

GENDER, POLITICAL EDUCATION AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The paper on gender, political education and national development in Nigeria is basically concerned with exploring the level of discrimination faced by female gender especially in politics and its implications on national development. It further examined the impact of political education as a panacea for gender equality for the attainment of national development. Using the secondary sources of data (text books, journal and newspaper articles), the paper discovered that female gender is grossly underrepresented in politics and decision-making positions globally, regionally and nationally. Adopting the Liberal feminist theory, the paper argued that female gender face subjugation and marginalization in all spheres of life especially in politics which is detrimental for achieving national development. The paper recommended among others re-orientation of the general public through political education as a panacea for holistic national development.

Key words: Gender, political education, development

Cultures as a construct of a people determine the behavior of men and women, including rights and responsibilities in a society. It prescribes the utilization and ownership of resources, and involvement in decision making. The gender ideologies usually reinforce superiority-inferiority of men over women (Institute of Development Studies, 2000). The impact on the level of gender development especially in the political environment of Nigeria is essentially the subject of discourse. Since engagement in political participation could be seen as a prerequisite for political development, it therefore implies that supporting women's political participation with special consideration to their population world over may advance the quality of their lives (Shojaei, Samsu, & Asayesh, 2010).

Yet despite numerous international declarations and frameworks promoting the equal right of people to public and political affairs, women continue to be disadvantaged within decision-making institutions and processes across the world, from local to international levels (Nath, 2013). This may be attributed to inadequate political

education world over. With 30% affirmative action framework in place at the international level, and particularly 35% according to National Gender Policy [NGP] in Nigeria, it is expected that there should have been robust, intensified effort in political education in twenty-first century politics. Political education is a necessary tool to address the socio-cultural and political challenges that inhibit women from mass participation in public affairs. However, inadequate political education may have advanced reasons why Nigerian democracy and indeed in most parts of the world could not work despite strive in this direction (Suleiman & Fadeyi, 2016). This is true where men dominate the political arena as a result of certain norms associated with men and women, where women are seen as subordinates in various areas of human life, particularly in politics.

The overall objective of education is to promote personal development, encourage freedoms and respect for human rights, enable individuals to participate actively in a free society, and promote understanding, and friendship among the people (UNESCO, 2007). This implies that the effects of diverse human development can be explained by level of education (United Nations Children's Fund [UNICEF], 2015). Political education, therefore, is essential in creating awareness in a society about politics (Suleiman & Fadeyi, 2016), and it is vital in providing information to the general populace toward making informed decisions, achieving a vibrant, representative and genuine government through democracy. In view of this, democracy underscores the participation of every citizen through adequate information about political issues, expressing opinion on public affairs, voting in elections, engaging in political parties, and contesting elections (Kelsen, 1955; Nassbaum, 2000; Barak, 2006; Hofmeister & Grabow, 2011). Recognition of the role of political education in the development of active citizens for a democratic society has gained relevance nationally and internationally due to globalization (Tormey, 2006). Therefore, this paper examines the need for political education among other strategies for gender empowerment as a means for achieving national development in Nigeria.

The Concept of Gender

Gender underscores imbalance between men and women. It is captured in the roles and responsibilities of women and men as a cultural construct of a people. The roles are influenced by perceptions arising from cultural, economic, political, environmental, social and religious factors, including the custom of the people. It differs from sex which is the biological differences between men and women (Best & Abdul-Qadir, 2007).

Gender is seen by Scott (1988 in Ekpe, Eja & Egbe, 2014) as the social organization of sexual differences but this does not mean 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.

The Concept of Development

Development is a multifaceted concept that requires changes in societal structures attitudes, and institutions, which in turn create opportunities for economic growth, equal rights, poverty eradication and self sustenance (Todaro& Smith, 2004). The expected change is achievable with the right policy framework that is capable of inducing changes in the basic needs and requirements of a nation(Akpomuvie, 2010).

