Review

Women, gender equality in Nigeria: a critical analysis of socio-economic and political (gender issues)

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ABSTRACT

More fundamentally, women have been subjected to domination by men. This is as a result of persisting cultural stereotype, abuse of religious and traditional practises, patriarchal societal structures in which economic, political and social power are dominated by men and the role women have historically played as the followers of male leaders. Women Gender Equality issues has become a global core commitment because equality between men and women is just fair and right. The attainment of gender equality is not only seen as an end itself and human right issues, but as a prerequisite for the achievement of sustainable development. Socio-economic and politics holds prospect for women, gender equality on the aforementioned fronts. To respond to the challenges of gender inequalities and attendant low socio-economic and political indicators. There is need to recognise gender issues as central to and critical to achieve women gender equality. The research methodology is termed qualitative research and with the use of secondary data gathered from the University Libraries, news print and journals. The aim of the study was to critically analyse the specific socio-economic and political (gender issues) responsible for the continuous perpetuation of gender inequality in Nigeria. We also proffered strategies to ensure women gender equality in all spheres of activities in the country.

Keywords: Women, gender equality, gender issues and gender analysis.

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria like other countries in the world is responding to the clarion calls made variously by the United Nations to rid societies of all forms of discriminations especially gender based discriminations.

Nigeria took a bold step in the year 2000 when it adopted and passed into Law National Policy on women guided by the Global Instrument on the Convention of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Nigeria is currently reawakening its effort in achieving gender equality. To achieve this, a development process which takes women and men as partners in development, and more importantly that which challenges the structure which continues to produce gender-based inequalities in the society, and balances power relations between women and men both at micro and macro levels is inevitable.

Nigeria indeed has tried to respond to this development from the international arena by articulating policies and programmes that seeks to reduce gender inequalities in socio economic and political spheres, however, the success of bridging the gap between men and women is far fetched.

Omonubi-Mc Donnel (2003:2) Opines: Politically, Nigeria women are negligible and undermined force, with little political involvement. Economically, they constitute the majority of the peasant labour force in the agricultural sector, while most of the others occupy bottom of occupational ladder and continue to be channelled into service and domestic occupations. The consequence of the unequal status between men and women is high level of economics and political powerlessness among women, powerlessness in turn retard development of any level, politically, economically and socially.

The question is, what are those constraining and discriminating factors against women that still continue to perpetuate gender inequalities in Nigeria?

The aim of the paper is to properly situate and analyse the socio-economic and political (gender issues) that still
persist in the societies thereby promoting continuous gender inequalities in all spheres of endeavours in Nigeria.

The paper is divided into sections, the introduction, followed by conceptual clarifications. The next section addresses the socio-economic and political (gender issues). The work ended with strategic solutions and conclusion.

Conceptual Clarifications

Gender:

This refers to social roles allocated respectively to men and women in particular societies and at particular times. Such roles and the differences between them are conditioned by a variety of political, economic, ideological and cultural factors, and are characterized in most societies by unequal power relations.

Bridge (1998) opines that gender constitutes one of the determinants of how poverty is experienced and of wealth creation. Rights and entitlements of men and women to opportunities, resources and decision making are based on socio-cultural norms rather than on human rights or the respective development capability of men and women.

CIRDDOC (2001:1) defines gender as a system of roles relationship between women and men that are determine not biologically but by the social, political and economic context.

Scott (1988:2) captures the nature of gender, thus:

Gender is the social organization of sexual differences but this does not means that gender reflects or implements fixed and natural physical differences between women and men, rather gender is the knowledge that establishes meaning for bodily differences. These meaning vary across cultures, social groups and time since nothing about the body including women's reproductive organs, determines univocally how social division will be shaped.

Gender analysis

This means a critical understanding of all “gender biases” which perpetuate gender inequalities in all sectors of society.

Gender issues

Gender issues arise when the relationship between women and men, their roles, privileges, status and positions are identified and analysed. Gender issues arise where inequalities are shown to exist between people purely on the bases of their being a female or male. The fact that gender and gender differences are socially constructed is itself a primary issue to deal with.

