

GENDER DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN IN POLITICS, BOJI-BOJI OWA, DELTA STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

Gender discrimination is a widespread phenomenon in patrilineal societies especially in the area of politics because of traditional beliefs and attendant socio-cultural stereotypes. Gender discrimination causes subjugation, domination and sub-limitation of women. Consequently, women are under-represented in the political arena. They are deprived of their rights and opportunities to express themselves to full potentialities. In examining these issues in Boji-Boji Owa, a research sample size of 80 was selected with stratified random sampling technique. Structured questionnaires were used for data collection. Socialization theory advocated by Kent Yenning formed the theoretical basis of analysis. The study revealed among others, that the background of the respondents had a significant correlation with the level of participation of women in politics at the executive level.

Women constitute about half of the population of Nigeria. They play vital roles as mothers, producers, home managers, community organizers, and partisan political activists. These roles notwithstanding, the societies have not given enough recognition to their invaluable contributions. Gender roles are broadly classified into two:- productive and reproductive roles. Productive roles are mainly associated with the male sex. Whereas the reproductive roles are exclusively for the female sex. Consequently, women had for long suffered various forms of gender discrimination, inequality and exclusion especially in the area of politics. The movement for alleviation and eradication of gender discrimination emerged to transform the status of women in terms of traditional beliefs rooted in patriarchy. Sex role socialization assigns distinct and often unequal work and political positions to biological sexes. Gender economists perceive this as sexual division of labour. This concept is central to the Nigerian political system where males and females are assigned different complementary tasks.

Discrimination against women is defined by Article 1 of the United Nations of the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women in 1996 (here referred to as the 1996 Convention of CEDAW) as

Any discrimination, exclusion or restrictions made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise of women irrespective of marital status on the basis of equality of men and women of human rights, fundamental freedom in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field (CEDAW 1996).

As defined by CEDAW, discrimination is symptomatic of a situation where patterns of structural inequality are maintained by rules, norms and procedures that dictate a subordinate role for women in all spheres of society. This calls for an end to discrimination against women and emphasizes the need for a radical redefinition of the process and content of economic, social and political development. It stresses the need for a holistic orientation which acknowledges that vital role of women in development, engineers their integration into developmental processes as equal partners with men for this purpose. It is argued that legal and substantive protection at the domestic, regional, and international levels must be co-ordinated for a more meaningful enhancement of both the status and situation of women.

Politics is the struggle for power and the practical application of it. It is about the acquisition and utilization of power. Over the years, there has been raging debates over participation of women in Nigerian politics. Some argue that women are regarded as weaker sex and thus, have insufficient stamina to participate in political activities. Men are stronger and are, thus, fit for political activities.

Sexual division of labour in Nigeria's political system is often traced to the onset of colonialism. The imperialist's notion of male superiority reflected in their relationship with Nigerians. Sir Clifford Constitution of 1922 disenfranchised women and limited the participation in politics to males. Fortunately, since then, Nigerian Constitution has been transformed and women are enfranchised, though participation is very low. The current study was carried out in Boji-Boji Owa, Ika-North East Local Government Area, Delta State. It was restricted to females aged 18 and above (age of franchise) as provided by the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

Research Problematique

Globally, in patriarchy, it is believed that politics is largely the preserve of men, and not of women. From this viewpoint, participation in politics is mostly accepted by men. Few attempts by women to break this dogma and wade into the political terrain has always been received either with contemptuous disregard by the society or with outright opposition by men who had already maintained a stronghold on this sphere of human activity. The common attitude is to regard such daring women as imitating upstairs venturing into a domain not meant for them.

Even outside political domain, individuals in the societies have been socialized based on pre-defined sex roles; socially constituted behavioural patterns that tend to lead women to subjugation or dependent on men. Women mostly play dependent roles while men dominate. Even when women attain phenomenal heights, if given the opportunities, there are still cultures, traditions, religions, societal perceptions and behaviours which are discriminatory and so marginalize and exclude women in the area of politics and political involvements. It is these problems stated above that this paper addresses.