Walter Rodney (1976) conceives development to take place at the individual and the societal levels. The individual level dwells on creativity, discipline, improved skills and material development. On the other hand, the societal level development supports inter and intra relationships. Gboyega (2003) on a similar note acknowledged that development is way of improving the conditions of human beings. That is improvement in the overall well-being of all people in ways that guarantees better future. This includes the reduction of poverty level, and equality of access to fundamental needs. United Nations Development Programme (2010) emphasizes human development measured by life expectancy, adult literacy, access to all three levels of education, including people's average income which is a necessary condition of their freedom of choice. In a broader perspective, human development is indicative of all aspects of human well-being, basically from survival to economic and political empowerment.

Theoretical Underpin

This paper adopted the Liberal feminist theory. Liberal feminism is associated with scholars such as Mary Wollstonecraft (1759 - 1797), John Stuart Mill (1806 - 1873), and Harriet Taylor Mill (1807 - 1858). Reeves (2009) documented the major argument of John Stuart Mills who is regarded as the father of liberalism. Mills argued:

That the principle which regulates the existing social relations between the Two sexes-the legal subordination of one sex to the other-is wrong in itself, now one of the chief hindrances to human improvement; and that it ought to be replaced by a principle of perfect equality, admitting no power or privilege on the one side, nor disability on the other (Mills, 1869, 26 cited in Reeves, 2009).

Mills argued that men and women are created equal and so should be treated equals. His support for women did not end with the ballot. He wanted women and men to be treated completely equal in all matters of law, employment, education and sexual relations. Mills radical brand of liberalism was founded on the belief that all individuals should be equally free to work out their own destiny (Reeves, 2009). Mills criticism of the social status of women is based on his analysis of the social injustice excluding women from public and civil life, from politics and decision-making. He stressed that this kind of social injustice is one of the main barriers to human progress and the moral

improvement of humankind. Analyzing the consequences of women subjugation, he points out that such condition negatively affect not only the lives of women, but of men as well. Men and women alike are harmed by such a situation, and consequently the subjection of women negatively affects the whole of society (Szapuova, 2006).

Liberal feminists advocate for equal rights and equal opportunities for all. According to them, men and women are not different by nature; all human beings possess a common nature. Liberal feminists argue that all human beings should have equal educational opportunities and civil rights in the society. The Liberalists lay emphasis on traditional understanding of human nature and personhood: rationality, individual autonomy, and self-fulfillment. The goal of women's liberation is freeing women from oppressive gender roles, that is sexual and gender equality. According to this theory, a just society is a society that allows individuals to exercise their freedom and fulfill themselves and as such, can achieve personhood. Liberal feminists believe that through democratic institutions women can overcome oppression and achieve equality (Anuradha, 2010).

Liberal feminists demand an end to discrimination on the basis of sex through the promotion of legal rights for women and with the view of attaining this goal through the institution of State. Wendell argues that "liberal feminism's clearest political commitments are: to the promotion of women's greater recognition and self-value as individuals, to equality of opportunity, to promotion of equal education for girls and boys, to ending sex prejudice and defacto discrimination, to equality of legal rights, and to the use of education as a major tool of social reform"(Wendell, 1987).

In summary, liberal feminism advocate for gender equality in the public sphere. Support equal access to education, socio-economic and political rights, and ending job segregation and better working condition among others. All of these liberal feminists want to achieve through legal institutional changes. This theory is apt in this paper since it advocates for women liberation through legal institutional changes including political education in order to achieve gender equality capable of engendering national development.

