United Nations Gender Equality Norms and Women Political Participation in Nigeria

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Abstract

The essence of political participation in any society, either civilised or primitive, is to seek control of power, acquisition of power and dispensing power to organise society, harness and distribute resources and to influence decision making in line with organised or individual interests. The aim of this study was to examine the impact United Nations gender equality norms have had on women political participation in Nigeria. The paper adopted the functionalist theory of gender inequality which believes that it is functional for the society to assign each gender different tasks and this is based on the fact that the division of labour in society was based on the physical differences between man and woman. The paper adopted the qualitative method of data collection and analysis based on content analysis and discovered that the re-introduction of democratic governance has witnessed once again an increase in women political participation both in elective and appointive offices. The national average of women's political participation in Nigeria has remained 6.7 percent in elective and appointive positions, which is far below the Global Average of 22.5 percent, Africa Regional Average of 23.4 percent and West African Sub Regional Average of 15 percent. Based on the foregoing, the study recommends the need to create enabling environment that allows women to engage meaningfully in decision making process in a sustainable and effective way that is free from violence and harassments of any kind.

Keywords: United Nations, Gender Equality Norms, Women Political Participation, Nigeria

Introduction

The Beijing Platform for Action defined two strategic objectives in its critical area of concern on women in power and decision-making: to ensure women's equal access to and full participation in power structures and decision-making and to increase women's capacity to participate in decision-making and leadership. Anyanwu (2015) has posited that the 35% affirmative action for women is far from being achieved in Nigeria based on current realities. The above therefore is the basic motivation behind this study, to explore the role of the UN gender equality norms and how it will help improve the participation of Nigerian Women in Politics.

Statement of the problem

Like many countries, Nigeria maintains a national democratic constitution, boasting inclusive and equitable access to political participation. It was expected that facilitating Nigerian women's admission to one-third of positions in governing bodies would enable women to reach a critical threshold in the pursuit of changes in gender equity and thus, women's empowerment (UNIFEM, 2003). However, the under-representation of Nigerian women in politics is both descriptive (that is, the number of women in political institutions is not reflective of the number of women in society) and substantive (that is, the unique perspectives of women are being heard in political institutions to ensure that women's needs, demands and interests are incorporated into political agendas) (Tremblay and Pelletier, 2000). When the reservation system was implemented, political parties were not necessarily inclined to support female candidates and the chances of being elected while not being a party member, or related to one, were slim (Ogwu, 2022).

Moreover, the gap between constitutionally-instituted rights and the conditions which enable women to recognize and embrace those rights often remains fragmented by the absence of politically-reinforced responses to women's daily needs and interests. According to Nussbaum (2002), Nigerian women's under-representation in the public and social domain, against their male counterparts and the inability to properly fit into political arena has affected Nigerian women's empowerment and social status. Without a more substantive conceptualization of female-male relations, both inside and outside of the public domain, filling quota

prescriptions risks contributing to routes of women's empowerment with outcomes observed by Nussbaum (2022) wherein is seen as the emergence of a new social underclass. Similarly, Lama (2021), Banerjee (2003), Bird (2013), and Jacquette (1997) document strategies for Nigerian women's empowerment which have necessitated the erasure of "femininity" within politics, the persistence of proxy-ruling and populist elections, and the regard for female leaders as goddesses imbued with a particular religious authority or vision.

Moreover, the application of a gender lens to world politics reveals that today, when women do occupy political offices, they are often assigned to ministries dealing with the perceived "soft" issues of politics such as health and education, both of which are often shrouded under the "hard" political areas of defence, finance and international trade, all of which are currently dominated by men (Peterson and Runyan, 2013).

Key objectives of the paper

The specific objectives of the paper are to;

1. Evaluate UN Provisions on Gender Norms and Equality
2. Examine the history of Women and Participation in Nigerian Politics
3. Identify and discuss the factors that militate against women's effective participation in politics

Significance of the Study

1. The study is fundamentally important as it will be beneficial to policy makers, government and women at large. Basically, it will seek to address the challenge of women political participation in Nigeria especially in selected states. Hence, the study will seek to reveal strategies through which the society can fight a major social menace in the society which is poor women participation in politics.
2. Importantly, this study will seek to highlight the impact of cultural beliefs and values and the changing roles of women within the Nigerian society have on the participation of women in politics. Thus, this research work will fundamentally seek to motivate women in examining and possibly discover those areas of life that scuttle their advancement in politics such as the role of patriarchy system arising from cultural practices and values.

