Sapientia Global Journal of Arts, Humanities and Development Studies (SGOJAHDS), Vol.5 No.3 September, 2022; p.g. 217 – 224; ISSN: 2695-2319 (Print); ISSN: 2695-2327 (Online)

GENDER ISSUES IN NIGERIA: WOMEN IN ELECTIVE POSITIONS

THERESE LEO IKWUEGBU
University of Uyo, Nigeria
sisterthereseleo@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Scholarship is replete with researches that suggest that women are not generally given equal opportunities with men especially in leadership roles in a world that is predominantly patriarchal. However, despite many initiatives undertaken to address these inequalities, there seems to be little improvement especially with regards to the disproportionate distribution of elective positions. This phenomenon is a reality in Africa and in Nigeria in particular. Thus, promotion of gender equality in Nigeria has remained a little explored area in scholarship with many inconsistencies and ambiguities yet to be attended to. Consequently, the major thrust of this paper is to delve into the effects of this imbalance in the distribution of the nation's democratic powers on the entire citizenry and on women and children in particular. This continues to produce ripples of consequences in the development of Nigerian society. This study adopts historical and analytical research methods. The study recommends an inclusive method of electing candidates into leadership of the nation. Women's potentials could be recognized and adequately utilized in building the nation and also be well represented and given opportunities to participate in making decisions affecting their lives and the entire nation.

KEYWORDS: Gender, Democracy, Equality, Nigeria, Leadership, Elections.

1. Introduction

The role of women as back burners in politics is a global reality despite the fact that they make enormous and invaluable contributions to the political processes leading to the election of leaders and their installment in many societies. There is a gross underrepresentation of women in leadership in many societies of the world. In Nigeria as many other nations, the participation of women in politics is often limited to electoral processes but not extended to the opportunities of leadership positions. Considering the nature of women and their numbers in every society, there is no gainsaying that they are a great support to the leadership of the nation, particularly with regards to the process of placing political leaders in positions. Although globally there is an increase in the participation of women in government and various institutions, a lot still need to be done. A number of women have been elected as heads of state of a few nations, but the progress is relatively slow. Nigeria rating among the lowest, has a very limited number of women both in the elected and appointed leadership positions. This exclusion in the Nigerian situation is basically gender-targeted, played out in the economic disproportions, household inequalities and a sexist culture (Kelly: 2019).

Leadership of every society must have a good representation of the population, this must include a fair and balanced representation of the genders, in this way such a society will reflect a better level of equanimity. Such a balance will maximize the responsiveness of the populace

as well as a better participation of majority if not all members of the society. This inclusiveness goes beyond mere gender equality, but extends to the inclusion of men and women, young and old, poor and rich without any social stratification in the political life of the society. This is about the inclusion of all in the leadership and decision making role in the affairs affecting their lives, where the opinion of all matters and are included in the final policies made for the administration of the society. This will imply that men and women regardless of their background and social status stand the genuine and equal chances of being elected into leadership positions of their respective nations and local governments.

To attend the feat of full equality and participation in Nigeria's political sphere, the first step ought to be to create a level playing field in the labour sectors, allowing equal access to all in the leadership roles in the different institutions. Breaking down socio-economic walls barring a section of the society's population from partaking in the political activities of the nation. This is possible if gender mainstreaming is employed as well as targeted policies. Going beyond the mentality of the social constructs and gender roles as well as social stratification which prevents a greater percentage of the nation's population full participation in politics. It is very obvious that women are the most disadvantaged in this situation.

This paper intends to briefly review gender inequality in general, and how it impacts the life of women. It will also discuss gender inequality in the Nigerian society and its nuances in different aspects of women's life in the country. The role of gender in the politics of the nation and the poor participation of women in the affairs of the country due to poor representation will be evaluated. Finally, the paper will end with a conclusion and a recommendation.

2. Gender Inequality

According to Enole in Eme and Elekwa (2010:2) "gender refers to the meaning we assign to being a woman or being woman". It is basically the characteristics and roles that one is expected to possess and express by the fact of being male or female. These traits assign people (men and women) to certain roles considered appropriate to their masculinity for men and femininity for women. It is expected that each group stick to their assigned roles and traits. Gender is a sociocultural phenomenon, because the roles are assigned through culture, and the social construction of inequality between men and women.

In every culture, men and women are treated differently from childhood, this ranges from the colour of clothing, choice of toys, enculturation into social roles, use of language, choice of career, expression of emotions, house chores, role in the society. All these are societal expectations, social constructs and gender-role stereotypes which are ascribed to the sexes. Many agents are instrumental in enforcing these stereotypes; parents, culture teachers, popular media, etc. (Encyclopedia of Social Issues:1997: pp.1709-1711).