Gender Inequality in Politics in the Global and National Context

Globally, gender imbalance in politics is most significant in the underrepresentation of women in the national legislature and ministerial appointments. The United Nations (2015) reveals that only one in five members of lower or single House of parliament worldwide is a woman. Although the number of female Heads of state or government has improved from 12-19 percent over the past 20 years, only 18 percent of women hold ministerial appointments. Data from Inter Parliamentary Union [IPU] also show that out of 193 countries only about 47 countries have attained 30 percent and above in women representation in lower or single House parliament, and Rwanda parliament remains the first in the world in women representation with 63.8 percent, followed by Bolivia and Cuba as the second and third with 53.1 percent and

48.9 percent respectively (IPU, 2017a). At the regional level, Americas takes the lead in women representation at national parliament with 27.8 percent while sub-Sahara Africa stands at 23.3 percent. Nigerian women representation is one of the lowest in the world and Africa as well. This is evidenced in women's representation which stands at 5.6 percent for Lower House and 6.5 percent for Upper House, making it the 181 country out of 193 in terms of global gender parity in political representation (IPU, 2017b).

A study in Nigeria general elections from the beginning of the fourth republic in 1999 by Okorokwo-Chukwu, (2013), revealed that at the national level, no woman was elected to the office of the president. While out of 109 Senators, only 3 (2.8%) women were elected in 1999, when compared with 2003, 2007, and 2011, shows an increase to 4(3.7%), 9(8.3%), and a drop to 7(6.4%) respectively. Also, out of 360 House of Representatives members, 12(3.3%) women were elected in 1999, this figure increased to 21(5.8%) in 2003, increased to 25(6.9%) in 2007, and a slight improvement in 2011. At the state level, the author further noted that out of the 36 states of the federation, no woman was elected in the office of the governor in 1999 to 2011. Further, out of 990 State House of Assembly members, only 24(2.4%) women made it in 1999. This achievement recorded an astronomical increase to 40(3.9%), 57(5.8%), 68(6.9%) in 2003, 2007, and 2011 respectively. A relative percentage was also recorded at State House of Assembly Committee members, where out of 829, 881,887 seat available, 18(2.2%), 32 (3.6%), 52 (5.9), were appointed in 1999, 2003, and 2007 respectively, while none was appointed in 2011. With the exception of 2011, only 13 (1.8%), 15 (1.9%) and 27 (3.6%) women in 1999, 2003 and 2007 respectively were elected as Local Government Area chairperson. Again, with exception of 2011 which did not record any woman councilor, out of 6368 Councilors, only 69 (1.1%) were elected in 1999, a remarkable increase in 2003 with 267 (4.2%), and a decline in 2007 with 235 (3.7%). In another study, Ogunyankin (2012) noted that in the number of women deputy governors, only 1 in 1999, 2 in 2003, 6 in 2007, and 1 in 2011. While there is little increase in the percentage of women across each election year in national and states houses of assembly, nonetheless, the percentage remains insignificant, with huge consequences for democracy in Nigeria. Investigating 2011 general elections in Nigeria, Olurode (2013) conclude that the participation of women in politics falls short of the desired 30% by international standards and 35% as entrenched in the National Gender Policy 2006. Subsequently, In 2015 General Elections in Nigeria, Adesuwa, (2015) observed that out of the 29 states where governorship elections held, the number of women who vied for office of the governor and deputy governor stood at 87(22.9%) out of 380 candidates. Also, of 747 candidates for senatorial seats, 122(16%) women were cleared by Independent National Electoral Commission [INEC]. While at the House of Representatives, out of 1774 candidates, 267(15%) women contested in the March 28 election. According to INEC (2015), only 7(6.4%) women were elected in Senate and 19(5.2%) were elected in House of Representatives.

Political Education as a Panacea for Development

Education lays the foundation for development. Thus political education presupposes the removal of all artificial inequalities such as caste, rank, title, race, sex among others. Suleiman & Fadeyi, (2016), suggest that political education is germane for both socio-cultural and political stability of any society, and that when individuals do not have access to political education in a political system; such society is bound to face political instability. This corroborate with (Falade, 2014) which asserts that political stability is a function of the awareness and engagement of the citizens in civic and political matters. According to Madhok (2005) political literacy transcends exhibiting awareness of political choice, but includes the functioning of the bureaucratic and development apparatus, involving the voicing of expectations from state and local social environment. Madhok (2005) maintained that political literacy recognizes the autonomy of women where limited agreements exists on social freedoms especially in rules regulating women's behavior such as poor girl education or the refusal to enlist unmarried girls more than 18 years of age into electoral register with consequences to disenfranchising them.

