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Gender Perspectives in Politics, Peacebuilding and Development in Nigeria

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Abstract
The study interrogated the implication of adopting gender perspectives to issues of politics, peacebuilding and Development. It was observed that there is an imbalance in the roles played by the male and the female gender in politics in Nigeria and therefore calls for more intensive studies into the political role and participation of women in the context of the ongoing democratization in Nigeria and Rivers State in particular. The study applied the qualitative deductive (secondary) methods of data collection and content analysis. In adopting Liberal feminism as a theoretical framework which is premised on the basic principles of freedom, justice, equality and liberty, the study discovered that Nigerian women are still being marginalized due to the style of leadership inherent in the country. Furthermore, despite the challenges women are facing, women's activism and advocacy, education of women, positivity on the part of successive governments towards women empowerment and interest of women to participate in Politics and peacebuilding are getting a lot of positive energy but a lot still needs to be done. The study therefore recommended that there is a need to build a mass Coalition of women's support and advocacy groups using NGOs and Grassroots women associations to coordinate support and advocacy for fellow women aspirants.

Keywords: Gender perspectives, Peacebuilding, Democracy, Development

Introduction

In interrogating the effect of effective peacebuilding and democracy on national and sub-national development especially with regards to the role of gender perspectives in peacebuilding and development, it has been observed that women have always had problems while venturing into Politics and peacebuilding, peacebuilding processes and development. There is large-scale discrimination from the men folk, both in voting for candidates and in allocating political offices. *No Woman Need Apply* (NWNA) – an unspoken slogan reminiscent of the discrimination against Irish nationals in 19th century Britain. This unwritten rule is one that only a small percentage of the female population has defied successfully. Stevens, (2018) notes that politics and peacebuilding can be said to be the act of making public choices and making decisions on behalf of people through the medium of the State and its apparatus. It is accepted that for development of any kind to be successful, women, who make up a larger proportion of the population, should not be left out, because there is no doubt that both men and women have some potential and rights to contribute

meaningfully to the development of their countries throughout the world, Africa inclusive.

There is abundant historical evidence that African woman have long been playing crucial roles in the Politics and peacebuilding of their countries. Many great women of yesteryears have helped in shaping African Politics and peacebuilding. They have played crucial roles in redeeming or elevating their countries (Mohamed, 2000). Despite being a patriarchal society, Nigeria has a rich history of women breaking out of the mould to participate in Politics and peacebuilding. Our pre-colonial history is replete with the exploits of Queen Amina of Zaria, who led armies to drive out invaders from Zaria; and Moremi of Ile-Ife, whose sacrifice for her people speaks to selfless leadership that we are so bereft of these days. Our recent past speaks of prominent women leaders like FunmilayoRansomeKuti, a crusader and challenger of despotic leaders, who led Egba women on a protest against taxation; Margaret Ekpo, a

prominent civil rights activist; and HajiaGamboSawaba, who championed the cause of the oppressed in northern Nigeria. IyalodeTinubu of Lagos exemplifies the rich participation of women on the economic scene. The legacies of these women are at risk of extinction.

Even though an increasing number of women are finding their way into boardrooms and providing leadership for blue chip companies, the majority of women in Nigeria only minimally participate in economic development or Politics and peacebuilding. Female participation in decision-making is still a far cry from the Rwandan experience, where the economy road to recovery on the backs of women. Equitable participation of women in Politics peacebuilding and government is essential to building and sustaining democracy. Comprising over 50% of the world's population, women continue to be under-represented as voters, political leaders and elected officials. Democracy cannot truly deliver for all of its citizens if half of the population remains underrepresented in the political arena. Despite the efforts being made by our sister countries in Africa to bridge the gap between men and women in politics and peacebuilding, the Nigerian government has not deemed it necessary to implement this (Saliu, 2021).

However, the recent election of female presidents in Africa, Latin America and Europe is being hailed by many as a seminal movement for the advancement of women in Politics and peacebuilding. The international community has encouraged countries to keep at least 30% of seats in their national parliament reserved for women. In the last republic (2003) election, three women made it to the 109-member upper house, while 21 were elected in the 360-member lower house. Six women were appointed ministers, with three as subordinate ministers and the other three as full ministers. This is a very poor representation. In Nigeria, the roles of men are more highly valued than those of women when it comes to Politics and peacebuilding. Women today are still seen as poor political/social problem solvers and therefore ineffective leaders. Saliu, (2021), opined that despite the huge contribution they have made in developing the country, they are still sidelined in both elections and appointment into public offices. For instance, it has been observed that rather than blossoming the activism of late Mrs. FumilayoRansome-Kuti, HajiaGamboSawaba and Margaret Ekpo, among others into Politics and peacebuilding which should propel Nigerian women to the forefront of governance seem not witnessed the expected result.