Theoretical Framework

The Functionalist Theory of Gender Inequality

The functionalist theory of gender inequality believes that it is functional for the society to assign each gender different tasks. To them; this division of labour in society was based on the physical differences between man and woman. Talcott Persons in his account of the role of women in industrial society, believe that the family performs two basic functions – the instrumental role of getting things done, and the expressive role of holding the group together, taking care of the personal relationships Thio (1989:281).

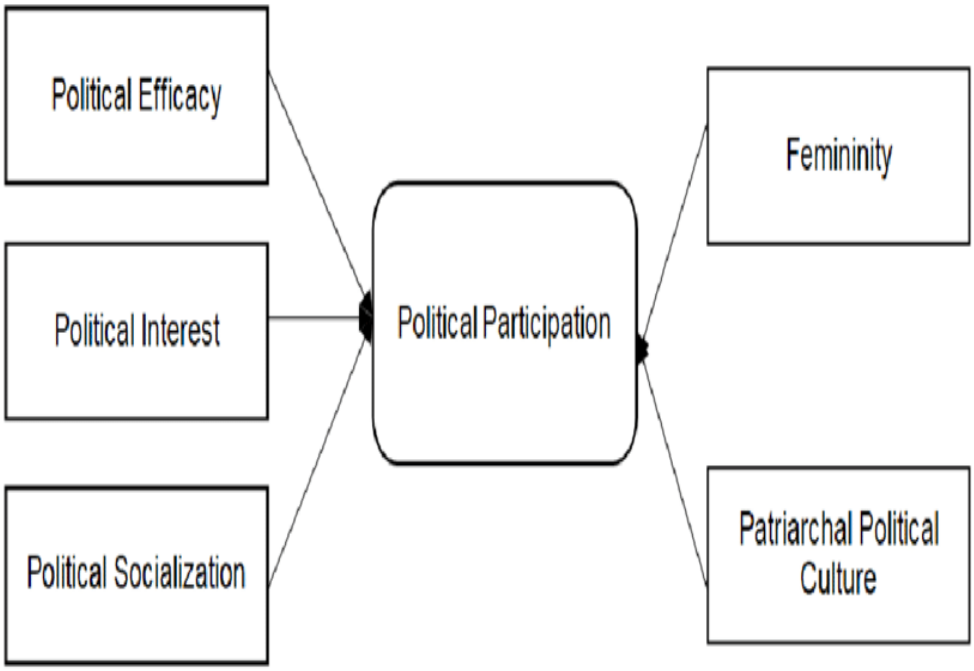
The woman is primarily responsible for socializing the young ones. This role underscored by biology because mothers bear and nurse children and establishes a stronger relationship with them. Haralambos (1980:372) said on the other hand that the father is always away from home performing instrumental roles as a breadwinner. According to Parsons, the role of women is termed expressive role because it provide warmth, security and emotional support. This role is very important for the socialization of the young and for the stabilization of the adult person. The "instrumental role" of man requires competence, assertiveness, dominance and these lead to stress and anxiety and therefore require the expressive female to relieves this tension by providing love, consideration and understanding to the man (Ogunyankin, 2021).

Concept of Women Participation in politics

The Nigerian constitution guaranteed the rights of women to participate in active politics; however, the last decade has witnessed a relative increase in women's participation. This is only when we measure increase in participation with certain standards like the number of women who vote in elections; the number of public offices held by women; number of women related policies implemented by government etc. Over the years, there has been a remarkable increase in women's participation in politics in Nigeria considering these standards, yet there is inherently a pronounced level of under-representation of women in politics when compared with their male counterparts (Nwankwo, & Surma, 2018).

Women are homemakers and centre of the family, they are also custodian of social, cultural and fundamental values of society and permanent change are often best

achieved through them, in fact 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 (Eyeh, 2019).



