Educating Women on Effective Participation in Nigerian Politics

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Abstract

Over the years, there exists an on-going conflict about women's right to political administration of her country or community where she finds herself. It is becoming a great concern to many that women are relatively deprived of their rights to politics and even a burning issue in the different parts of the world. Although some elites have taken it as mere propaganda being blown out of proportion usually because of reasons such as religious or cultural inclination, the fact remains that women are not equal to men in Nigerian politics and other countries of the world. The fact is that when women's rights asserted are being stood upon, the expectation from women participation in politics would hinder the progress of the country. Therefore, this position paper considers educating women on effective participation in Nigerian politics and the impact of women in politics. Suggestions to eliminating women deprivation were discussed and recommendations towards improving the level of women participation in Nigerian politics were made.

Introduction

Most African countries till date, are still struggling to find political stability; in this, Nigeria is not left out. The legacy of colonialism of several years is still affecting most African countries in virtually all aspects, economically, politically, educationally, culturally, and socially. This can be summed up as several researchers (Porter, 2013; Un-women, 2015) have been able to identify Africa democracy as a major problem against sustainable development in most African countries. The major argument we find in research and literature pertaining to this issue is "what if these countries and particularly Nigeria were

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to include more women in politics? Of course, democracy in Nigeria could become a reality. A prominent political representative argues that "Women are central to new breed of politician in most African countries, through whom a deeply rooted, uncorrupt democracy could be attainted ... women are traditionally seen as authoritative figures, who tend to go about politics in a "bottom-up" fashion by building their constituencies confidence in them and not by relying on money to buy their support (Harmon, 2005).

There is no gainsaying from this assertion that women can also engage prominently in other socio-economic and political activities like their male counterparts and perform brilliantly. The advancement of women into politics in Nigeria has often been met with much criticism and cynicism because it is more widely accepted that women are the "weaker" vessel. Well, that may be physically true, but as the years go by, and with the little opportunity given to women to fill some leadership positions in politics and other academic disciplines; it is now becoming a reality that women are as human as men. Then, it is time to educate women, not as weaker vessels, but as strong as being able to excel in political leadership positions in Nigeria (Kolawole, Owonibi & Adebayo, 2012).

The first nation to permit women participation in politics was New Zealand in 1983 and the last to do so in 2015 was Saudi Arabia (UNDP, 2020). Nevertheless, progress is too slow and women are still under-represented. Therefore, educating women on effective participation in politics is the core of this position paper. The interest in the study is borne out of the fact that discrimination against women is still deeply rooted in many societies and especially in some African societies. Though records have shown some levels of progress, where more and more women are getting involved in politics around the globe and are being elected/appointed into leadership positions. The points to be stressed in this paper is to encourage women to stop from viewing themselves as being victims of discrimination, violence, illiteracy, intimidation, harassment and confined to deferential positions in the society because of the prevalence of traditional and cultural practices in most African countries. For example, Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala is a good example of women who against all odds has reached the final race in the election for Director General of World Trade Organisation (BBC NEWS, 2020).

However, the major goal of this paper is to educate women on the four indicative domain of democracy as expressed by Arowolo (2010). These include:

(i)   The domains of individual group and group rights and freedom.
(ii)   The domain of popular and equal participation in collective decision.
(iii)   The domain of accountability of government to mass publics and consistent minorities; and
(iv)   The domain of the application of principles of equal citizenship in all spheres of life; social, economic and political.

On this premise, educating women about equal participation in Nigeria politics is not out of place. Equally, encouraging and motivating women to become functional and to avoid the factors that mitigate and militate against women in politics is just to apply the principles of equal citizenship in all spheres of life in any democratic state or regime like Nigeria (Nda, 2003). On the other hand, it should be noted that educating women on effective participation should start from school, at the different levels of education. This may be through the introduction of gender studies into the schools' curricula. Parents are not left out by injecting into their female children the essence of women in society. The role they should play at home, school and community. Motivation, encouragement and empowerment against any form of marginalization right from the classroom, among their male peers will go a long way to prepare them for the future. Also, advocating for gender equality through the media and emphasizing the roles of women in society is a means of educating women for effective participation in politics. These would have prepared the minds of the young/girl child towards becoming functional women, working against factors that mitigate and militate women's participation in politics.