Statement of the problem

The high level of patronage and corruption means that female representation in peacebuilding processes is sometimes tokenistic rather than substantive, as in the case of first ladies' political initiatives (Hughes & Painter 2020). This is evidenced in the 2019 general elections where women were gathered and offered drinks, wrappers and food for them to participate. Even though the Nigerian State and indeed successive governments had subscribed to international agreements and instituted national policies to improve women's representation, it is rather unfortunate that the Nigerian State has done little to implement concrete measures with which to encourage women to participate in Politics and peacebuilding. Nigerian civil society organisations and international funders have promoted several capacity-building and behavioural change programmes such as seminars on improved women's participation held in 2019 at Lagos.

Notable NGOs have also organised programmes aimed at improving women's participation in Politics and peacebuilding, yet the overall levels of female representation in government have barely improved since 1999 hence the motivation behind this study. Under international standards and conventions, both men and women should have equal rights and opportunities in everything, most especially to participate fully in all aspects and at all levels of peacebuilding processes (Radzik, 2005).

This paper aims to examine the role of effective gender perspectives in politics, peacebuilding and development of the Nigerian State. The specific objectives of the study are to: i) identify and discuss those problems or factors militating against women's active participation in peacebuilding processes; and ii) examine women's participation in politics and peacebuilding and its benefits for the Nigerian state.

Conceptual Review

Women's Participation in Politics and Peacebuilding

The Nigerian constitution guaranteed the rights of women to participate in active Politics and peacebuilding; however, the last decade has witnessed a relative increase in women's participation. This is only when we measure an increase in participation with certain standards like the number of women who vote in elections; the number of public offices held by women; the number of women-related policies implemented by the government etc. Over the years, there has been a remarkable increase in women's participation in Politics and peacebuilding in Nigeria considering these standards, yet there is inherently a pronounced level of under-representation of women in Politics and peacebuilding when compared with their male counterparts (Osori, 2015). Women are homemakers and the centre of the family, they are also the custodians of social, cultural and fundamental values of society and permanent change is often best achieved through full community development is not possible without their outstanding cooperation and effective participation (Omoruyi et al 2008). No doubt, the participation and contributions of women to the political and socio-economic development of any democratic state is immeasurable, women have not taken their rightful place in the political and national life of Nigeria.

According to (Craig 1997:240) "All societies use gender as a yardstick for dividing the chores and rewards of social life into men's and women's roles". From time dressing styles to careers, both genders have been seen not only as different people but also as unequal. In many traditional settings, the works, traits, ideas and even virtues ascribed to women have been seen as less important and less worthy than those ascribed to men. It is in society being rational, competitive, aggressive, making huge wealth and others like supposed masculine traits and this is viewed as superior to emotional caring, rearing children etc. all supposedly feminine pursuits. Men enjoy more wealth, power, position and prestige than women and this cuts across societies despite social changes. (Ezeigbo 1996:15) posit that 'the extent of devaluation of women varied from one society to another. Women both publicly and politically are not represented satisfactorily and this was the situation in Ibo traditional society. This state of marginalization did not go well with the women and they countered by forming associations through which they sought control of their affairs (Ezeigbo, 1996).

Gender and Gender Equality

The definition of gender is being untidily used to denote the different and unequal perceptions, views, roles, relevance or rewards that a society assigns to the two sex categories, discrimination happens to both males and females in individual situations, particularly the female, or women group (Dovi, 2016). The act of subjugating women is an inherent tradition, which has consistently been kept in an active state and coupled with its debilitating ability. As society has been grappling with the problem of creating a fair, just and equitable arrangement among different people, the mainstream agenda of development is challenged through; how to enhance the role of women in politics and governance. There is no human society where women are not discriminated against or marginalized. Women are an entrenched, global pandemic. Udegbe (2004) specifically explained that males and females go along with several stereotypes that virtually impose both role performances, possibilities of different kinds. That is why Margaret (1982) confirms that women have been traditionally designated to occupations, which require such skills with cultural values. According to

Agbalajobi (2010), the key point that leads to discrimination against women has its roots in our societies which celebrate men as being unique, stronger and fit for the public space while women are feeble and weak and meant to stay within the confluence of the private space. All these are consequences of cultural norms of the society which are embraced by the people of the world.