Women

Refers to the female gender, the opposite of male gender. There is the dependency syndrome that women are known to have being dependent on men. In order words, their roles are that of helpers to men.

Gender equality

This refers to a situation where women and men have equal conditions for realising their full human rights and potentials; are able to contribute equally to national, political, economic, social and cultural development and benefit equally from the results. Furthermore, it entails that the underlying causes of discrimination are systematically identified and removed in order to give men and women equal opportunities. Equality is therefore understood to include both formal equality and substantive equality, and not merely simple equality to men.

Situation Analysis: Gender Issues

A. Political Issues:

In Nigeria, there are prevailing concerns such as religious and cultural bias against women participation in politics; Low membership in political parties and party structure; the hostile political environment are not responsive to women needed interest and creates imbalance in the political sphere.

Women who constitute about half of the population have been continuously sidelined in public life to the extent that they never held more than 15% of elective offices (see table 1 statistics of elective positions) compared to what obtained in other nations of the world, particularly in developed nations. Table 1: Comparism of women representation in 2003 and 2007 general elections

Olurode (2011) noted that Nigeria lags far behind in women political participation index on the African countries saying, “Nigerian women have about the worst representation of 5.9% in the national legislature when compared to most other African countries example Uganda (34.6%), South Africa (43.2%), Ethiopia (27.7%), Cameroon (20%), Niger (12.3%) and DR Congo (8.0%)”. The issue being that women in Nigeria face a lot of odds when they contest against men. For instance,
Table 1. Comparism of women representation in 2003 and 2007 general elections.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/N</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>No. of Available Seats</th>
<th>No. of women elected and % total in 2003</th>
<th>No. of women elected and % total in 2007</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Presidency</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Senate</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>2 (2.27)</td>
<td>9 (8.26)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>House of Representative</td>
<td>360</td>
<td>21 (5.83)</td>
<td>25 (6.98)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Governorship</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>State House of Assembly</td>
<td>990</td>
<td>38 (3.84)</td>
<td>54 (5.45)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Gender Audit and IPU PARLINE database (2003 and 2008)

i. The issue of the Chauvinistic traditional system: Onyejekwe (2011) stated that:

a. It is an abomination for women to claim equality with men especially in decision making programmes such as politics or wanting to head a man under any circumstance, it’s a taboo.
b. A woman does not take a separate decision apart from her spouse.
c. The idea of women in politics is a rude agenda in Nigeria and an abomination to most men. Naturally, there is stiff opposition from even educated men politician to women.

ii. Women conception of politics:

In Nigeria, there is a belief that Nigerian politics is based on high political virility, those who have all it takes to compete in the turbulent environment, and those who can match violence. It is assumed that men possess superiority, strength, competitiveness and self-reliant and are preferred to tussle in political endeavour, whereas, women are considered too passive to engage in politics and governance. This consensus is also constructed by societal norms and values which through socialization has defined different gender roles according to biological differences. Their perception of politics as a dirty game and continued fright at the thought of violence has alienated them from mainstreaming politics.

iii. Funding and high cost of election

Although equality affects men but the rate at which it affects women is more pronounced in Nigeria. The cost of financing political parties and campaigns is a big obstacle to women. The minimum cost of gubernatorial election could go as high as 200 million naira and how many men can mobilize such huge amount of money for women? Which political party would nominate a woman for that post considering her very small contribution to party finance and formation? (Nda, 2003:338).