Theoretical Framework

The democratic framework on which this study was based concerns the historical legacies stemming from society's cultural, religious and political traditions. The proponents (Krasner, 1984; Skocpol, 1992; Peter, 1999 & Raynolds, 1999) who were of the institutional path dependency, present, historical legacies have been potentially capable of affecting the improvement and modernization of women's social and political status. The theory of historical legacies saw women participation in civic activities as being more of a matter of cultural choices, for which a certain degree of cultural modernity must be reached. The theory also expresses the fact that the emphasis society places on self–expression and self-esteem values creates a cultural climate that encourages women's participation in civic activities. In other words, the motivation, interest and encouragement any woman would have in political participation is borne out of the religious, tradition, cultural identity, political policies and historical legacies. The impact of the above, have a very great effect on women rights and empowerment, even on the face of developmental trends of social modernization and this has greatly affected the societies abilities to improve women's life (Inglehart & Norris, 2003; Inglehart, Norris and Welzel, 2002). They have asserted that the emergence of institution such as cultural laws, religious or historical legacies sometimes consist of types of organization that have a continuing and somewhat determinant influence a phenomena (woman) that would have otherwise changed due to forces like modernization. This measure of path dependent processes highlighted in this theory is capable of affecting gender equality and women adequate

participation in Nigerian politics; hence the need to educate women on effective participation in Nigerian politics.

Challenges of Women Participation in Politics

Nigerian women are still facing lots of challenges in active participation in politics till date and there is a need to educate women to rise up to the task of contributing maximally to the governance of the communities and the nation at large. Scholars (Agbalajobi, 2010 & Yetunde, 2010) have ascertained that gender bias in Nigeria's political system could be traced to the onset of colonialism as a result of the control of women by the colonialists and according to Hugh Clifford constitution of 1922. This constitution introduced the first elective principle in the pre-colonial Nigerian society which vehemently disenfranchised women; of course, the colonial era was widely believed to have wiped out every history of achievement by women. The colonial period, among other things, advocated that women should be seen, but not heard, and this foreign idea presented women as mere exhibition of their husbands' wealth. The concept resulted in minimizing the political and social roles of women in society. On the other hand, Nigerian politics is based on virility; it only involves those who are able to give all it takes to compete in the turbulent environment and are prepared to tussle to any extent in the political endeavour. This continued fright at the thought of violence has further alienated women from mainstream politics (Luka, 2011). For reasons such as:

1. Discrimination from various political parties and lack of affirmative action for women participation in politics.
2. Inadequate supply of financial support from the governments for female aspirants.
3. Involvement of political thugs, blackmail, intimidation, maiming, violence and assassinations during and after elections.
4. The highly patriarchal nature of political system in Nigeria.
5. Discouragement from relatives, socio-cultural and religious practices.
6. Lack of media support for women political aspirants, whose political feats are not properly documented, but rather down-played.

Therefore, there persists poor participation of women in politics and the number of women in political positions in Nigeria is growing at a very slow rate despite several interventions to change such trends. In Nigeria, women participation in politics is not proportionate to the 50% of the nation's population which they represent and has not translated into equal representation in political leadership positions (Irabor, 2011).

As such, the rights of women in Nigeria political agenda is more or less a buzz word in all the countries of the world. This ascertains that women are

deprived of their human rights, this is not just propaganda, of a truth, gender gaps still exist in virtually all the countries of the world. Despite the advances made in the area of women's rights to participation in politics, the political participation of women in Nigeria remains one of the lowest in the world. Women's participation in government is still below the 35% as stipulated in the gender policy.

However, scholars (Adebile, 2018 & Obasoro, 2013, 2016) have advanced other reasons why women participation in politics in Nigeria remains one of the lowest in the world. It has been observed that women do not feel free to vote for other women political aspirants. The thought of "will she be able to withstand the horrors involved in politics? make them vote for men political aspirants in place of their fellow women. For such reasons most women prefer to be in the political background, motivating and supporting male political aspirants. Who then is at fault? it is equally observed that when women give birth to female children like 2 or 3 consecutively, they are not happy, because they prefer male children to female children, why? Then is it proper to say that women are the enemies of themselves in some contexts? The authors of this paper are of the opinion that building up of political skills, political orientation and self-confidence in women are the most important cardinals of educating women for effective participation in politics. Therefore, the rights of women in active participation in Nigeria have been tampered with in so many ways as expressed in this table.