According to David (2019), gender equality and women's empowerment are not only human rights; they are also imperative for achieving inclusive, equitable and sustainable development. Women's political participation is central to these goals, and political parties are among the most important institutions for promoting and nurturing such participation. With less than twenty per cent of the world's parliamentary seats occupied by women, it is clear that political parties need to do more and should be assisted in those efforts to support women's political empowerment. Globally, although forty to fifty per cent of party members are women, women hold only about ten per cent of the leadership positions within those parties. Ensuring women's equal participation in the decision-making structures of parties is essential for promoting gender equality within them – and, ultimately, within society as a whole(David 2019). Over eighteen months, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the National Democratic Institute (NDI) compiled twenty case studies of party activities to promote women's political empowerment.

Theoretical framework

Liberal feminism as a theoretical framework was propounded by Radzik 2005 and is premised on the basic principles of freedom, justice, equality and liberty. These principles are the same as the constituents of open-minded democracy which involve participation, equality and liberty (Riker, 1998). Every political individual is given an equal chance to be involved in the election of political leaders and is free to organize, publicize and engage in the pursuit of personal interest and collective goals (Huntington and Moore, 1968). Relevance of the theory: Liberal theorists believe that these democratic elements are fundamental to the working of society and therefore must be enthroned in all democratic societies all over the world. One of the major criticisms levelled against the theory is the fact that most scholars use it predominantly as a tool for the advancement of women's agenda against the views and respect for men.

Methods and Materials

Historical and descriptive research designs were applied in this study as the study sought to conduct a historical analysis of the challenges militating against women's effective participation in politics. Furthermore, the study applied the qualitative method (secondary) based on content analysis.

Results and Discussion of Findings

Several impediments have been identified as limiting the participation of women on the social, economic and political scenes. These barriers are cultural, economic, and legal amongst others. This intervention would focus on some distinctly Nigerian variants of these barriers. The first is patriarchy. This refers to a society ruled and dominated by men over women, which in turn has given rise to women being looked upon as mere household wives and non-partisans in the decision-making process in households not to talk of coming out to vie for political positions (Phillips, 1995). The second is stigmatization. Following the way Politics and peacebuilding in Nigeria are played, it is being perceived that it is for individuals who have no regard for human rights and are quick to compromise their virtue for indecent gains. Therefore, women aspirants who venture into Politics and peacebuilding are looked upon as shameless and promiscuous. The third shortcoming has to do with the level of women in education. The National Bureau of Statistics (2010) revealed that the adult literacy rate in English in Nigeria is 50.6 per cent while literacy in any other language is 63.7 per cent