Initially, the fight for equality among men and women began as individual issues as women fought independently for equal rights in workplaces and segregations in various areas of life. With time, women began to unite in their fight for gender equality, with a definitive move made in 1960 in America. The women's liberation movement then which consisted mostly on professional women later gave rise to more powerful movements and conventions in the bid to end marginalization and gender stereotype and marginalization(Encyclopedia of Social Issues:1997: pp.1709-1711). The term gender is very much regarded as synonymous with the

demand of women to end biases imposed by the society and cultures on the roles of sexes, however it means more than just that.

Stereotypes vary from one culture to another, though generally certain traits run across many cultures. In the typical African society there is the belief of women being unfit and inadequate to perform certain roles in the socio-religious, socio-political settings. According Essien and Ukpong (2012:p287), "Politically women are perceived as not being worthy of exercise of power and authority in the society… Religiously in a traditional setup, it is a taboo to think of women leading or being in charge of a shrine". This buttresses the idea or stereotype that women are inferior to men. When the choice of a leader is not based on the individual's knowledge and ability to lead, but on the sex of the person, it becomes a gender issue.

2.1 Gender Inequality in Nigeria

Culturally, Nigeria is gender stratified. The importance of gender of a person is a real issue in Nigeria and very much determines one's place in the educational, economic, social, political, religious and religious strata. There is glaring inequality in almost every aspect of the Nigerian society. It is an existing reality that cannot be easily ignored, both in the family, social, religious and economic institutions as well as in governance. There is severe imbalance in the educational, workforce and leadership opportunities in the country. Enough women are not empowered educationally and given opportunity in the labour market and worse still, in the area of leadership. A statistics conducted in 1990 revealed that a very minimal percentage of women were professors, about 1.8% of all the professors in Nigeria, furthermore, only 11% of women participate in the Nigerian economy as against 30% of men (Olonade, et al: 2021).

Likewise, a study conducted by Omoregie and Abraham (2009) on the statistics of male and female genders enrolled for studies at every level of education, it was discovered that there is a persistent gender inequality in the education sector of Nigeria. The research also revealed that the reason for the inequality is fundamentally due to the historical, cultural, and patriarchal structure of the traditional Nigerian society (Omoregie& Abraham: 2009).

In a typical Nigerian traditional society irrespective of tribe or ethnicity, the gender places one on the strata of life. One is valued according to his or her gender. Male genders are generally more appreciated than females, and are accorded more rights and privileges with regards to house chores, opportunities in the family, inheritance, more social recognitions, privileged social and religious recognitions and roles etc. this translates so strongly in the regular life of the Nigerian society. This unjust practice is presumably accepted as the modus operandi in the society without being questioned or challenged. Any attempt to challenge it raises an eyebrow and may earn the person an image of a rebel.

It is surprising how tolerant and indifferent the society seem to be in the midst of this seeming social injustice. One is tempted to question the understanding of social injustice among the Nigerian citizenry; especially the elites. Wouldn't the situation of women in Nigeria be a typical violation of chapter IV, section 42 of the 1999 Nigerian constitution on the right to freedom from discrimination? Though it may not be explicit, however, it is implied in the patriarchal influence embedded in the country's system of running affairs, an unfortunate extension of the tenets of different cultural practices against women dignity. Almost every home has women or at least a woman, experiencing the potentialities and numerous abilities

ingrained in the female specie. How come no substantial moves are made towards the inclusion of women in the leadership of the nation when most members of the society know and have experienced the leadership roles played by women so expertly in their different homes? Why are women and men not given equal opportunities?

3. Gender Inequality in Nigerian Politics

The 1999 constitutions of the Federal Republic of Nigeria amended in 2011 maintains that every Nigerian citizen who has the qualities provided in chapter VI, part 1 can be voted into any leadership position of the country. This implies the freedom of every Nigerian citizen to participate in politics, including the electoral rights of voting and being voted for. Candidates can only be disqualified according to the provisions of chapter VI, part 2 of this same constitutions. Despite being enshrined in the Nigerian Constitutions; the reality is a far cry from the ideal. Although there is no explicit law disqualifying women from not being full participants in the political life of the country, there is still a subtle exclusion strongly engrained in the psyche and fabrics of the citizens, women inclusive. People are already wired from birth to see women as unfit to take up leadership roles in the public sectors of the nation. Women are taught by the society not to trust their own abilities to lead, even when their prowess in leadership is so glaring. Women in Nigeria, or rather female folks has been systematically impeded from full participation in politics and only settle for some aspects of politics. The tenets of participating in the electoral process of the democratic leadership roles has been redefined and decimated by certain cultural bias and stereotypes (Awofeso&Odeyemi: 2014).

