors against Nigerian women active participation in Politics

S/N	Cluster	Item	SA	A	D	SD	X	Decision
	Cluster A socio-political	factors inhibiting women from taking active part in politics are:						
1.		Early marriage	85	-	5	-	3.89	SA
2.		Marital burdens	52	-	38	-	3.16	A
3		Purdah marriage	76	4	9	1	3.75	SA
4		Fear of insecurity	86	2	-	2	3.98	SA
	Cluster B Socio-cultural							
5		Childhood socialization(education)	72	2	10	6	3.74	SA
6		Society values of female personality	56	34	-	-	3.62	SA
7		Cultural practices	62	20	6	2	3.64	SA
8		Women’s perception of themselves	40	45	3	2	3.42	A
9		Sex role stereotype	75	15	-	-	3.83	SA
10		Fear of failure	15	55	14	6	3.01	A
	Cluster C Economic							
11		Financial constraints	31	15	40	4	2.90	A
Grand mean							3.54	
Key:	SA-	Strongly agree		D-	Disagree			
	A-	Agree		SD-	Strongly Disagree			

The result in table 1, cluster A, reveals that: mean scores of item nos. 1-4 are 3.89, 3.16, 3.75 and 3.98 respectively. For cluster B, the mean scores for item nos. 5-10 are: 3.74, 3.62, 3.64, 3.42, 3.83 and 3.01 respectively. Finally for cluster C, the mean score for no. 11 is 2.90

DISCUSSION:

The discussion was carried out in relation with the three (3) research questions
 The results in table 1 cluster A (social-political factor), reveal that early marriage, marital burdens, purdah marriage and fear of insecurity are some of the socio-political factors that inhibit women from taking active part in politics. These findings are in line with Ezeani, (1998:104) who maintains that, ” institutions like child marriage,” purdah” deter women from exercising their basic constitutional rights particularly in respect of political participation which have to be voluntary in a true democracy”.

Despite the effort of women's right advocates in Nigeria, human right violations are prevalent with women's rights being violated much more often than those of men. One of the most severe violations of women's right is associated with early marriage. Such practice has a devastating impact on the political participation of Nigerian women.

These findings were equally inline with Okafor (2004: 54) who summarizes the adverse effect of these socio-political factors as they effect political participation of Nigerian women in the following lines:

The family life burden of Nigerian society makes the burden of marriage heavier for women and also the degree of moral obligation with which an average woman views her role as a mother is such that non-fulfillment of that role carries with it high psychological and emotional sanctions and these can and do affect her productivity and performance in any other novel role such as politics.

The study reveals equally in cluster B,(socio-cultural factors) that childhood education, society values of female personality, cultural practices, and women's perception of themselves, sex stereotype and fear of failure are socio-cultural factors that inhibit women's active participation in politics. This can be described as depoliticization of the female personality in childhood and adult socialization. This finding agrees with the view of Ozi gbogh (1998) who states that in most part of Africa, particularly in Nigeria, girls were socialized into feminine roles of cooking, child rearing practices, they are the ones saddled with heavy household chores. He also maintains that education institutions equally reflect societal values or norms through administrative practices, school curriculum, teacher behaviors and classroom environment. The prevalence of these societal norms and values in our society have devastating impact on the behavioral pattern of the Nigerian female, and of course "suppress the personality-potential for meeting the challenges of gladiatorial political involvement"(Okwuosa, 1992: 4). In essence unequal division of labour and responsibility within the household has in one way or the other inhibits women active participation in politics. In line with this, Woman's Right Document (2008) was of the opinion that the dual burden which the norms ascribe women, prevents them from pursuing their carriers, attaining management and decision making positions at the same pace and rate with their male counterpart. It is pertinent to note here that women's perception of themselves has its root in traditions and culture. The above findings as it concerns women perception of themselves however, is in line with Nwafor and Ezegebe (1998:92) who succinctly write:

Tradition conditions women to stay away from politics...women have not only accepted this position but are ready to invoke sanctions against any fellow woman who dares to challenge male dominance. During political campaigns, men have used such stereotyped women to run down the images of female political opponents, thereby making it difficult for female political aspirants to get support even from their fellow women

The above scenario has however generated fear of failing in the mind of some women who may want to be actively involved in politics.

Financial constraints (Cluster C), have been identified from the findings of this study as one of the factors that limits Nigerian women from being actively involved in politics. This

finding agrees with Ezeani (1998) who views women non-active participation in politics as a result of staggering fees demanded by the parties for registration of aspirants to governorship position. The above finding is also in line with Effah Attoe (2005) who opines that, lack of adequate finance is a crucial hindrance to effective female participation in politics in Nigeria.