Conceptual Framework of women political participation
Source: Researcher desk

Though, Nigerian women have shown to be homemakers, custodians of family values, they have also exhibited and demonstrated competence in managing public affairs and leadership positions. As Fasugba (2000) rightly noted, many women today are engaged in activities and jobs hitherto regarded as the exclusive of men, since women have become conscious of their rights, they have continued to slug it out with men in all areas of human endeavours. Nigerian women have been faced with numerous constraints, militating against them in the political

arena, beaming from the first republic, though the fourth republic has been seen as a new dawn for women participation politics as it has more women in government both elective and positions of appointments (Eshiet, 2011). The United Nations declaration of 30% affirmation action for women in the Beijing Conference of 1995 was timely for Nigeria; however there are still constraints yet to be surmounted.

Ebere (2013) notes that Women's aspiration to participate in governance is premised on the following ground; that women in Nigeria represent half of the population and hence should be allowed a fair share in decision-making and the governance of the country. Secondly that all human beings are equal and women possess the same rights as men to participate in governance and public life. The right to democratic governance is an entitlement conferred upon all citizens by law. The 1999 Nigerian constitution by virtue of Section 40 states the following: Every person shall be entitled to assemble freely and associate with other persons, and in particular he may form or belong to any political party, trade union or any other association for the protection of his interests: Provided that the provisions of this section shall not derogate from the powers conferred by this Constitution on the Independent National Electoral Commission with respect to political parties to which that Commission does not accord recognition. Section 42(1) of the same constitution states further that: A citizen of Nigeria of a particular community, ethnic group, place of origin, sex, religion or political opinion shall not, by reason only that he is such a person be subjected to any form of discrimination (Eniola 2018).

From the foregoing therefore, it appears that there is nothing in the constitution, which excludes the participation of women in politics in Nigeria. Yet when it comes to actual practice, there is extensive discrimination. Few and almost insignificant number of women were elected into various posts in the 1999, 2003 and 2007 general elections held in the country. Men dominate most public offices till date. Female gubernatorial candidates have emerged but none has ever won and same goes for the Presidency. Legislative representation has witnessed the presence of women yet they remain under-represented when compared to their male counterparts.

Following decades of military rule statistics reveal that women only secured 3% representation in contested positions in 1999, 4% in 2003, while in 2007 they made with only 6%. Few and almost insignificant number of women were elected into various posts in past three general elections held in the country between 1999 and 2007. The result of the survey shows that no woman was elected as governor of any state in the federation. We only had few women as members of Houses of Assembly across the country and as members of the upper house (Senate) and lower house (House of Representative) of the National Assembly. This survey shows a poor representation of women in the 1999, 2003 and 2007 elections.

In 2003 for instance in States like Adamawa, Cross River, Ebonyi, Jigawa, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Nasarawa, Oyo, Sokoto, Yobe and Zamfara, no woman was elected as member of the State House of Assembly. In states where women were elected as members of House of Assembly, they were very few. As noted by Hillary Clinton:

> If half of the world's population remains vulnerable to economic, political, legal and social marginalization, our hope of advancing democracy and prosperity will remain in serious jeopardy. We still have a long way to go and the United States must remain an unambiguous and unequivocal voice in support of women's right in every country, every region, on every continent.

Undertaking an academic exercise such as a discussion on women's participation in Nigerian politics will induce creating new, or agreeing to existing conceptual frameworks in gender and politics. Political participation here entails various variables of participation but basically voting in elections, contesting elective (public) offices. This is quite different from representation. Representation basically entails elective/public offices held in relation to other representation. For instance, the increase of votes cast by women in elections from 10 to 40% of total votes cast in eight years signifies a form of increase in participation. But when the number of women holding public offices, when compared to men, is relatively low there is under-representation.

Concept of Gender and Gender Equality

The term gender is derived from the Latin noun, which means kind or group. Recently the word was used as a grammatical concept to classify word into masculine and famine. Today the connection 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 male and female 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 or marginalized. Women are an entrenched, global pandemic. Udegbe (2004) specifically explained that male and female goes along with a number of stereo-type that virtually imposes 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. To Agbalajobi (2010) the key point that lead to discrimination against women has its roots in the nature of our societies which celebrate men as being unique, stronger and fit for the public space while women are feeble and weak 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.

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 a period of 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. Drawing on those and other examples, UNDP and the NDI identified concrete steps which can be taken by political parties to promote women in political life. This publication, Empowering Women for Stronger Political Parties: A Guidebook to Promote Women's Political Participation, is the fruit of this research, and provides concise and targeted options for political party reform.