Awe (1995) opines that women are said to be amongst the poorest people in the world and a poor person can not play significant role in politics. Over 90% of women live below the poverty line in Nigeria. Those that are educated are not rich and the rich ones are uneducated or are not politically inclined. Therefore this disadvantage position cannot allow women to match naira for naira in Nigeria monetised politics. This partly explain why they are reluctant about active participation in politics.

iv. The place of the women participating in politics:

Although women actively participate in the membership of political parties, the only serve as supporters for male to acquire political positions. Politics is said to be game of members yet women’s numerical strength has not impacted positively on the political life and decision making structure of the nation. Men constitute a large percentage of the party membership and this tends to affect women when it comes to selecting or electing candidates for elections. Men tend to dominate the party hierarchy and are therefore at advantage in influencing the party’s internal politics. Women usually constitute a smaller percentage of political party membership because of the social, cultural, religious attitude of different Nigerian societies.

v. The general perception of politics in Nigeria:

Is on dirty vocation that is reserved for unrefined people who have little scruples with bending the rules and subverting due process (Luka, 2011). Female politicians are therefore seen as accomplices of vile male politicians who are bent on manipulating the popular will of the people. They are treated as deviant male politicians. Politics is time consuming and it demand great attention. Juggling their traditional ascribed roles with an interest in politics without a supportive spouse could result in needless conflict.

Female politicians are often perceived to be divorcees and marital failures. Also violence and treat, the do-or-die nature of politics in Nigeria has had its own fair share of
women who have to pay the ultimate price for venturing into politics. Alhaja Kudirat Abiola, Suliat Adedeji and many others are easily recalled as helpless victims of the sanguinary predilection of Nigeria’s politics. These issues highlighted have gone along way to affect women’s participation in politics and has therefore lead to a very low level of political interest.

B. Economic Issues:

The fact that women do not have same productive resources as men and most work of women goes unrecognised. According to the United Nations, of the three quarters of all economic activities in developing countries ascribed to men, women actually perform 53 percent of the work featuring prominently in the informal sectors of most economies in Africa.

Nigeria is where women are not considered fit and proper to own and engage in any meaningful investment that will allow them grow financially independent. Many women still lacked access to decent work and face occupational segregation, low access paid jobs, where a man and a woman have the same qualification, the man would likely be hired by most employers for unknown reasons even when occasions have proved that women are better managers of wealth and resources.

Gender in Nigeria report for 2012, the British council and the United Kingdom Department for International Development noted that women economic opportunities remain very constrained. That “women in Nigeria earn less than men, even within the same sector; women and men access to productive assets such as land, credit, technology and information are different. So are the outcomes of their productive activities.”

Although the gender division of labour within cultural contexts , superimposes on the structure of production within activity units, the assignment of gender roles however has not proceeded with a simultaneous assignments of resources. Therefore entitlement structures which are similarly skewed by gender, determine the allocation of (productive) resources.

Trade and entrepreneur activities have continued to be engendered in the form of access, control and remuneration, while commercial agriculturist and traders (mainly men) supply their commodities to big national, regional and international markets. The smaller entrepreneurs (mainly women) are left to supply the local villages and rural markets. In urban areas commercial and trade activities of men and women are of different scales. Credit facilities for entrepreneurship development also appear to be skewed, with policies of micro finance targeted at women and that of high-capital finance targeted at men. Studies have shown that while both men and women participate in micro and small enterprises (MSC) as well as small and medium enterprises (SMEs), and though the women are more in the MSE and SMEs, the structure of these enterprises favours men in terms of profitability, types of product, size of business and so on.

In the industrial sector, especially the informal sector, the participation of woman has always been stronger than that of men. Several patterns distinguished male and female owned or female dominated SME activities, indicating a strong need for gender sensitivity in planning for SME growth. Women enterprises are concentrated and dominated in more traditional manufacturing activities such as dress making, grass and cane work as well as retail trading. The implication is that there are still institutional barriers to woman full participation in economic empowerment especially through trade. However, the Nigeria Labour Congress instituted a National women commission and has adopted a gender policy to guide economic activities, employment in both the public and especially the private sector in Nigeria.

C. Social issues:

Women suffered (and still) suffer degrading treatment. Women were considered second-class citizens and in some instances, treated with contempt and derision. Worst yet, in matters that affect them directly and intimately, they were hardly consulted. Social exclusion of women gravely affected their collective lives in more ways than one. It caused disharmony in marital life, frustration and desperations.