Research Objectives

The general objective of this study is to identify the factors that lead to discrimination against women's participation in politics in Boji-Boji Owa. The specific objectives are:-

- (i) To investigate the relationship between cultural/traditional beliefs and women's participation in politics in Boji-Boji Owa;
- (ii) To examine how the background of women affects their participation in politics in Boji-Boji Owa; and
- (iii) To determine if equal rights and opportunities in politics could foster sustainable national development.

Theoretical Framework of Analysis

The socialization theory advocated by Kent Jennings was used for the theoretical framework of analysis because the theory identified the root causes of gender discrimination and marginalization in political participation. It is concerned with the manner and means by which knowledge, values and norms are imparted from one social group to the other. Usually, the social set transferring such values and norms hold some acknowledged superior position in relation to the receiving group in the relationship. The theory thus postulates that the early grooming of children by their parents, relatives, peers and social groups is structured along sex/gender lines. This theory also touches educational development. In most times, Jennings observed that male children were given more attention by their parents and teachers in the course of their academic development. To this end, male children were given extra lessons in mathematics and other science subjects which would make professional engineers, doctors, scientists, and architects in the future. The reverse is the case with female children who were given minimum opportunities in educational attainments, just enough to perform rudimentary task of reading and writing. The core educational attainment was often centered on domestic chores. Their mothers, aunts and other close relations commonly taught them professions related to this angle. Consequently, from early beginning, the foundation was laid for girls to pursue domestic related careers such as cosmetology, fashion designing, teaching, nursing, entertainment and catering services. By these precedents, the society further constrains the pre-adult socialization of males and females along gender lines with regard to political participation, handling of public power, distribution of political and strategic offices, and access to privileges and potentials in the society. It is

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on this premise that the pre-adult socialization of male and female children is structured even in Nigeria.

Research Hypothesis

This research had two hypotheses to test:-

- (i) That there is a relationship between traditional beliefs and women's participation in politics in Boji-Boji Owa.
- (ii) That there is a relationship between a woman's background (marital status, level of education, and occupation) and the level of participation in politics in Boji-Boji Owa.

Research Methodology

The population of this study consisted of women, literates and non-literates from all fields of endeavours aged 18 years and above. The population of women in Boji-Boji Owa was estimated at 38,652 (Population Census, 2006). In a bid to get a sample that would be representative of different areas, a stratified random sampling technique was used. The town of Boji-Boji Owa has approximately 40 named streets, and to get a research sample size of 80, 20 streets were chosen randomly. Structured questionnaires were used for data collection. Frequencies and simple percentages were used for analysis of bio-data, whereas, chi-square statistics (χ^2) was used to test the research hypotheses.

Data Analysis on Gender Discrimination against Women in Politics in Boji-Boji Owa

Socio-Economic Characteristics of the Respondents

With respect to age, Table 1 shows that out of 80 respondents 22 (27.5%) were aged 18-27 years, 20 (25.0%), and only 8 (10.0%) were within the age cohort of 58-67 years old. The statistical analysis means that majority of the respondents were young suggesting that they might have greater interest to participate actively in politics so as to occupy fruitful positions in politics/governance.

Regarding marital status, Table 1 also shows that there were more married women with 47 respondents (representing 58.7%); 23 (28.7%) were single/not married; 3 respondents (3.7%) were divorced; 2 (2.6%) were separated; and 5 (6.3%) were widows. Table 1 further shows that majority of the respondents were Christians representing 68 (85.0%), the rest of the respondents 32 (15%) were Muslims and those who worshipped traditional religion. Thus, the dominant religion in Boji-Boji Owa was Christianity.

Furthermore, in Table 1, the educational attainment of the respondents was quite interesting. Most of the respondents were educated beyond secondary level. The highest number of respondents had OND/NCE with 36 respondents representing 45.0%; 27 (33.7%) of the respondents had HND/B.Sc. degrees; only 2 (2.5%) had higher degrees. As regards occupation, most of the respondents 30 (37.5%) in Boji-Boji Owa worked in one government parastatal or the other. They were civil servants. Boji-Boji Owa is the largest urban area in Ika-North East Local Government Area; while those who were self-employed such as traders, farmers, market women, manual workers and vocational workers were 18 (22.5%); 15 respondents (18.8%) were unemployed; 8 (10.0%) were housewives; and only 3 (3.7%) were pensioners. The analysis means that majority of the respondents were civil servants (see also Table 1).

