

GENDER IMBALANCES: A GREAT THREAT TO CULTURAL LEADERSHIP IN NIGERIA

BY

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Abstract

This paper explores the consequences of gender-cultural and political leadership in Nigeria using case study's approach to appraise the life histories of two groups of women. It takes gender as a category of analysis, recognizing the contributions feminist theorist have made. Although, more emphasis should be placed on power politics, without necessarily deemphasizing alternative options such as affirmative action, it should, however, be pursued within a frame work of competitive politics so that the legitimacy, effectiveness and autonomy of women in decision-making will not be compromised as cultural superiority brewed violent and wanton destructions of lives and properties as those believed to have superior culture trampled over self-acclaimed inferior practices of other groups. Understanding gender relations will improve socio-economic and political wellbeing of Nigeria nation.

Introduction

Leadership, particularly political leadership is crucial for the development of any nation. The progress, development, and fortunes of any nation are tied to the type and quality of the political leadership it has had and continues to have. Cultural integration among various ethnic groups in Nigeria has survived since the 1900 till the present political dispensation despite the various challenges militating against the unity of the Nigerian nation. However, leadership like other processes is gendered sensitive. Leadership, like institutionalized practices, institutional structures and institutions exist within hierarchies that generally privilege men over women. The review of women's political adventures globally, gender and women's political leadership in Nigeria, understanding gender relations, culture and development in Nigeria, hindrances to women's participation in governance, how to strengthen women's participation in governance, and advice to women presently occupying leadership position are the major sub-topics in this work. It also showcased the ability and the difficulties encountered by Nigerian women in their leadership positions.

Review of Women's Political Adventures Outlook in a Global Perspective

According to Winner (2016), women constitute slightly more than half of the world population. Their contribution to the social and economic development of societies is also more than half as compared to that of men by virtue of their dual roles in the productive and reproductive spheres. Yet their participation in formal political structures and processes, where decisions regarding the use of societal resources generated by both men and women are made, remains insignificant. Presently only 22 countries have achieved a critical mass of 30 percent or higher women representation in their national parliaments, mainly as a result of constitutional quotas

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written into law and requiring that a certain percentage of political positions be occupied by women of that numbers. Six are African countries. Burundi, Mozambique, Rwanda, South Africa, Tanzania and Uganda. These countries succeeded because they recognized the importance of equity between women and men in decision-making and they instituted changes in their electoral and parliamentary processes. The US currently ranks 68th of 134 nations worldwide with only 16 percent of women elected to the House of Representatives and 16 percent elected to the senate. In October 2003, Rwanda became the country closest to reaching parity between men and women of any national legislature. Currently, Rwanda has 48 percent of lower House seats held by women and 34.6 percent held in the Upper House. From 1945 to 1995, the number of sovereign states with parliaments increased seven – fold but the percentage of women members in parliament worldwide increased only fourfold. From 1945 to 1997, only 42 of the 186 states with a legislative institution have at one time or another selected women to preside over parliament or a House of parliament 18 European, 19 of Americas, 3 Africa, 1 Asia, 1 pacific. Women ministers remain concentrated in social areas (14%) rather than legal (9%) economic (4%) political (3%) and executive (3.9%) areas and there are only 13 women in the highest position of state out of 189 governments.

Historical Overview of Nigerian Women and Electoral Politics

According to Iwuala B. (2007), the political marginalization of women in Nigeria was well played out during the First Republic (1960 – 1966) when there were only two female legislators, Mrs. Wuraola Esan and Mrs. Bernice Kerry in the Federal parliament, and two others Mrs. Margaret Ekpo and Mrs. Janet Muokelu in the Eastern House of Assembly. There was no female minister. During the Second Republic (1970 – 1984), there was one female senator out of 571 and 11 members of the House of Representatives out of 445. In the 19 states of the Federation, there was no female representative in all the state House of Assembly, neither was there a female chairperson nor councilor at the local government level.