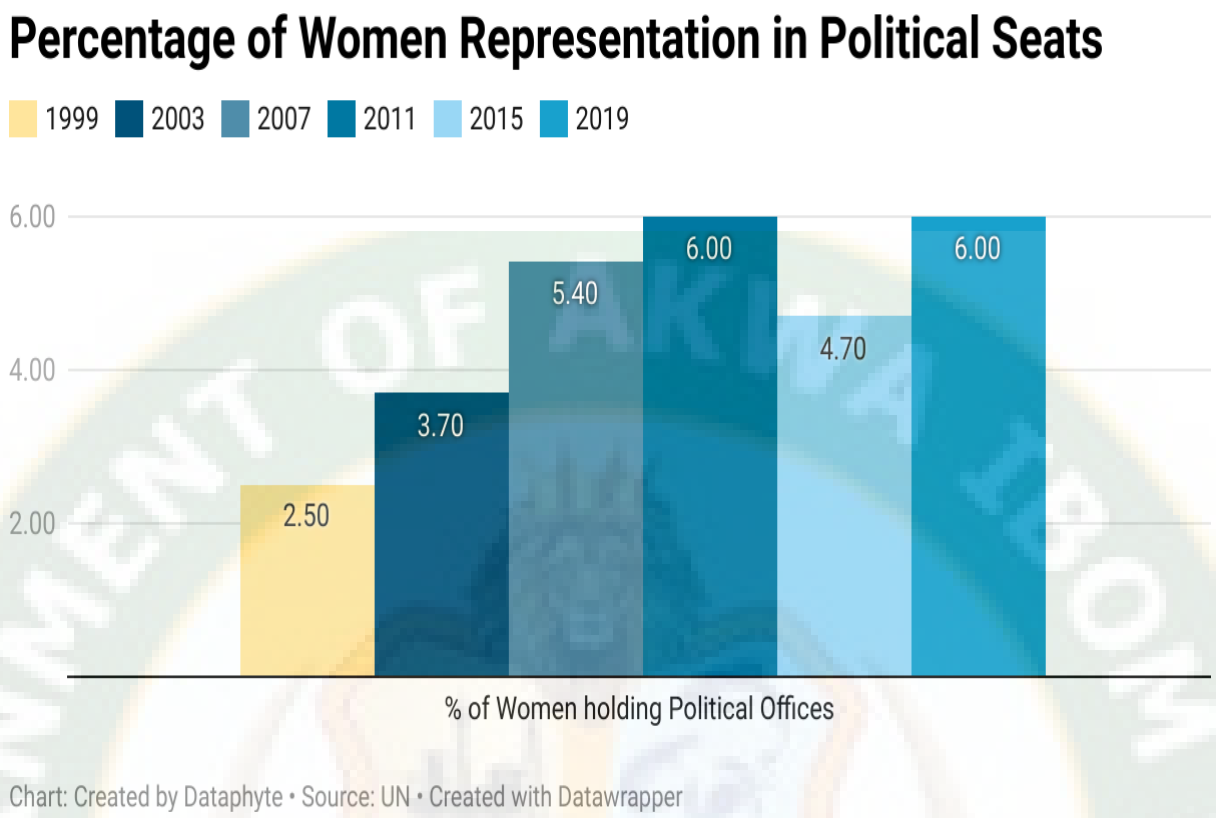
(female adults aged 15 and above). This explains why most women are least qualified for political offices due to low educational attainment. This is also an effect of colonialism, where men were more favoured than women (Phillips, 1995).

The fourth problem is the time scheduled for caucus meetings to strategize and map out political plans either for the pre or post-election periods is odd and is not conducive for responsible and family women. The slated time is often the time when women are expected to take care of their children and families. This method of schedules is viewed as an attempt to side-lining women from engaging in the political process. The fifth challenge has to do with financing. Competing for political positions in Nigeria requires huge financial backup. Most Nigerian women who seek these positions cannot afford to meet the financial obligations therein, despite the waivers given to women aspirants by some of the political parties. And so, they could do little or nothing to outweigh their male counterparts. The sixth revolves around political violence elections have always been characterized by one form of violence or another since the return of democracy. Female aspirants of various political parties cannot withstand political violence; therefore, women's participation in Politics and peacebuilding is drastically reduced.

Religious and cultural barriers represent the seventh challenge: Both Christianity and Islam do not accord women many roles in public life, and the same is obtainable in most cultural values, where women are seen culturally as quite submissive and an image of virtue (Pathania, 2017). However, they are not to be seen in the public domain. And so it is a challenge to women's participation in Politics and peacebuilding, more so, women found in the corridor of Politics and peacebuilding are not often religious in practice. Religion is an accomplice in the stereotyping of women and the reinforcing of the barriers that prevent them from participating in Politics and peacebuilding, economic activities, and the social scene. For instance, in the northern part of Nigeria, women are held in Purdah in deference to Islam. The implication of this is that only their husbands can have unfettered access to them and their movement is restricted to their quarters. They are at the mercy of the husband for the needs to be met. The conditions of their lives can be best left to conjecture as most households subsist below the poverty line Religion ensures that a significant number of women are shut out from participating in Politics and peacebuilding either as voters or as aspirants into elective offices and also participating in economic activities.

Moreover, men are the decision makers; women should be cooking in the kitchen while men play Politics and peacebuilding." - Comments passed to Dorothy Nyone when she announced her intention to represent the Gokana area in south-eastern Rivers State for the ruling People’s Democratic Party. Social conventions, values and mores conspire to deepen the stereotype of women as perpetual habitués of the kitchen who are only gatecrashers into other spheres outside of their matrimonial homes. They are usually socialized from birth to see their place as a second fiddle. The birth of a male child is warmly received.

Contrary to these challenges, research has shown the connection between the participation of women, a product of economic empowerment and its effect on children, the home and the society at large. Empowered women take adequate care of their children, ensure the education of their female daughters and hold in breaking the vicious cycles of poverty that are so rife in Africa. It is widely reported that the Rwandan economy owes its recovery from a coma to the effort of its women. Women are said to be driving that economy. With 50% of Rwanda’s parliament made up of women, Nigeria can take a clue from Rwanda by empowering its women. Experts say women make better investment decisions than men.