Table 1: Socio-Economic Characteristics of the Respondents

Age	Frequencies	Percentages (%)
18-27 years	22	27.50
28-37 years	20	25.00
38-47 years	13	16.25
48-57 years	13	16.25
58-67 years	8	10.00
68 years and above	4	5.00

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Total	80	100
Marital status		
Single	23	28.7
Married	47	58.7
Divorced	3	3.8
Separated	2	2.5
Widowed	5	6.3
Total	80	100
Religions		
Christianity	68	85
Islam	12	2.5
Traditional religion	10	12.5
Total	80	100
Educational level		
Primary	5	6.25
Secondary	10	12.50
OND/NCE	36	45.00
HND/B.Sc.	27	33.70
Others	12	2.50
Total	80	100
Occupation		
Unemployed	15	18.8
Self-employed	18	22.5
Civil servant	30	37.5
Pensioner	3	3.7
House-wife	8	10.0
Others	6	7.5
Total	80	100

Source: Fieldwork July-October, 2010

Level of Participation of the Women in Politics

Out of 80 respondents, 50 (62.5%) did not belong to any political party, 23 (28.7%) were ordinary members; 4 (5.0%) belonged to committee of political parties; only 3 (three) (3.8%) were executive members of political parties (i.e. leaders of the women wing).

Table 2: Positions the Women Held in Political Parties

Positions held in political parties	Frequencies	Percentages (%)
Committee membership	4	5.0
Executive membership	3	3.8
Ordinary membership	23	28.7
Non-membership	50	62.5
Total	80	100

Source: Fieldwork July-October, 2010

Reasons given by those who did not belong to any political parties included:-

- (i) **Marital and Family Responsibility** Married women with children were heavily loaded with domestic chores; taking care of children, husbands, relations, and perhaps, domestic helps. These were full-time jobs, in addition to official duties which are also full-time jobs. So, in essence the women performed two full-time jobs. They had little or no time to participate in politics. Married women participation was largely determined by the consent and approval of their husbands. Those who were separated, single and divorced still depended on the support

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and encouragement of significant others. It was further discovered that the singles/unmarried were not fully interested due to financial constraints involved.

- (ii) **Discriminatory Behaviours by Others** Male politicians culturally would not like women to come and rub shoulders with them in political arena, which they regarded as “male domain.” So, they hated to see women politicians in their midst.
- (iii) **No Support from Husbands** The people in the society perceived politics as a violent and dirty, profession. Consequently, certain husbands refused their wives’ participation in politics.
- (iv) **Religious Doctrines** On the issue of religious beliefs, most women were limited/prevented from participation in politics e.g. the Jehovah’s Witness. They believed that it is sinful for women to participate in politics. They believe that political activities are exclusively reserved for men; women should not participate in them at all.

In support of the reasons for non-participation, data analysis revealed that only 35 (43.75%) of the respondents voted in the last election; the rest did not vote or participate. This meant that the level of participation of women in politics in Boji-Boji Owa reflected various impeding factors already mentioned above.

Significance of Women Participation in Politics and National Development

When the respondents were asked to declare if equal rights and opportunities could foster sustainable political and national development, they clearly expressed affirmatively the significant role of women in terms of political and national development. All the 80 (100%) respondents stated that women are capable. If women were given equal rights and opportunities as men in political participation at the executive level, they can contribute selflessly towards sustainable development in Nigeria’s politics. The high level of corruptible practices in politics which hinder national development will drastically reduce to the barest minimum for the good of all.

Table 3: Significance of Women Participation in Political and National Development

Category of Response	Frequencies	Percentages (%)
Yes	80	100
No	-	-
Total	80	100

Source: Fieldwork July-October, 2010

Testing of Research Hypotheses

Chi-square (χ^2) statistics was used as stated below:

Hypothesis 1:

H₀: There is no relationship between traditional beliefs and participation in politics at the executive level.