Methodology

In this paper, a combination of historical and descriptive methods of research was used as research designs. It is of great importance to identify the method and procedure adopted in this research work, since it gives the reader background information on how to evaluate the findings and conclusion. Historically, the article examined writings in the past concerning the role of gender equality norms in Nigeria. Descriptively, the paper provided answers to the what, why, when, where and how of the subject matter under review.

Besides the research design, this study adopts the qualitative methods of data collection and analysis and therefore data was collated primarily from secondary sources and analysis was based on the content analysis

Results and Discussion

UN Provisions on Gender Norms and Equality

Article 11 % 12 on elimination of all forms of discrimination against women

Article 11

1. States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the field of employment in order to ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women, the same rights, in particular:

a) The right to work as an inalienable right of all human beings;

b) The right to the same employment opportunities, including the application of the same criteria for selection in matters of employment;

c) The right to free choice of profession and employment, the right to promotion, job security and all benefits and conditions of service and the right to receive vocational training and retraining, including apprenticeships, advanced vocational training and recurrent training;
d) The right to equal remuneration, including benefits, and to equal treatment in respect of work of equal value, as well as equality of treatment in the evaluation of the quality of work;
e) The right to social security, particularly in cases of retirement, unemployment, sickness, invalidity and old age and other incapacity to work, as well as the right to paid leave;
f) The right to protection of health and to safety in working conditions, including the safeguarding of the function of reproduction.
2. In order to prevent discrimination against women on the grounds of marriage or maternity and to ensure their effective right to work, States Parties shall take appropriate measures:
a) To prohibit, subject to the imposition of sanctions, dismissal on the grounds of pregnancy or of maternity leave and discrimination in dismissals on the basis of marital status;
b) To introduce maternity leave with pay or with comparable social benefits without loss of former employment, seniority or social allowances;
c) To encourage the provision of the necessary supporting social services to enable parents to combine family obligations with work responsibilities and participation in public life, in particular through promoting the establishment and development of a network of child-care facilities.
d) To provide special protection to women during pregnancy in types of work proved to be harmful to them.
3. Protective legislation relating to matters covered in this article shall be reviewed periodically in the light of scientific and technological knowledge and shall be revised, repealed or extended as necessary.
Article 12
1. States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the field of health care in order to ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women, access to health care services, including those related to family planning.

2. Notwithstanding the provisions of paragraph 1 of this article, States Parties shall ensure to women appropriate services in connection with pregnancy, confinement and the post-natal period, granting free services where necessary, as well as adequate nutrition during pregnancy and lactation.

History of Women and Participation in Nigerian Politics

Pre-colonial era

Politically, in the pre-colonial era, Nigerian women were an integral part of the political set up of their communities. For instance, in pre-colonial Bornu, women played active roles in the administration of the state, complementing the roles played by male counterparts. Also, Women also played a very significant role in the political history of ancient Zaria. The modern city of Zaria was founded in the first half of the 16th century by a woman called Queen Bakwa Turuku. She had a daughter called Amina who later succeeded her as Queen. Queen Amina was a great and powerful warrior. Yomi, (2017) pointed out that she built a high wall around Zaria in order to protect the city from invasion and extended the boundaries of her territory beyond Bauchi and she made Zaria prominent Commercial Centre (David 2019). The story was not different in ancient Yorubaland, where Oba ruled with the assistance of a number of women referred to as female traditional chiefs. They consisted of eight titled ladies of the highest rank. The significant role played by prominent women such as Moremi of lfe, Emotan of Benin and Omu Okwei of Ossomari, cannot be ignored. Moremi and Emotan were great amazons who displayed wonderful bravery and strength in the politics of lfe and Benin respectively, while Omu Okwei dominated the commercial scene of Ossomari in present day Delta State (Yahaya, 2020).

Colonial Period

Colonialism affected Nigerian women adversely as they were denied the franchise. It was also only in the 1950s that women in Southern Nigeria were given the franchise. Three women were appointed into the House of Chiefs, namely Chief (Mrs) Olufunmilayo RansomeKuti (appointed into the Western Nigeria House of Chiefs); Chiefs (Mrs) Margaret Ekpo and Janet Mokelu (both appointed into the Eastern Nigeria House of Chiefs). The women's wings of political parties possessed very little functional relevance. (Kolawale et al, 2013).