Gender and Women's Political Leadership in Nigeria

According to Akuniboye (2015), under the infamous transition programme of General Babangida, the longest and most expensive in Nigeria (1985 – 1993), women were also grossly alienated. For instance, in the 19 member political Bureau of 1986, only two were women. In the 1990 local government elections, 3 women were elected out of 591. In the State Houses of Assembly there were 27 out of 1,172 members, whereas there was no woman legislator in 14 states. In the House of Representatives, women counted only 14 out of 589 and 1 out of 91 in the senate out of the 3000 presidential aspirants in 1991, only 8 were women. Significant difference for example, the percentage of women in the labour force, which was 35.9 percent in 1994 stood at 34.3 percent and 38.1 percent in 1993 and 1994 respectively. Since 1986, the proportion of female primary school dropouts is larger than male. By 1999, at the dawn of the Fourth Republic, the story was still the same. Out of the total of 11,117 electable positions available during the 1999 elections, only 631 women contested, which was a mere 5.6 percent, not of the total number of contestants, but of the number of position available for contest. Of the 631 female contestants only 180 (143 of whom were elected as ward councilors) managed to win, representing just 1.6 percent of the electable positions. In other words, of all electable positions available under General Sani Abacha, there were 20 women out of 360 members of

the House of Representatives, and 9 out of 109 senators whereas in 1999 elections only 1.6 percent was occupied by women.

In 2003 men occupied 105 out of 109 seats leaving 4 for women representing 3.7 percent. There was an increase in 2007 as women occupied 9 seats out of 109 representing 8.3 percent. (Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW Tamale 2007). The absence of under-representation of women in the very process of decision making and implementation undermines the fundamental concept of a democratic form of governance which assumes that participation and representation in all areas and levels of public life will be equally available to women and men. However, politics and political arrangements in Nigeria have undermined female legitimacy resulting in women's political powerlessness. From available statistics, women's overall political representation and participation in Nigerian government was at 8 percent in 2010 (Umeha). The consignment of women's role to the domestic arena while the public space is seen as the traditional place for men tends to perpetuate discrimination and distinctions on the basis of sex although there is growing emphasis on gender equality, which is a central component of the process of democratization.

An analysis of Nigeria electoral system by Shuaibu (2015) shows that the 2003, 2007 and 2011 elections witnessed unprecedented increase in the number of female aspirants and heightened local mobilization of the generality of women, yet only a handful made it in the end. For the last 2011 election, women candidates constituted 9.1 percent of the total number of candidates who contested in the April 2011 polls, leaving 90.9 percent as male candidates across political parties. The implication of this is that very few women passed through the primaries to make the candidates list, thus reinforcing the demand that the condition for party primaries should be investigated to support the need for a more level playing ground. Among the six geopolitical zones, the South – West had the highest number of female candidates in the April 2011 election with 15.5 percent of the 2116 persons who contested from the zone across political parties. Next were the South – East which had 11.9 percent of the 1611, South – South with 10.5 percent of 1624, and North Central with 8.5 of 1371. However, the North East and the North West had the least gender representation with 4.2 percent of 1187 and just 2.3 percent of 2088 respectively. The analysis here does not include the president and the Vice President positions. At the state level, the FCT had the highest number of female candidates leading with 24 percent, followed by Ekiti with 20 Percent, Osun 20.5 percent Lagos 17.8 percent and Ebonyi 16 percent, states like Bauchi 1.1 percent and Yobe (0.8 percent female) had very low representation with the least being Jigawa with no single female representation. In terms of political parties with more than 500 candidates, APGA which fielded 640 candidates had the highest with 12.2 percent of women candidates. The Labour Party came next, 91 women representatives out of 775 representing 11.7 percent. For the ANPP with 1293 candidates, there were 77 women, making 6 percent of the total candidates. PDP with 1510 candidates had 84 women or 5.6 percent followed by CPC with 1167 candidates and 64 women making 5.5 percent and the CAN with 67 women out of 1347 with 5 percent representation. It is important to note that parties with less number of candidates are more likely to have relatively larger proportion of those candidates as female. For instance, DPA had just 2 candidates and one of them was a woman, giving women 50 percent participation in that party. NSDP had 82 candidates and 33 (40.2 percent) were female; Fresh had 8 and 3 were female giving (37.5

percent) to female BNPP had 12 and 4 (33.3 percent) were female and CPP had 70 out of which 22 (31.3 percent) were female.