In the context of political development, the media is an integral element of communication that has been effective in providing orientation to the people. For example, the radio has positive impact in mobilizing women to engage in politics and with the right contents it can indeed become a veritable tool in promoting development for women in Nigerian politics (Adekoya, Akintayo, and Adegoke, 2015). Assessing the America political education, Cook (1998) affirmed that the media are the primary sources of information about government and politics, and current affairs. Usually they provide information about the administration, establish linkages between leaders, institutions, and the citizens, and equally display acceptable behaviours and mobilize the political community.

More so, in the report of 2011 Nigerian general elections, National Democratic Institute for International Affairs [NDI] (2012) observed that in 2011 general elections in Nigeria, the civil society, and the media played significant role in educating voters, disseminating information about the elections and contributing to fairness of the entire process. Also among the government circles, the civil society, political parties, and Independent National Electoral Commission [INEC], and National Orientation Agency [NOA] as institutions of government, civil society, and political parties educate the people on political concerns through electoral reform advocates, voter educators and citizen observers of the electoral development (NDI, 2012).

For increased level of women participation to occur, adequate education and sensitization of women is necessary to create an enabling environment for them to thrive in politics, Ekpe, Eja&Egbe (2014),and it implies that democratic systems thrives on efficient, accurate dissemination of socio-cultural and political information in a social environment (Nwogu, 2015).Beyond national borders, political education is an instrument to inject democratic ideology into both content and organization of non-

democratic countries. This is achievable by developing institutional curriculum for creating democratic or civic education teaching materials for democracy. Again policies that will introduce regime change for democracy require change in existing non-democratic mores, attitudes, and involve governments effort by convincing the people of the worth and importance of democratic principles (Alden, 2011). This is achievable through access to information and resources, utilizing multiple channels.

Apart from appointive positions are being advocated for women, Nigerian women have right to vote and stand for elections. As a result, deserve more political enlightenment, training and support for female politicians, the kind of support similar to UNDP Democratic Governance for Development Project which succeeded in training 2043 female politicians to participate in elections and electoral process in Nigeria Okoronkwo-Chukwu (2013). According to Madhok, (2005), women's political education is an indicator of autonomy within conditions of subordination, and directs attention to aspects of women's lives not conventionally considered as women's activities. Essentially, good political education is important not only in teaching politics, in pursuing a career as a professional politician, in working in a government ministry, but include working in many specialized institutions and voluntary organizations, in voting, and in conversation about politics (Pacho, 2014).

Conclusion

Gender equality is a necessary condition for achieving democratic stability, political development and national development. In order that women actively contribute to national development, there is the need to fully integrate political education in the political affairs of the nation. Although gender relations are historical, changes or transformation can be achieved through political education for all.

Recommendations

Basically, the paper makes the following suggestions:

1. Government should create an enabling environment to achieve gender equality such as enactment of laws to protect and promote gender equal participation in politics to enhance democratic stability, good governance, and democratic development.
2. Government effort should also gear towards empowering women in all sectors such as granting them greater access to employment opportunities. This would reduce poverty among women and enhance their capacity and opportunity to stand in electoral contest with men.
3. Political education should be revived and sustained by institutions of government such as the National Orientation Agency, political parties, civil society organizations, and non-governmental organizations. Fundamentally, the goal is to achieve value re-orientation especially as it relates to gender equality in politics and decision-making necessary for the attainment of national development.

4. Government should also implement the Beijing Conference and Nigeria's NGP frameworks on women and emphasize the use of quota system in appointive and elective positions, and reserve legislative seats for women at all levels of government with the view to increase the number of women in decision-making positions necessary to achieving national development.

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