Table I: Women representation in Nigerian Elections in the years 1999, 2003, 2007 and 2011

Office	1999		2003		2007		2011	
	Seat Available	Women	Seat Available	Women	Seat Available	Women	Seat Available	Women
President	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0
Senate	109	3(2.8%)	109	4 (3.7%)	109	9 (8.3%)	109	7 (6.4%)
House of Reps.	360	12 (3.3%)	360	21 (5.8%)	360	25 (6.9%)	360	26 (7.2%)
Governor	36	0	36	0	36	0	36	0
State House of Assembly	990	24 (2.4%)	990	40 (3.9%)	990	57 (5.8%)	990	68 (6.9%)
State House of Assembly Committee	829	18 (2.2%)	881	32 (3.6%)	887	52 (5.9%)	887	-
Local Government Area Chairperson	710	13 (1.8%)	774	15 (1.9%)	740	27 (3.6%)	740	-
Councilors	6368	69 (1.1%)	6368	267 (4.2%)	6368	235 (3.7%)	6368	-

Source: Eyeh (2010); Irabor (2011) and Okoronkwo-Chukwu (2013)

Table 2: Comparison of Women Deputy Governors in Nigerian from 1999-2011

Election Year	No. of Women Deputy Governors
1999	1
2003	2
2008	6
2011	1

Source: Adapted from Ogunyankin (2012)

Table 3: Female Members in National Assembly from 1999-2015

Year	Senate	House of Representative
1999	3(2.8%)	12(3.3%)
2003	4(3.7%)	21(5.8%)
2007	9(8.3%)	26(7.2%)
2011	7(6.4%)	25(6.9%)
2015	7(6.4%)	19(5.2%)

Source: Quadri, M.O. (2019), www.inecnigeria.org

The three tables above explain extensive discrimination against women and under-representation of them in politics and governance in Nigeria when in comparison with their male counterparts. The interpretation of tables 1, 2 and 3 above also reveal the persistent poor participation of women in politics. The Nigerian women civil society organizations, groups, activists, and advocates have not been able to improve this situation maximally.

In spite of the women's rights to actively participate in politics and governance as stated in section 42(1) of the 1999 constitution of Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN) "A citizen of Nigeria of a particular community, ethnic group, place of origin, sex, religion or political opinion shall not, by reasons only that he is such a person be subjected to any form of discrimination". This situation in tables 1, 2 and 3 above, have no significant relevance with this policy stated above. For instance, from 1999-2015 general elections in Nigeria, no woman was elected into the office of the governor in any of the 36 states and that of the president of the federation. Therefore, the rights of women and the level of women participation in politics according to the gender policy should be properly examined by the government in order to breed the gaps and allow active women participation in politics and governance of Nigeria.

Women's Right

Everyone is entitled to human rights which include right to live free from violence and discrimination, to enjoy the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, to be educated to own property, to vote and to earn an equal wage (Women's Rights amnesty.org).

Women have the right to participate in political processes which affect them, their families and societies. According to (USAID, 2016), countries where a lot of women are allowed to participate tend to be more inclusive, responsive, egalitarian and democratic. Whenever women are permitted to take part in peace processes, they assist to expand agreement scope and encourage the prospects for lasting peace.

Impact of Women in Politics and Governance

Challenges of women towards viable contributions to politics are numerous; discriminatory attitudes, socio-cultural and religious practices and the situations where women were often discouraged by parents, husband and other close relations as a result of the violence and unhealthy (do-or-die) political environment, coupled with assassination, threats and humiliation are all parts of limitations of women to active participation in politics (Yahaya, 2012).

Yet, women from the pre-colonial period have played significant roles in politics and governance in most African societies. In fact, evidence from the historical background has shown that women in Nigeria have long been playing crucial roles in the political life of the nation; this has contributed in no great measure in shaping the political system of the country. For instance, Women like Queen Amina of Zazzau played significant roles in the political history of ancient Zaria in Northern Nigeria. Also in Yoruba land, conscientious, industrious and diligent women rose to the title IYALODE, a prestigious chieftaincy title among women in Yoruba land in the western part of Nigeria. Still in Yorubaland, the Erelus, the Moremi of Ile-Ife, just to mention a few. In Nigeria and other African nations, great women have impacted their world (Okoronkwo-Chukwu, 2013).

