

Source of Powerlessness of Women in Politics

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Keyword:

*Constitution,
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Powerlessness
Liberation.*

Abstract

In Nigeria, systematic gender biases exist in various form of laws and custom that are capable of impeding women's participating in politics. The 1989 and 1999 constitutions have created an enabling environment for its citizens who are willing to participate in politics. Nigerian women seem not interested in the game of politics regardless of the fact that they constitute a large percentage of the electorate. The data used for this paper were drawn from documentary sources. The paper recommends that women should also have articulated positions on political issues rather than being ambiguous, as well as ensures that the right people get elected into government, male or female.

Introduction

It is now widely acknowledged that Nigerian women are grossly underrepresented in politics and indeed in government, and in all spheres of human development activities. It is noted too that both the Nigerian Constitution and the Electoral laws guarantee the right of political participation to all Nigerians, irrespective of sex. Furthermore, the electoral laws empower women who feel discriminated against on the basis of their sex to seek redress in the law courts. Nigerian women should therefore be able to participate fully in

politics. Politics is a game of number and women constitute about 60% of the country's population. (Ivor,O.(2008) It is, therefore, not the intention of the 1989 Nigerian Constitution nor other laws of the land that the under dog position of women at the three legislative levels of Government should be so. History tells us that Nigerian or African women are not inferior given equal opportunities. We are told and we can remember vividly the feat of some Nigerian women in both pre-colonial,colonial,and postcolonial era in the economic and political life of the country. Easily remembered are Queen Daura of Daura Emirate, Amina of Zaria, the Amazons of Dahomey, Moremi of Ife Emotan of Benin and a host of others. Let us not forget Babangida era marked a watershed in the history of women struggle In Nigeria, when Maryam Babangida introduced the office of the first lady in 1987,She also took the issues of women to a high hight. Moreover,some other women who had great impact in the post independent Nigerian Government and politics includes : Professor Dora Akunyili,Dr (mrs) Okonjo –Iweala, Mrs Oby Ezekwesili,Deziani Alison Madueke,Justices Aloma Marian Mukhtar,Oloye Olajumoke Akinjide,Professor (mrs) Viola Onwuliri etc . There is overwhelming evidence today to prove that women constitute an oppressed, exploited, marginalized and under-privilged group in Nigeria as is the case in all Third World Countries. Women are therefore. powerless in our developmental spheres including politics.(Isiramen,C.(1999)

In Nigeria, while women form over 60% of the population, have the largest number of voters and constitute about 62% of the agricultural labour force, only 7% of women are literate enough to participate in meaningful democracy. In the Second Republic Legislature, women had only 0.7 representation. Educationally, women are at a disadvantage when compared with men. In the late eighties, female enrollment in schools was less than that of males. At the primary level, enrollment of girls was about 50% that of males, less than 50% at the secondary school level and only about 10% at the University level. Uku,P.E.B(1992)

Conceptual clarification of terms

Politics

Nothedge, refers to politics as “many situations outside the context of the state especially those in which individuals and groups are in a condition of rivalry

and competition” (Nothedge 1975:16). For instance, trade union politics, academics politics, church politics. Harold Lasswell (1936), defined politics as the study of “who gets what, when and how” he said it is the study of an influence and influential. David Easton (1960) conceived it as the “authoritative allocation of resources in the society”. Nwankwo (1990) defined politics as the study, which consider how people institutionalized their disagreements. The Oxford Advance English Dictionary defines politics as the science dealing with the form organization and administration of a state and with the regulation of a state’s relating with other states.

Election

Elections are part of democracy as they are the simplest forms of mass participation in selecting officers to positions. It could also be considered as a litmus test of any democratic system. As a process, election accords citizens the right to choose, at regular intervals among competing leaders and politics. Emhenya, A.I. and Aiya, F (2012).

(Dibie, C. C. 2008) sees “election as a social mechanism amongst others for aggregating preferences of a particular kind”. An election is therefore a procedure recognized by the rules of an organization, be it a state, an organization, a club where all, or some of the members choose a small member of person to hold an office or offices of authority within that organization. Ball, A U, (1979), states that political activity is a universal phenomenon and that it involves disagreement and the reconciliation of those disagreements which, of course, can occur at any level. Differences between individuals and groups provide reasons for disagreements. The poor may be jealous of the rich and form groups and political parties to work for a more equal distribution of wealth, men may wish to perpetuate the inferior position of women in society, and a struggle may ensue for the political emancipation of women. (Omorogbe, 1996).

Constitution: is a body of laws that determine how a state is govern’

Liberation: Free, discharge, Release simply refer to one that has been in bondage under restriction and now he is free.