There are various ways and levels that citizens participate in the political activities of their nations. Through political participation, people partake directly or indirectly in the selection of their leaders and consequently have a voice in the making of policies that affect their lives. Some of these political activities include; voting, contesting for election, campaigning among others. These activities could further be classified into political participation and political representation, the latter being the highest form of participation. In Nigeria, men have remained the preferred and favoured gender for political representation. A few women may once in a while be given opportunities at the local government levels and sparingly in the state and national levels, men however have retained the highest levels of leadership both at the state and national levels.

Oluyemi (https://www.unstats.un.org) rightly observed from the analysis of the participation of women in elective positions between 1999 and 2015, that a very negligible percentage of women took part in the exercise. This she attributed to some challenges facing women and hindering them from full participation in politics. Such challenges she identified as; patriarchy, stigmatization, low level of education meeting schedules, finance, political violence and finally religious and cultural barriers. These challenges are created by the society without due consideration for the female gender who are more likely to be victims of these limitations. This is a way of limiting the political potentials and powers of women, leaving them no room to contribute to the growth of the nation and to take part in making decisions affecting their lives and their families. This type of gender discrimination is pervasive and orchestrated to remain part of a complex system of social, economic and cultural oppression. A lot of women go to their graves with most of the music of their lives unplayed, without being given the opportunity to unleash their leadership qualities.

Women enjoying full participation in politics in a society like Nigeria where they are subjugated to household managers, being responsible to a greater extent for raising the children and keeping the home. Majority of women will have little or no chances to keep up with nocturnal political meetings nor afford the financial demands for vying for a political post. The dreams of being full and equal participants in the affairs of the Nigerian state will continue to be elusive for women. The implication of this for Nigeria is that, there is no authentic democracy. Anyalebechi (2016) posits that "Political participation which is a *sine qua non* (sic) of democracy allows for diversity of opinion and participation of both men and women into political gathering".

Since the Beijin conference in 1995, African women are yet to experience the effects of the implementation of the convention on the "Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)". African women according UN protocols as of 2005 as well as the development of new policies and guidelines and creation of networks of gender experts said that African women continue to face not only widespread poverty, but also heavy labour burdens.

However, African women have made significant strides in the political arena over the past years. The continental political body of the African Union (AU), took a major step by promoting gender parity in its top decision making position 2003. Five women and five men were elected as AU commissioners. In 2004, Ms. Gertrude Mongellgood was chosen to head the AU's Pan-African Parliament, where women make up 20% of the members. Another AU body, the African Peer Review Mechanism entrusted with the task of overseeing Standard for good governance, was led by Ms. Angelique Savane. African women have also successfully promoted agreements that advance their rights. By the end of 2004, 51 out of the 53 AU member countries had ratified CEDAW adopted in 1973 by Un General Assembly. In 2003, Activists persuaded their heads of state to adopt a protocol on the rights of women (UN: https://www.un.org).

Despite all these achievements and progress made, African women have also encountered challenges and obstacles such as; the primary development of policies in many countries known as poverty reduction strategies, who still do not take into account the differences in income and power between men and women, hampering efforts to finance programs that reduce inequality. Moreover, majority of African women are still denied education and employment.

African Union (2017) in its logical framework for achieving gender equality and women empowerment in African, Aspiration 4.1 on leadership states that "Equal participation and demonstrated influence of women and girls in all leadership and decision-making positions". Furthermore, African Union commission developed 6 key pillars for Gender Equality and women's Empowerment (GEWE) to ensure the inclusion of women in Africa's development agenda. The agenda include;

1. Women's Economic Empowerment and Sustainable Development
2. Social justice, protection and women's right
3. Leadership and Government- increasing the opportunities for the participation of women in leadership of nations

4. Gender management systems- providing access and investing sources
5. Women, Peace and Security- ensuring that women's perspectives are included in these issues
6. Media and ICTs- giving women a voice in African media and access to technology for knowledge. (UN: https://www.un.org)

Despite the progress promote gender equality and empower women in some African countries, Nigeria has been slow in implementing the 1995 Beijin declaration for women to have at least 30% representation in the leadership of the nation, as well as the 2000 Millennium goals of the United Nations for Women empowerment and gender equality. In the words of Quadri (2018),

> "A systematic analysis of women's participation in Nigeria since 1999 when the country returned to democratic rule, reveals the same pattern and trend of engagement and outcome. The National Assembly in 1999 had three (3) (2.8%) female Senators and twelve (12) (3.3%) female House of Representatives members. In 2003, four (4) (3.7%) and twenty-one (21) (5.8%) female members were elected respectively into the Assembly. In 2007 the National Assembly had nine (9) (8.3%) female Senators and twenty-six (26) (7.2%) female members of House of Representatives. In 2011, the National Assembly had seven (7) (6.4%) female members and twenty-five (25) (6.9%) female members in the lower house. In 2015, the National Assembly has seven (7) (6.4%) female members in the Senate and (19) (5.2%0 female in the House of Representatives".