Judging from the findings of this study, one can still argue that financial constraints is not a serious factor, as others, as to why women do not actively participate in politics. This is because it has the least mean score of 2.90. Though finance appeared to be the least inhibiting factor from the findings of this study, we will not ignore the fact that the status of the respondents could affect their responses. The response to this item might differ if subjected to the majority of Nigerian women who are illiterates, and who as well lack economic power.

Summary,

The result of this study shows that the highest inhibiting factor to women's active participation in politics is fear of insecurity. This could probably be as a result of instability of the Nigerian experiment in democracy since her independence. To them politics is viewed as a dirty-game. The above finding is in line with the views of Nwafor and Ezegebe (1998:91) who affirm that, "Nigerian politics is characterized by instability, violence and high degree of dishonesty (such as rigging). Women, naturally, are not fitted into such activities". Still in line with this finding also is the sayings of Okafor (2004:56) that, "Nigerian women are reluctant to invest the little resources in time, money and connection that they have gained in the risky game of politics as is currently played in Nigeria."

Conclusively, it is pertinent to say that Nigerian women should not because of these prevailing factors that try to limit them, be absconded from political scene, hence their involvement means a lot in harmonizing certain tenets of democracy in Nigeria. This therefore calls for need for political re-orientation of women.

Conclusion and Recommendations

It is true that women's political rights have been violated via a good number of factors prevalent in human society. The fact still remains that as rational being, man still have potentials to make adjustments so as to have peaceful co-existence with his fellowmen. The need for paradigm shift from mere constitutional provision to effective policy implementation becomes of upmost importance. For instance the government needs to adequately foster the capacity of key public institutions, officials and leaders to generate popular understanding as well as promoting fundamental human rights and freedom as most violation of human rights is more on women's rights which invariably hinges on their political rights.

The government through National Commission for Women and other relevant agencies should ensure that very active enlightenment programmes aimed at re-orientation of women ideology about themselves in areas of education, social, cultural, economic and political spheres of life are established. Secondary, all the barriers created to limit women from taking active part in politics should be lifted. For instance all political posts (appointments and elective) should be constitutionally allotted equally to both men and women, political meetings should be held during the public office hours, huge amount of money paid on registration for political aspirants should be ameliorated so that women will not be scared from such posts. Base on the findings of the study the following recommendations were made.

Certain measures need to be put in place as solutions to most of the problems inhibiting women's active participation in politics.

In the first place, there is an urgent need to disabuse the mind of parents on the early marriage of a girl child. A girl child should be taken as a precious seed that cannot be discarded at the very early stage in life without being given opportunity to develop a mind set that will help her exercise her democratic rights. Every child has the right to education and if given that right, a girl child will no doubt develop her potentials that will grant her full opportunity to acquire social-economic and political skills that will help her take active part in politics. There is a biblical saying that "my people perish because of lack of knowledge". In the same vein, many women do not take part in politics not because they would not like to be part, but because they lack knowledge of what their political rights are.

Similar to the above view point is the need to dismantle certain institutional structures like the discrimination of the female personality in childhood and adult socialization as this goes a long way to hinder the personality-potentials of a girl child to meeting the challenges of political involvement. There should be no discrimination in the sharing of household chores between male and female children so that the female child too will have equal opportunity with her male counterpart, to compete in any public forum. Similarly, women should device means of relieving themselves of such marital burdens which the society put on them. They should know that the entire society needs to benefit from the virtues that God deposited in them. They should not limit themselves to only house chores. They should know the entire society needs to benefit from the virtues that God deposited in them for development of their community and the world at large. Their active involvement in politics will make a difference in shaping human society and bringing about atmosphere or environment of peace.

There is need for women folk to work on the perception of themselves. They should not see themselves as inferior to their men counterpart in any public offices. There is a saying that "what a man can do, women can do it even better". From the look of things, if men are in power and Nation such as ours is chaos, it means that women with their wealth of knowledge and innate potentials given to them by God to make their homes "Paradise" will transform their entire human society. Women should encourage themselves and support themselves through voting any woman political aspirant into power. If women can vote for their fellow women into power, sooner or later the government of Nigeria will be taken up by women folk. If women- folk who are over 50% of Nigerian population could unit and vote themselves into strategic political positions, fear of failure in politics and fear of insecurity in political life of people in this nation will be a thing of the past and peace will begin to reign for the goods of all.

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