In Nigeria for instance, Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, the former minister of Finance, displayed a far-reaching impact on the growth of the economy and effective administration of the World Bank. Also, in Liberia, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, the former and the 24th President of Liberia served in various capacities in some public institutions before becoming a minister and then the president of the country. There are several other women not yet mentioned whose political activities have contributed to the growth of their different countries. Considering the various activities of women in the political life of Nigeria right from the pre-colonial era, the authors of this paper felt positive attention should be placed towards effective women participation in politics and governance in Nigeria. As such, women should be given the proper perception in politics like men. Therefore, the use of negative labelling, derogatory names, abusive

languages and expressions to describe great female political aspirants in Nigeria should be eliminated (Ngara & Ayabam, 2013).

Although in Nigeria, political activities are noted to be masculine activities and it makes it worse when sponsors of politicians prefer male aspirants rather than female ones. They believe to have better chances with male candidates than female candidates. Whatever the case, it is important to note that in politics, women are equal to men and women are not as powerless as portrayed by the contemporary world. Women, as expressed above, can play active roles in shaping the direction of Nigeria's politics beyond the imagination of their male counterparts in Nigerian politics.

Educating Women for Excellent Performance in Nigeria Politics and Governance

Women are significant actors in democracy and so must be actively represented and become effective part of political decision-making in Nigerian politics. In fact, the key indicators of democracy are gender equality and the full participation of women in politics and governance in Nigeria. For realization of women's rights and development of democracy, effective participation of women in politics at all levels of decision-making is crucial (Mangvwat, 2009).

Theoretical discourse on gender and democracy states that: *gender equality and women empowerment are not only human rights; they are also imperative for achieving inclusive, equality and sustainable development. Women's political participation is central to these goals, and political parties are among the most important institutions for promoting and nurturing such participation* (Clark, 2012).

The above in principle provides equal opportunity for both Nigerian men and women to participate in the political process. Also, it is impossible to separate women's political rights from their human rights, while human rights are fundamental aspects of any democratic framework (Karam, 2000). Therefore, women's efforts to become relevant politically should be seen as part of exercising their human rights.

One major key element of democracy is political participation and it provides the justification for inclusion of marginalized groups such as Nigerian women in electoral competition. The Nigerian experience in which the political process is male dominated and men influence the process more than women to the deprivation of women should be eliminated. Also, the process of participation of women in politics should be just, fair, free and rewarding (Karam, 2000).

According to UNDP (2020), the following methods can be employed to educate women on political participation:
1. Creation of awareness of youth in fighting for gender equality.

2. Involvement of institution and civil society raising the voices of women in politics.
3. Make available easy access to justice for women
4. Teaching women home management
5. Government should provide gender equality in education
6. Counselling women against the belief that they are only good for the kitchen
7. Women should be encouraged to have trust/confidence in themselves
8. Gender studies should be taught in all levels.
9. Training and mentoring women for political participation. (unwomen.org)
10. Women should build up their political skills, self-confidence and political orientation.

Conclusion

This paper has demonstrated a need to educate Nigerian women on active involvement in politics and governance in Nigeria. The paper has equally encouraged women to work hard in order to take the mass action against women marginalization and deprivation in Nigerian politics. Based on the perspective of traditional and cultural practices, women actually face a kind of massive resistance from participating in politics. Therefore, in order to ensure active participation of women in politics, civil society organizations, governments as well as political parties should increase the level of awareness by educating the women and organizing seminars and workshops not only in the cities but also in the rural environments. This is a positive indication that participation of women in politics can enjoy a brilliant era in future, therefore all relevant stakeholders should be ready to advocate for the protection of women from being marginalized, and there should be economic empowerment and political review that will accommodate the growing interest of women in politics both elective and appointive positions.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made;
1. Women are to continue with their political ambition in spite of gender discrimination, religious and socio-cultural practices, contributing greatly to political and national development.
2. The Nigerian government should work towards achieving gender equality in democratic governance to improve women's active participation in politics because of women's great potential and rights to politics.
3. There should be lots of improvement on the part of women activists to educate women on their rights to politics and governance in their country.
4. Women are to be encouraged by all relevant stakeholders to ignore all the difficulties summed up as gender discrimination and continue with their

political ambition, contributing greatly and meaningfully to the political and national development of their nation.

5.   There should be an enabling environment that allows women to engage meaningfully in the decision-making process in a sustainable and effective way that is free from violence and harassment of any kind.

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