Of the 909 female candidates, there were 58 female Deputy Governorship candidates with SDMP presenting 5 (8.6 percent) and DPGPA presenting 4 (6.9 percent). Other parties presented less than these two. The two parties with highest number of female governorship candidates were ADC and APN as each presented 2 female governorship candidates out of the total 13 female candidates. Out of the 220 female House of Representative candidates ANPP presented 25 (11.4 percent), PDP presented 21 (9.5 percent) while CAN presented 19 (8.6 percent). Only one female presidential candidate was presented in the 2011 election and she was from the UNPP.

Understanding Gender Relations, Culture and Development in Nigeria

Gender imbalances have existed in Nigerian cultures for a long time now. In most Nigerian states or ethnic groups women constitute a greater number compared to men but they remain underrepresented in many areas of social, economic and political activities. This is mainly due to long-standing traditional beliefs concerning gender roles, which are mostly based on the premise that women are less important or less deserving of power than men. These long standing cultural values have often led to domestic violence and abuse of women. Domestic violence accounted for 54 percent of all murder cases held in Nigerian court between 2004 and (2008 Atolabi).

According to (Afolabi A. 2018), in a study on women health in Nigeria, the World Health Organization (WHO) found that 50 percent of women in most Nigerian Urban Cities of Lagos, Kano, Rivers State, Abuja, Kaduna, Enugu and Ibadan are reportedly experiencing one form of violence or the other by their husband or other intimate partners than their rural counterparts. The Nigerian women do the bulk of the farm work, provide for the livelihood of their families, but are barred from owning the land they cultivate. This again is a practice that is deeply rooted in culture which considers the Nigerian man the head of the household and therefore the rightful authority over land. It is a well-known fact that there are calls by international women organization, calling for sovereign nations to account to a bill of women's right of ownership of traditional properties in countries like Asia, Africa and in the Mid-East countries like Mozambique where there are pieces of legislation enacted to facilitate the acquisition of land by women were criticized by many African countries like Zambia, Zimbabwe, Tanzania, Nigeria and Ethiopia. The attempts by Nigerian and African women to own traditional properties in their matrimonial homes in the presence of their husbands are ceremonial, and are not effectively accepted by communal/traditional Nigerians society.

According to Saliu O. (2012), the issue of gender relations does not affect men and women only. In most Nigerian ethnic nationalities, homosexuality is illegal. Homosexuals are seen as a minority group and regularly experience discrimination and stigmatization. Due to that stigmatization many struggle with defining their own gender identity and the subsequent disclosure thereof. It is believed that because in pre-colonial Nigerian traditional culture, there was no homosexuality. In Hausa land and Nupe, homosexuality began with the Arab traders hence most Hausa ethnic nationalities still uphold the view that homosexuality is not culturally acceptable. Whilst the situation is like this, there is a lot of preaching around integrating Nigerian culture into development programmes but how do we effectively integrate Nigerian

culture and some of its aspect like the one mentioned above into developmental programmes that equally benefit all Nigerian citizens.

According to Adunie and Nasidi (2016), culture is that which makes us who we are. It shapes the way we think, walk, talk and relate to each other. It affects our decision making process. The United Nations organs are some of the organizations that have come to an understanding of the pivotal role that culture plays in development, especially its interest in an approach to integrate culture in the development of Nigerian languages. It is called 'culture lens and its purpose is to advance the goals of programmes effectively and efficiently with strong community communication, acceptance and ownership. Language in Nigeria is an analytical and programming tool that help policy makers and development practitioners to analyze, understand and utilize positive cultural values, assets and structures in government at all levels in Nigeria in their planning and programming processes, so as to reduce resistance to the ideas of ethnic or tribal marginalization of some areas in Nigeria. Cultural Incorporational Programme Action, (CIPA) strengthen government programming effectiveness in Nigeria and create conditions for ownership and sustainability of CIPA programmes, especially in the areas of women empowerment and promotion of reproductive health and right of women in Nigeria (Balogun, 2016). In this age of globalization, are Nigerians not running a risk of having powerful cultures dominating and deciding on positive and negative aspects of culture? According to Ogwaegbu (2016) CIPA coordinator who says that 'in this time of globalization, with all its advantages, Africans are the most vulnerable to having their traditions, relationships and knowledge and skills ignored and experiencing development with a great sense of trauma, loss and social disconnectedness'. As long as Nigerians talk of positive and negative aspects of certain cultures in Nigeria without clearly defining the criteria which they use to classify those aspects then the discriminatory tendency will continue to exist and that means a risk for developmental programmes (Olura P. 2005).