Women were considered inferior and their participation at all levels of government, discouraged. In fact, some communities considered it a taboo for women to take active roles in governance. Many qualified women were forced to play minor roles in the margins or were frustrated out of governance. This was in spite of several institutional conventions and treaties that encouraged woman participation in economics, politics and governance.

Strategies For Ensuring Women, Gender Equality In Nigeria

i. Poverty and Economic Empowerment

By ensuring equal access of woman and man to critical resources and reduce extreme poverty among women including ensuring gender equitable access to capital and large scale investment opportunities; remove gender discriminatory practices on access to landed properties; facilitate women’s access to improved technology; building women’s entrepreneurial skills. Involve women in the execution of empowerment programmes. Government should enhance the business environment
through provision of infrastructures and accounting for the value of women’s work in Gross Domestic product (GDP).

Building the capacity of the women and men in low poverty group on investment opportunities, by enlightenment on investment opportunities, provide access to institutional credit facilities. Supporting and encouraging the development of small, medium and large scale enterprises, and provide extension services for those in poverty group to enhance information.

ii. **Employment and Labour Issues**

Building the human capital of women to allow comparable opportunity in the modern labour market by encouraging equal access to education and skill acquisition for women to increase their participation at the managerial level, also making vocational education and adult literacy programmes available to all.

Eliminate all discriminatory practices against the employment of women in the public and private sectors of the economy, i.e. by eliminating all gender-based discriminatory practices in recruitment, wages and promotion, with particular reference to the private sector. Personnel policies and practices must comply with the principle of equitable representation of both sexes. And all forms of gender based exploitation of work, ensure effective implementation of national and international labour laws. Ratification of ILO Convention on Equal Treatment for men and women workers. Government should create reward system for organizations in the public and private sector of the economy that operates based on gender equity and equality principles.

iii. **Empowerment of women in politics**

Increasing the level of women participation in politics, there is need for sensitization of women to political participation, creating enabling environment for women to participate in politics by economic empowerment and adequate education of women for political participation.

Eradicate all discriminatory policies against women, by reviewing the structure and operational guidelines of political parties. Financial support should be provided for women political aspirants. To increase the number of women in elective position and decision making process, then Affirmative action in politics (30% of political posts to be reserved for women). And also reform the existing traditional structures which exclude women from participating in decision-making.

iv. **Constitutional Guarantee**

By ensuring that women and men have equal legal and human rights. Eliminating all gender discriminatory clauses in existing laws and legislations including, by persons, organizations and enterprises. Engender customary laws with gender equality principles through advocacy, sensitization, equal access to the laws, irrespective of wealth and gender.

Introduce human rights education into school curricular at all levels and building the capacity of the legislative, the judiciary and other law enforcement agencies to uphold gender justice and gender equalities principles. The use of quotas and proportional representation assist in the promotion for gender balance in public life. Phillips (1995) “Quotas do not discriminate but compensate women actual barrier that prevent women from pursuing a political career. Relevant stake holders such as Independent National Electoral Commission and political parties should be engaged in introducing quota.

Related to the above is the necessary legal framework that guarantees the rights of women especially in achieving the provision of international and domestic instruments for more participation both in social, economic and in governance process of Nigeria.

**CONCLUSION**

In order to have women, gender equality initiatives, the government needs to work towards changing the structures which produces gender inequalities in our society.

Building on the premise of the existence of a clear inexorable interconnection between women’s deprivation and some socio-economic and political factors, it therefore follow that, to address women gender equality on any front, effort must be made to address the aforementioned gender issues.

Nigeria cannot afford to continue to treat half of its population and a significant part of the productive force as inferior being. We need to give our womenfolk the full chance to participate in all sectors of society. The roles of women as house makers cannot be down played. Women touch anywhere, cannot be matched. To ensure and achieve gender equality in Nigeria, economic and political powerlessness of women must be addressed.

**REFERENCES**


Ekpe et al. 19