Powerlessness: could mean lack of ability, influence or power, unable to produce an effect, or lacking power to act, helpless.

Methodology

This research adopts and explores primary and secondary sources of materials in simple random selection which involves the issues of Source of Powerlessness of women in Politics, data from textbooks, journals, newspaper, magazines, internet and libraries were used.

Theoretical Framework:

This paper will be hinged on the Gender Oppression Theory was propounded in the year 1995 by Lengemann and Niebrugge Brantly, describe women's situation as the consequence of a direct power relationship between men and women in which men have fundamental and concrete interests in controlling, using, and oppressing women—that is, in the practice of domination. By domination, oppression theorists mean any relationship in which one party (individual or collective), the dominant, succeeds in making the other party (individual or collective), the subordinate, an instrument of the dominant's will. Instrumentality, by definition, is understood as involving the denial of the subordinate's independent subjectivity (Lengemann and Niebrugge-Brantley. 1995). Women's situation. for theorists of gender oppression, is centrally that of being dominated and oppressed by men. This pattern of gender oppression is incorporated in the deepest and most pervasive ways into society's organization, a basic arrangement of domination

Most commonly called patriarchy, in which society is, organized to privilege men in all aspects of social life. Patriarchy is not the unintended and secondary consequence of some other set of factors—be it biology or socialization or sex roles or the class system. It is a primary power arrangement sustained by strong and deliberate intention. Indeed, to theorists of gender oppression, gender differences and gender inequality are by-products of patriarchy. ,

Therefore, The theory is relevant to this study because it explain how men and the traditional political values of women relegated them to the background when compared to their male counterpart

Sources that prevent women from active participation in politics.

Lack of government supportive and definite laws:

Many factors have contributed to the decline of women's participation in public and economic affairs, the first source that readily comes to mind is lack of

government supportive and definite laws which could encourage women to participate in politics. As a vulnerable but a vital force in the country's political scene, women deserve some governmental encouragement and incentives to enable them to compete with men for political positions. It is therefore regretted that the good intentions of the wise law makers have not been translated into concrete form by the Federal Military Government. At page 159, paragraph 9.063 of the Report of the Political Bureau of March, 1987 is the comment and recommendation that:

“Full involvement of women in politics is one method of defending and promoting women's interest in society. They can participate fully if they are members of the legislative and executive arms of government. For this reason, we recommend the allocation of 5% of the legislative seats to women in all the three tiers of government. This 5% of the legislative seats allocated to women is to be filled by nomination through the political parties.”

Women's political burden would have been made lighter if this recommendation was implemented. As long as women are not adequately or equitably represented as members of the legislative and executive arms of government, women's interest in politics will continue to suffer. Again, to encourage women to fully participate in politics, the electoral law which insists on Federal Character in appointive political positions ought to have made specific mention of female representation. Similarly, experience has shown that Decree

27 of 1989 which forbids the formation of women wings which could have served as pressure groups” within the parties makes politics more problematic for women.

Poor education. Another crucial source of powerlessness of women in politics is poor education. Politicians must be properly groomed through education for professional, technical and artistic competence to be able to compete successfully with political opponents. These educational qualities are central to meaningful political participation, many Nigerian women fall short of men in their educational attainments, and politics makes very great demands on the participant. Man is a political animal and politics, being the science of government, is a grim battle for political dominance and supremacy. The modern politics which calls for open debates and exposition of party manifestos

and ideologies, is heavily achieved in favour of the educated. If women are to compete with men on an equal footing, they have to equip themselves educationally for the great combat to increase their versatility to cope with the new demands of politics.(UNESCO,1996:6)

Women's traditional role of wife and mother, if properly carried out, is a fulltime job. It is the best educationally that should dabble in politics without jeopardizing their traditional role. While men should assist their wives with raising the children, women cannot afford to abandon their traditional role and take to the soap box en-masse. Politics for women must be seen as additional, not alternative role. It must be stressed that although fathers have a duty to contribute towards the upbringing of children, motherhood and the care and nurture of Nigeria's future leaders right from the cradle is women's greatest contribution to mankind's great march to advance technology and development. In playing this role, women enjoy a monopoly and not even men in their arrogance and physical superiority, can swap places with elect descendants of Eve. There are however large number of educated women with grown up children who should participate in politics to ensure that the interest of women, children and the family is catered for, and a balanced development is attained.

Lack of economic incentives. (financial support)

Another important source of powerlessness of women in politics arises from economic factor. As it is in every desirable undertaking, politics involves money, and women need it badly to meet the requirements of INEC and political parties. Campaign strategies and execution, dissemination of information and logistics and the mobilization of the masses for the political message, are all issues of huge financial disbursement which the majority of our women can ill afford.