Hindrances to Women's Participation in Governance

There are very many challenges facing women in Nigerian politics and one of them is the perception of women in politics. Many feel that it is women who are rabble-rousers or who are not serious that are in politics. That myth has been shattered by what we have seen in the country in the last couple of years. There are women of character and integrity holding various offices in Nigeria now and in that last ten years since Nigeria returned to civil rule. Since the return in 1999 to 2017, there are about four or five female deputy governors in the country. Even in the states, we have female commissioners and if they had not performed well in the last dispensation, more governors would not have wanted women as their deputies. The issue is to encourage more women to come into politics. On coping as a mother and politician, the married mother of four, two or more children admit that there are many conflicts between being a politician and raising a family, as there are many women who have a career other than their family. On rift between Governors and the Deputies almost scare women away for such political position. It has become the norm rather than the exception in Nigeria. These rifts are caused by a clash in personalities. Nigerian women were not encouraged to participate in politics because of cultural beliefs and family values in the society. Men in Nigerian politics do not give women the opportunity/chance to participate in decision making because they are usually inundated when a women is occupying leadership position. God-fatherism, male

dominated party executives, labeling, violence, and money politics as well as other social cultural factors have been the order of the day. Since men are usually in the majority in the political party setup, they tend to dominate the party hierarchy and are therefore at an advantage in influencing the party's internal politics. For instance, in Nara in Nkanu East Local Government (LG) of Enugu State, a female candidate, Mrs. Grace Ani, was reported to have contested for councillorship position in the last LG elections and won. To her greatest consternation, the position was given to a male candidate who lost in the elections on the basis of gender discrimination. The women in the community protested to no avail, rather, Mrs. Ani was compensated with a political appointment in the LG.

Mrs. LamiSadu, who was divorced by her husband in 1999 for having the effrontery to vote for the All People's Party against her husband's wish. In January 2011, Hajia, Halima Tijjani (ACN) Kaduna Central was battered and her elbow broken for daring to contest. The real problem is with the hypocrisy of the backward elite in Nigerian politics which considers every woman seeking a role in public life, a busy body. The failures perpetuate underrepresentation of women in governance in Nigeria. Democracy is about fair representation of all interest groups in the society. The low representation of women is a violation of the principle of democracy. Poor representation denies women mass participation in governance, which is another hallmark of democracy. The inclusion of gender sensitive provisions in party constitutions and manifestoes can be an important tool for encouraging women to participate actively in political parties and holding the party accountable when it comes to affirmative action. The success of women in politics like that of any male out-group cannot be achieved within such systems without displacing or replacing existing elite and without some changes in values. It cannot occur independently of fundamental changes in socio-economic as well as political relations. Of course, without clear understanding of the way men regulate their own access to political elites. The conditions which given that of women will remain obscure. The imperative and urgent desire by the Nigerian rulers to retain their political positions at the highest level of government and at all cost because it is from there they can consistently affect the future of the polity. The leaders of some ethnic groups in Nigeria/some states in Nigeria are unsure of their position thereby adopting certain political strategies and goals so cumbersome to be combated by women because of their natural disposition.

How to Strengthen Women in Governance

According to Dauda R. (2015), in a more recent exposition on legislative quotas for women in Nigeria, women became very vocal and active in parliamentary debates. Since the Fourth Republic however, there has not yet been a specific affirmative action measure geared towards reserving seats for Nigerian women in the upper chamber or parliamentary and local government elections. Yet the method of cooperation especially in political appointment has been well played out, giving women 20.5 percent of ministerial and special advisers' appointments in 1999. Women should be encouraged to take up responsibilities in any political office they found themselves not minding men's political intimidation. They should head political parties and have political grand/control of such parties that have national outlook, thus will strengthen their policies stand or hold for such parties.