The above report shows a very poor representation of women in Nigerian leadership. The population of women in Nigeria as elsewhere outnumbers that of men by a large margin, it is therefore unjustifiable that they are so minimally represented. The big question is 'how are their voices heard? How much they do participate in the decision making of the country? How do their opinions matter? Does this reflect a just, fair and egalitarian society?

4. Conclusion

The voices of the Nigerian women are very faint and consequently barely heard in the high leadership circles where decisions concerning them and their children are made. They have so much been relegated to the background that they not even trust themselves to be of relevance to the political spheres of the country. Membership in these circles are through elective offices which women has been structurally excluded from through cultural, religious and social stereotypes. The Nigerian society needs to first of acknowledge that the exclusion of women from politics is social injustice and a systematic discriminatory act. It is not disputable that women are veritable instruments of leadership, they have it takes to give good leadership. Each gender has got particular attribute needed to advance the country in all ramifications; economically, educationally, socially, culturally, etc. giving women a chance by liberating them from the cultural and social biases that has hindered their full participation in politics through education and other forms of human empower will be of great benefit to the country.

5. Recommendations

This paper recommends the following to facilitate better participation of women in the Nigerian politics and subsequent electives positions;

1. A Genuine reorientation of what the feminine gender stands for the entire citizenry of Nigeria. Both men and women need to be properly educated and correctly informed about gender roles in a way that is egalitarian and promotes complementarity.
2. Planning political activities in a way that is inclusive. Holding nocturnal meetings for political parties is already a way of excluding women who must be home to give attention to their families.
3. Politics should not be made so capital intensive that a certain group of people you may possess leadership qualities to help the development of the country is scared of it, women especially. Secondly there should fair play in the labour market, so that women that have equal ground with men.
4. The society owes it to the women to train and development their confidence, encouraging them to believe that they not inferior but rather different from men. They are to be made to believe in themselves and in the ability to lead. It is the duty of the society, because the society pushed into the box they find themselves at the moment.
5. Women are to take positive and concrete actions to move, defying all odds and obstacles. They to support one another to move and make their presence felt in politics and the voices heard in the decision/policy-making bodies.

References

African Union "AU Strategy for Gender Equality & Women's Empowerment- 2018-2028", African Union Headquarters, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, https://www.au.int, Retrieved 10 March 2022.

African Union Commission, (2015), "Agenda 2063- The Africa we Want". https://www.au.int, Retrieved 10 March 2022.

African Women Battle for Equality/African Renewal- the United Nations, https://www.un.org. Retrieved 10 March 2022.

Anyalebechi, L. (2016), "The Issue of Gender Inequality in Nigeria", in *Journal of Policy and Development Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 2, pp. 63-71)

Eme, I. O. &Elekwa, N. N. (2010) "Dynamics of Gender Studies: A Thematic Exposition", pp110. In: Okoli, F. C., Okeke, V. O. S., Okoye, I. K., Ojukwu, U. G., (eds.) *Gender Studies – A Reader*, Great AP Express, Nsukka-Nigeria.

Essien, M. A. &Ukpong, P. D. (2012). Patriarchy and Gender Inequality: The persistence of Religious Prejudices in Contemporary AkwaIbom State, Nigeria. *International Journal of Social Science and Humanity*, 2(4), pp.286-289.

Kelly, L. (2019), "Barriers and Enablers for Women's Participation in Governance in Nigeria", in *Helpdesk Report*, University of Manchester.

Olonade, Y. O., et al, "understanding Gender Issues in Nigeria: The Imperative for Sustainable Development" in *Journal Pre-proof*, Heliyon, 15 July 2021.

Oluyemi, O., "Monitoring Participation of women in Politics in Nigeria", https://www.unstats.un.org. Retrieved 9 March 2022.

Omoregie, N. & Abraham, I. O. (2009), "Persistent Gender Inequality in Nigeria Education", Benson Idahosa University, Benin-City, Nigeria.

Quadri, M. O. "Women and Political participation in the 2015 General Election in Nigeria: Fault Lines and Mainstreaming Exclusion", in *Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa,* Vol. 20, No. 1. 2018.

Roth, J. K. (Ed), Encyclopedia of Social Isssues (Vol. 6, pp. 1709-1723). Marshall, New York, USA. 1997.