Although women perform about 52% of all agricultural work in Nigeria, much of the work is for subsistence, the products being for family consumption. Land as capital or money is a vital source of power in a society in which agriculture constitutes one of the dominant features. In Nigeria, people are able to own, in the cities and towns and in the rural areas. Women normally farm in the plots of their men relations. Majority of women can therefore not invest as men do in agriculture and land to raise money for politics. Men's access to land enhances

their political and economic power thus encouraging them to go into politics. The result is that many women in the urban and rural areas are powerless not only in politics but also in many other economic activities Olori.,(2003).

Religion and culture or traditionalism have greatly contributed to women's powerlessness in politics. There are in Nigerian Societies and indeed in all societies throughout the world some traditional beliefs and cultures which discriminate against women in public affairs. In these societies emphasis is on women's roles of breeding and bringing up children. This emphasis on the natural role of women is overemphasized. Indeed as put forward, without women performing this role, the human race will soon be extinct. It is not being advocated that women should abandon their exalted role of perpetuating the race, rather, that suitable arrangements should be made by the governments of the Federation to lighten the heavy burden of house keeping and child rearing which women have borne in this country for decades so that those women and especially middle age women who have political ambition can go into politics and achieve self actualization quite apart from putting across at the appropriate forum the case for women. Those cultures that practice early marriage for women do not allow women to get mature enough to be able to participate in public affairs. Some women are put into Purdah, and are thus prevented from participating fully in public life. In early days 'Polygamy and the institution of the harem relieved women of incessant pregnancy and gave them protection and security for the learning of their children. Even those practices that now seem to us most cruel and unjust, evolved gradually as a matter of convenience or necessity, firmly established in the culture, they were accepted with equanimity, very often with pride and preference by the women involved.'" Such attitudes are echoed today by some women who object to present movement for equality of opportunity preferring the comfort of accustomed ways and the security of subordination to a protecting male. Such women argue that politics should be the exclusive preserve of the men.

In a situation where there is very strong male chauvinism, men insist that women, especially their wives and close relations, should vote along their party lines. Such uncompromising attitudes of men constitute another source of powerlessness of women in politics. It is time men changed their feudalistic attitude and accept women as their partners in progress.

Thuggery and violent nature of Nigerian politics:

Another notable source is the thuggery and violent nature of Nigerian politics. Some women, in fact a majority of them who live in rural areas, have genuine fear for Nigerian type of politics. We are all aware of the kind of politics that existed in the first, second third and fourth Republics. Politics was characterized by thuggery, violence, arson and even murder. The atmosphere was hostile to free movement and there was no respect for law and order. It was common then for homes and villages to be abandoned. Women therefore regard politics as men's exclusive game too dangerous for them to participate in.

It is true that politics is a tedious business but there are women who are tough to participate in politics and excel. Such women can cope with the rigours of electioneering campaigns and long nocturnal political meetings which cannot be divorced from politics. The inherent problem of women is the natural role of perpetuating the human race which I have earlier discussed in this paper, which if properly carried out with dedication is a full time job. And women love their children and homes too dearly to jump at the idea of going into full time politicking. Besides, many women are handicapped financially to get fully involved in politics. I do not agree with the argument that many women are not in politics because of the hard work politics involves.

Women's unco-operative attitude towards themselves

I must not fail to mention women's unco-operative attitude towards themselves at public meetings and in politics. They are difficult to organize and often refuse to support and co-operate with fellow women. They gossip a lot, and can be petty. Women are sometimes said to be women's own enemies.

Socialization or sex role stereotyping is a major factor that shapes female participation in politics. Through this process, women are made to believe that politics is not for them. Girls are made to associate with the immediate environment while boys with the wider environment. Socialization through education has largely produced apolitical women, and among the educated ones it produced women who were specially trained for women oriented jobs such as typists, shorthand and stenographers, nurses, clerks, teachers, ornamental hawkers and domestic cooks and baby sitters.

Ignorance on the part of women is also a major source of powerlessness in politics.

Having discussed at length some of the sources that prevent women from active participation in politics, I will now examine how obstacles which cause women's powerlessness in politics can be eliminated. A new political culture which emphasizes public enlightenment, education and mass mobilisation is now being pursued. Women should be ready to move with the times so that their participation in politics will not be merely cosmetic as it was in the past Republics.