As the situation remained unchanged, threat or change has to be made to forestall the structure of male domination of politics and governance in Nigeria. Unless tactics are changed,

it is doubtful whether any meaningful progress can be made in mainstreaming gender into national politics and policies. More emphasis should be placed on power politics, eruptive options such as affirmative action. It should however be pursued within the framework of competitive policies so that the legitimacy, effectiveness and autonomy of women in decision-making will not be compromised. There should be marginal increase to generate much increase in women's ability to promote and influence gender-friendly legislation and policies. It may be that due to their non-elective ascension to power, they lack legitimacy or a clear-cut constituency among women, political parties and presidency. Given the foregoing, there is need to refocus beyond measures. It will be preposterous and counter-productive to assume that gender acts as a proxy for the political and social values held by an individual. In such development, women in Nigerian politics should not be held responsible for not giving their support to bill/bills not properly understood despite positive economic benefits to the nation.

An Advice to Women Presently Occupying Leadership Position in Nigeria

Women in Nigeria politics should always work extra hard to be accorded their recognition and to debunk the general feeling by skeptics that some jobs could not be done by women because they are neither strong nor serious minded enough. Women in leadership positions in Nigeria should first and foremost shun corruption because it engenders compromise and poor performance on the job. They should also ensure that in corruptibility permeates the system under their control from the highest to the lowest levels of authority. Women in Nigerian leadership circle can only do this through leadership by example. Women should exhibit forthrightness with their clients and staff without fear or favor. Corrupt practices and laxity must be severely sanctioned while hard-work and integrity should be adequately compensated. When hard work and transparency are not recognized and compensated, laxity and corruption are promoted and perpetrated. For the women who have made it to the top. They should be role models. They should take the young ones under their motherly wings and nurture them in full maturity so that when they leave, there will be no vacuum. For those aspiring to leadership positions in Nigeria, the fact is that, to get to the top, you should work hard. To stay on top without toppling, you work even harder. Women must remain focused, determined and hardworking with utmost transparency and resolve never to be intimidated.

Admittedly, affirmative action may help to improve the situation of Nigerian women in politics. Yet it presents some dilemmas in its implementation, effectiveness and the irony of the fact that it is hardly supported by reality. From comparative experience, while affirmative action measures can improve Nigerian women's representation in public offices, they have some internal contradictions that tend to ambush and neutralize their intended benefits.

Summary

In Nigeria, the number of women assuming leadership positions is on the increase, even though Nigerians are still far from the 35 percent stipulated for employment of women and occupation of top public offices. However, the present gender and women's political leadership in Nigeria as demonstrated by the Nigerian government to give more leadership positions to women is a step in the positive direction. Nigerian women over the years have proved that when given the opportunity, they can justify the saying that the best man for the job is a woman, or whatever men can do, women do better.

Nevertheless, the Nigerian women have electoral capacity to acquire power and thereby effect political change by virtue of their superior electoral strength over men. They are lacking in gender competitive consciousness, particularly in a system entrenched with patriarchal hegemonic leadership and with male political elite unprepared to concede to gender justice. Unfortunately, the whole essence of politics is the acquisition of power. Nigerian women cannot, therefore, desire power and at the same time detest competitive politics for its vices. It can therefore, be reasonable to submit that the fear of politics as a dirty game by women in Nigeria will only be an exclusion from the political process. The women folk in Nigeria need a political and cultural re-orientation as to the imperative of embracing and helping each other in competitive politics in Nigeria and reconstructing their psychological dispositions. Women have failed to acknowledge the existing gender competition in the contemporary Nigeria and the world at large. Ideological cold war has been replaced by gender war, war of sex equality and justice. The failure of Nigerian women to realize this culminates in certain outcomes, which include perceiving politics as dirty, name-calling of female politicians as deviants and voting overwhelmingly for men contestants rather than their women counterparts in elections. Power, realistically speaking, is central in human existence and survival. To envisage its holders to voluntarily relinquish it on the frivolous grounds of gender equality may continue for decades in Nigeria and would remain a dream in the pipeline. Rather than commit such political suicide, Nigerian women would gain more if they design ways of circulating all legal, institutional, and procedural devices aimed at achieving such. The onus of seeking and actualizing a better balance rests with the power seekers. In this case, the Nigerian women groups should seek to establish power equality with men. For affirmative action's to be effective, they must begin with the political parties in all their dealings and this should be promoted through popular competitive politics at all levels of national politics.

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