H₁: There is a relationship between traditional beliefs and women’s participation in politics at the executive level.

$$\chi^2 = \frac{\sum(O-E)^2}{E}$$

Responses	O	E	O-E	(O-E) ²	(O-E) ² /E
1.	53	40	13	156.25	3.9
2.	27	40	-13	156.25	3.9
Total	120		0		Σ7.8

Rules:

Accept null hypothesis (H₀) if tabulated-value is (\geq) greater than or equal to calculated-value, otherwise reject.

T – value = k-1 (α) = df

$K = 3$

$\alpha = 0.05$

Calculated-value = 7.8

Tabulated-value = 3.84

From the above analysis, tabulated-value of χ^2 is less than the calculated-value, We therefore, reject the null-hypothesis (H_0), and accept the alternative hypothesis (H_1) which states that “there is a relationship between traditional beliefs and women’s participation in politics at executive level.

Hypothesis 2:

H_0 : That there is no relationship between a woman’s background (i.e. marital status, level of education and occupation) and participation of women in politics at executive level.

H_1 : There is a relationship between a woman’s background (i.e. marital status, level of education and occupation) and participation in politics at executive level.

$$\chi^2 = \frac{\sum(O-E)^2}{E}$$

Responses	O	E	O-E	(O-E) ²	(O-E) ² /E
1.	63	40	23	506.25	12.6
2.	17	40	23	506.25	12.6
Total	80		0		Σ25.2

Rules:

Accept null hypothesis (H_0) if tabulated-value is (\geq) greater than or equal to calculated-value, otherwise reject.

T – value = k-1 (α) = df

$K = 2$

$\alpha = 0.05$

Calculated-value = 25.2

Tabulated-value = 3.84

From the above analysis, tabulated-value is less than calculated-value. We, therefore, reject the null hypothesis (H_0) and accept the alternative hypothesis (H_1) which states “that there is a relationship between a woman’s background (i.e. marital status, level of education, and occupation) and participation in politics at the executive level”.

Summary and Conclusion

The first point to note in this study is the issues of the disproportionate representation of women in politics. They get unequal opportunities. They are discriminated against based on gender and socio-cultural stereotypes which the societies hold about women who are involved in politics.

The hypothesis tested in the study showed the various factors which impede, limit, deter, and discourage women to participate in politics and these geared towards the discriminatory nature which women face in the political arena in Boji-Boji Owa, and in Nigeria in general. This type of discrimination was found in families too where parents concentrate more on their male rather than female children on the issue of education. They were conscious to send their sons to tertiary institutions, whereas women should stop either at primary or secondary education. They believed that women did not need higher level of education to perform domestic chores, rear children, take care of husbands and relations (i.e. their major gender roles). Men needed higher level of education to work outside the home, and to participate in politics and governance. The entire background characteristics of the women as well as traditional beliefs determine their level of political participation at the executive level.

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In view of the above findings, the following recommendations were made for improvement:

- (i) Socio-cultural stereotypes held against women in politics should be dropped and discarded because they are not true. Women that participate in politics only seek opportunity to contribute and be part of the national development efforts. Politics is not a dirty game, but the people who participated in it over the years were indeed dirty. They looted and made away with public funds. Today, Nigeria needs a change in politics. Women will help to effect positive and selfless change if given the opportunity.
- (ii) This is also a call to parents and Nigerian societies at large to bring up their children without any gender discrimination, give equal educational opportunities to males and females to become professionals in their career choice, and to aspire for political appointments just like men for the growth of the political system and sustainable national development.
- (iii) Equal and unrestricted access should be granted to men and women aspiring to be politicians, and leaders in politics and governance in Boji-Boji Owa, and in Nigeria in general.
- (iv) Humanitarian groups, religious denominations, unions and associations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) should stand out to support Nigerian women in their drive for empowerment and struggle against gender discrimination in politics. Nigerian women have much to offer towards improving political system for sustainable and national development.

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