Empowering women with the right skills, adequate funding and timely information will no doubt ensure national productivity. Women can form pressure groups to articulate and voice concerns about workplace issues, redistribution of economic resources, and creation of job opportunities for women among other issues indicative of gender inequality. These groups can also help educate women on the implications of government policies on their business and participation in Politics and peacebuilding. Organizations like Baobab for Women's Human Rights, and WIMBIZ have played significant roles in this regard. These and many other groups also help by adding value-adding inputs into legislation that demolish barriers like patriarchal land and property laws that make it difficult for women to own properties by engaging with the political class to enact legislation to encourage the participation of women. The infinitesimal percentages of women in legislative organs still affect the passage of gender-friendly laws in the country.

Regular town hall meetings for women can be convened to discuss issues that collectively affect women. The broadcast media can also be exploited to collate issues that affect women. This is especially effective in rural areas where community radio stations are partners in communicating change. Businesses run by women can form coalitions to formulate policy positions and present a common voice before the government. These groups can also interact with thought leaders and think tanks to appraise the impact of proposed legislation on women's intervention in business, politics and peacebuilding. In a similar vein, periodic publications and materials that highlight specific issues can help to galvanise broad support across social lines. These publications should be targeted at a broader audience including particular youths. They should highlight the predicament of other demographics like unemployed youths, widows and the aged. Tibaijuka, (2010), opined that quick wins by women should be celebrated. One such is the recent nullification by a high court in Nigeria of the requirement of spousal approval in the form of a letter of consent before the issuance of an international passport to married Nigerian women. Young people can help spread reports

of these quick wins via new media platforms like Facebook and Twitter now X. These social network avenues present the opportunity to rally young people around the cause of gender equality and mobilize public opinion for the opening of the space for women's participation

Moreover, skills acquisition centres should be established in rural areas for women to acquire skills in the use of modern agricultural tools as the predominant population of women in Nigeria is involved in agriculture. Women can form agricultural workers collectives where they can pool resources together to collectively acquire lands, and modern tools for farming. Collectives make it easy for women to access funding and also learn new skills to better their lot (Yahaya, 2020).

Conclusion

Interrogating women's participation in politics and peacebuilding is important in the contemporary Nigerian State. Politically, women have been relegated to the background, despite the tremendous effort put forward by non-governmental organizations and civil society organisations following the declaration made at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, which advocated 30% affirmative action and National Gender Policy (NGP) recommendation of 35% affirmative action for a more inclusive representation of women both in elective and appointive positions. It is worth noting that Nigerian women are still being marginalized due to the style of leadership inherent in the country. Despite the challenges women are facing, women's activism and advocacy, education of women, positivity on the part of successive governments towards women empowerment and interest of women to participate in Politics and peacebuilding are getting a lot of positive energy. This is an indication that the participation of women in Politics and peacebuilding has a bright future. Therefore, the relevant stakeholders are advised to advocate for the protection of women from abuse, empower them economically and politically and review the necessary legislation to accommodate the growing interest of women in Politics and peacebuilding both elective and appointive positions.

Viewed from the perspective of culture and tradition, women face massive resistance from participating in Politics and peacebuilding. Aside from the fact that the majority of husbands do not allow their wives to participate in Politics and peacebuilding, the study discovered that a lot of females believed that politics and peacebuilding would prevent them from taking absolute care of their families. Fear of broken homes, breeding irresponsible children and the need to perform their domestic activities were identified as major reasons preventing them from going into Politics and peacebuilding. The issue of violence, thuggery, intimidation money Politics and peacebuilding are considered secondary. The first major issue is a lack of interest arising from the need to effectively handle their sedentary activities.

Recommendations

1. There is a need for state governments to build a mass Coalition of women's support and advocacy groups using NGOs and Grassroots women's associations to coordinate support and advocacy for fellow women aspirants.
2. Federal and State governments must as a matter of urgency create an enabling environment that allows women to engage meaningfully in the decision-making process sustainably and effectively that is free from violence and harassment of any kind.
3. Federal and State governments must establish legal funds to assist women politicians in challenging electoral malpractices of any form at all levels of political processes.
4. Introducing a quota system at all levels of government and Identifying and engaging relevant stakeholders such as the Independent National Electoral Commission and political parties to ensure strict adherence to it.

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