Strategies for overcoming identified sources, obstacles and constraints

1. Women should have, at least, the basic education which inculcates literacy. Even as a voter, a woman should be educated because a voter cannot really exercise responsible freedom of choice unless she knows what she is choosing between. To overcome the problem of literacy, women as mothers should ensure good education for their female children and also the illiterate women should take advantage of the Mass Literacy programme currently going on in every local government area in Nigeria.
2. Economic viability cannot be divorced from the game of politics. So women should actively participate in activities such as workshop, talks, for, as well as information and hints on the establishment of small and cottage industries projects and the procurement of loans.
3. Women should also have articulated positions on issues rather than being ambiguous. Democracy also encourage individuals to critically examine issues thus women should endeavor to have, and where they criticize one another's ideas, dreams and manifestoes in camera. This action has the advantage of effecting changes on issues of mutual interest in a mature manner.
4. Any woman aspiring to a position of political leadership and authority must have the quality of political leadership and authority. This is enhanced by exemplary leadership qualities like honesty, dedication, purposefulness, courage and tolerance. She should also have an

unalloyed commitment to the improvement of the living conditions of the citizens in general and the womenfolk in particular.

5. It is pertinent to mention that sacrifice is needed on the part of female contestants and voters alike. Therefore, women would as of duty and role ensure that the right people get elected into government, male or female.
6. We wish to request politically minded women to identify with the non-governmental organizations championed by women to enable them constitute themselves into a political moving force. Some non-governmental organizations such as the Nigerian League of women voters and the National Council of women Societies have shown exemplary leadership in this area. Nevertheless, a lot needs to be done to harness and harmonize their efforts for the benefits of the larger society.
7. women should endeavor to ignore those negative restrictions of religion and culture and focus their attention on those aspects of religion and culture that emphasize their worth. according to oduoye (2001), the task of transforming culture is women's to embark upon. when they say yes, their "chi" will say yes, for not to speak out is to play according to the rules of those who seek to dominate one's life.
8. Women should learn to assert themselves at all time and shun inferiority complex.
9. Unity among women (both the elite and grass root) is necessary to achieve success of gender equity.
10. As a matter of necessity, men must shift grounds from patriarchal .
11. They should encourage their wives, mothers, sisters and nieces into contesting and winning into enviable positions
12. Men should desist from gender bias in casting of votes during elections
13. Government should enforce the various international declarations on women's political involvement. This can be done by taking a leaf from the strategies of Norwegian government. In Norway, the government endorsed a quota gender balancing in every government board and establishment of 40 — 60. That is, all official committees, government boards and councils must be made up of a proportion of 40% of any of the other sex (Common Wealth Secretariat, 1990).
14. Government should embark on enlightenment programmes aimed at dislodging all biase.

15. Cultural, religious or sexist which prevent the participation of women in local, national and international decision making should be discourage

CONCLUSION

We have identify that some of the factors responsible for the powerlessness of Women in politics include lack of government incentives for women to easily participate in politics, an area of male dominance, lack of adequate education on the part of women to appreciate why, how, culture women should participate in politics, traditional practices and some cultural taboos which militate against women participating in male-dominated public affairs, religious considerations which prevent taking part in outdoor activities and women's negative attitude towards group organisations and leadership.

Women should embrace lifelong education and should not merely acquire education once and for all; but learn how to build up a continually evolving body of knowledge all through life so as to be well for full political participation.

I have also pointed out in the course of this lecture that part of the powerlessness of women is inherit in womanhood since it falls to the lot of women to perpetuate the human race. Also identified is the religion constraint imposed on women by some religions. There is no special provision for women's representation which is left to the whims and caprices of their more aggressive male counterparts. This should not be so since women slightly out-number men in Nigeria.

My experience during the just concluded Presidential general elections in Nigeria as well as elections into the party executives of the APC and PDP has more than convinced me that the constitution ought to have conceded at least one quarter of the positions to female candidates in any elections.

After many years of struggle in the political arena, women can only point to very minimal achievements and partial victories Because women are grossly under represented in policy making positions their conditions whether in the political, legal, economic, social, or cultural spheres remain far from satisfactory.

The work of the women's Commission, the National Council of Women's Societies, and other women's organisations, have created broad national awareness of the problems of women, and there is a general commitment to bring women to the core of development activities, so as to ensure balanced development. Improvement in the status of women is a pre-requisite to development.

There is therefore the need for continuous re-examination of the scope of women's participation in public life in the economy and in the community in order to remove all discriminatory barriers which inhibit women from taking up new responsibilities mandated by a constantly evolving and changing world. The work of the Women's constitution and other women's organisations is far from done. It is evident from the recently concluded general elections that male chauvinism is still prevalent in our Nigerian society. It would, therefore, appear that the only solution to the problem of powerlessness of women in Politics is the allocation of a quota of legislative and executive positions of government to women in all the three tiers of government.

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