The Post-Colonial Period

During this period, Nigerian women began to play very active roles. In 1960, Mrs. Wuraola Esan from Western Nigeria became the first female member of the Federal Parliament. In 1961, Chief (Mrs) Margaret Ekpo contested and won the election, becoming a member of the Eastern Nigeria House of Assembly till 1966, Mrs. Janet N. Mokelu and Miss Ekpo A. Young also contested elections and won, they became members of the Eastern House of Assembly. In northern Nigeria, however, women were still denied the franchise even after independence until 1979 that is, the return of civilian government (Daniel & Faith, 2013). As a result of this denial, prominent female politicians like Hajia Gambo Sawaba in the North could not vote and be voted for.

Second Republic (1979-1983), saw a little more participation of women in politics. A few Nigerian women won elections into the House of Representatives at the national level and also few women won elections into the State Houses of Assembly respectively. However, During the same period, only two women were appointed Federal Ministers. They were Chief (Mrs) Janet Akinrinade and Mrs Adenike Ebun Oyagbola, Minister for Internal Affairs and Minister for National Planning respectively. Mrs. Francesca Yetunde Emmanuel was the only female Permanent Secretary (first in the Federal Ministry of Establishment and later Federal Ministry of Health). A number of women were appointed Commissioners in the states also. In 1983, Ms Franca Afegbua became the only woman to be elected into the Senate. Also, very few women contested and won elections into the Local Government Councils during this period.

Factors that militate against women's effective participation in politics

Low level of education:

The low participation of women in education is also part of the shortcomings. The National Adult Literacy Survey, 2010 published by National Bureau of Statistics 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 adult age 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 (Clark, 2012).

Meeting Schedules:
The time scheduled for caucus meetings to strategize and map out political plans either for the pre or post- election periods are odd and are not conducive for responsible and family women. The slated time are often time which women are expected to take care of their children and family. This method of schedules is viewed as an attempt to side-lining women from engaging in political process.

Financing:
Competing for political positions in Nigerian requires huge financial backup. Most Nigerian women who seek these positions could not afford meeting the financial obligations therein, despite the wavers giving to women aspirants by some of the political parties. And so, they could do little or nothing to outweigh their male counterparts.

Political Violence:
Nigerian 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 participation in politics is drastically reduced. 7. Religious and Cultural barriers: Both Christianity and Islam do not accord women much role in public life, and same is obtainable in most cultural values, where women are seen culturally as quite submissive and image of virtue. However, they are not to be seen in public domain. And so it is a challenge to women participation in politics, more so, women found in the corridor of politics are not often religious in practice (Clark, 2012).

Religion
Religion is an accomplice in the stereotyping of women and the reinforcing of the barriers that prevent them from participating in politics, economic activities, and on 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 (Asaju, & Adagba, 2021). They are at the mercies 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 either as voters or as aspirants into elective offices and also participating in economic activities.

Conclusion

Women Participation in Nigerian politics is a topic of importance. Politically, women have been relegated to the background, despite the tremendous effort put forward by government and non-governmental organizations 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 worthy to note that Nigerian women are still being marginalized due to the style of leadership inherent in the country. Despite the challenges women are facing, women activism and advocacy, education of women, positivity on the part of successive governments towards women empowerment and interest of women to participate in politics is getting a lot of positive energy. This is an indication that the participation of women in politics 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 legislations to accommodate the growing interest of women in politics both elective and appointive positions.

Recommendations

1. To create enabling environment that allows women to engage meaningfully in decision making process in a sustainable and effective way that is free from violence and harassments of any kind.
2. Establishment of legal funds to assist women politicians to challenge electoral malpractices of any form at all levels of political processes.
3. Introducing quota system at all levels of government and Identifying and engaging relevant stakeholders such as Independent National Electoral Commission and political parties to ensure strict adherence to it.
4. Ensure that in addition to national laws, relevant international instruments relating to full political rights for women such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and the Convention on Political Rights of Women, are

ratified, integrated into national law and implemented, especially in those countries where women are still denied the right to vote and stand for election.
5. Review the existing constitutional, political, legislative and regulatory framework, particularly in countries in transition and post-conflict states, for provisions that may hinder women equal participation, such as rules requiring high numbers of signatures to register as a candidate or high monetary deposits that can be discriminatory against women candidates.

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