

EXCLUSION OF WOMEN IN POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN NIGERIA AND IMPACT ON NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT: A STUDY OF EBONYI STATE

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Abstract

The study examines the exclusion of women in governance which leads to the delay of development in any nation. The study focused on Ebonyi State of Nigeria. The theory applied is patriarchal theory which culturally leads to men dominance.

Secondary data were used to analyse the study. The objectives of the study are to determine the extent to which socio-economic and cultural factors influence women's political participation, and to establish whether the exclusion of women in politics affects the development of Ebonyi State. The study reveals that there is a drastic fall in participation of women in politics in Nigeria which is dangerous to the nation's building. The paper recommends that all cultural and traditional harmful practise against women should be abolished in Nigeria by government issuing a very strong policy which should be implemented and enforced.

Keywords: Exclusion, Governance, Development, Dominance, Women, Inequality.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the study

Developed societies and sustainable governments rely on the participation of all the citizens in the country. Development and sustainability also depend upon the equality of all citizens under the law, Anifowose, (2014).

The African Union (AU), the New Partnership for African's Development (NEPAD) and the first Beijing Conference worked on strengthening women's political leadership and their effort towards national development.

However, despite these efforts, the World still witness slow progress of women participation in politics, UNDP Report (2015).

The Nigerian Constitution of 1999 as amended in 2010, in section 42 states that:

Any 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.

Orucha (2018) says that the progress and development of any nation is by the women in the society. This is because the women represent a tool for positive change, depending on how they are treated and the level of opportunity given to them to actualise their potentials.

National development is the ability of a country to improve the welfare of the citizens by providing social amenities, creating conducive political environment, political participation and security.

According to Egwu (2014), Nigerian women have all the potentials that are necessary to develop and sustain the economy and governance of Nigeria. In Ebonyi State, the population of women outnumber the population of men. Yet this large number is excluded irrespective of their potentials. As these women continue to be excluded in politics, it is assumed that national development of Nigeria is not progressing as should be expected; like in the developed countries of Europe and America where women are given equality of opportunities.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

Nigeria's social, economic and political development has been very slow which has been affecting the populace. The total population of Ebonyi State was 2.2 million, of which women population was 1.135,517 in 2006 (Census 2006, Federal Bureau of Statistics). The potentials of these women are totally redundant because they are not being utilized.

A recent United Nations Report concluded that economic development of nations is related to the empowerment of women. In nations where women have been restricted from empowerment the economy has been stagnant or retrogressive. According to the 1995 United Nations Survey, two changes have occurred over the past ten years in the enabling environment for women in the world economy. One is the establishment of legal equality for women. The other is granting women equal access to education and training. These two factors in the enabling environment for women have significant impact on the global economy of the Highly Development Countries (HDC)

In Nigeria the case is different. Women experience little capacity building or enabling environment to participate actively and effectively in politics such as in the social economic and cultural sphere. Without these enabling factors, the study assumes that the development of the Nigerian nation may not progress as it should be compared to the Highly Developed Countries that have enabling environments for their women. Given that the population of women is greater than that of men in Ebonyi State, one expects that the women should be empowered and not excluded in the economy and politics. Powel (1990) and Egwu (2007) argued that women with their intuition can and do set up organisations if empowered, to develop their countries and Ebonyi State is not an exception.

Consequently, this study attempts to provide answers to the following questions:

- i. To what extent do Socioeconomic and cultural factor influence women's political participation in Ebonyi State?
- ii. Does the exclusion of women in politics affect the development in Ebonyi State?

1.3. Objective of the Study

Determine the extent Socioeconomic and cultural factors influence women's political participation in Ebonyi State.

Establish whether the exclusion of women in politics affects the development of Ebonyi State.

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested in this study.

Socioeconomic and Cultural Factors influence women's political participation and exclusion.

Exclusion of women in political participation affects the development of Ebonyi State.

1.4. Significance of the Study

Theoretically the study will contribute to the field of Political Science by providing a data base for further studies especially in the field of women studies in Ebonyi State. This study will sensitize the government and the public on the need to empower women to participate fully in the development of their nation.

Finally, the study will help to enhance the women develop their capabilities and their decision making status both in the family and society as a whole.

1.5. Scope of Study

The study covers Ebonyi State which have Thirteen Local Government Areas. It will study the population of active adult females which comprised of 1,135,517; 2006 Census of Federal Republic of Nigeria.

Literature Review

Socioeconomic and cultural factors. Women always constitute a small number in political participation because of socioeconomic and cultural factors. The issues of exclusion from socioeconomic and cultural participation have several implications on women and their countries. Okpilike and Abamba (2013) have opined that Nigeria is a patriarchal society like many other societies of the world where men usually dominate. Agbalajobi (2010) states that patriarchal social systems or structure occur when the economic, political and socio-economic powers are dominated by men. Falola (2013) argues that even when men dominated powers and authority, women were given titles such as queen's. what are ceremonial titles compared to executive, legislative and judiciary powers where decision are made and executed.

2. FURTHERMORE, HOW MANY WOMEN WERE THE QUEENS IN NIGERIA OF THE ANCIENT?

As men dominate the society so the society is structured to suit them. For instance, several traditional practices are injurious to women's self-esteem and self-image which are necessary ingredients for the confidence needed in political participation; Yetunde (2008). So many women have been inhibited from political participation by moslem purdah (house seclusion of women) of northern Nigeria Luka (2011) stresses that politics in Nigeria is structured to be a dirty vocation that is reserved for unrefined and unscrupulous people.

The culture according to Wagadu (2008), the socialization of a girl child is also responsible for perceived inabilities on the part of the women. As a result, the life passages of most women in Africa are not sacramentalised, celebrated or even acknowledged. As soon as they are born, their roles are already waiting for them. Wagadu (2008) states that the women's roles are too demanding: home makers, cooking, washing, expecting them to be gentle, providing for their husbands and responsible for their children's upbringing. All these gave no room for political meetings and gatherings that usually runs into the mid-nights. Also, Ekpe, Eneija and Egbe (2014) explain further that politics is time consuming and demands great attention. The rituals and the rites of passage pertaining to the boy's nurture on the other hand provide them for leadership positions, whether at home; local and national levels.

Furthermore, in Afikpo North Local Government Area where the author comes from, women are totally excluded from the traditional decision making body by the authority in charge. For instance, the "age-grade" (Essa) is the highest traditional decision making body in Afikpo in Ebonyi state. This traditional institution is dominated by men and no woman is a member. This situation agrees with Muoghali and Abrifo (2012) who said that women are to be seen alone and not to be heard.

Apart from the age grade (Essa) system, there are other traditional institutional arrangements where there in ritualistic manifestation and glorification of cultural practices that promote male domination, total female subjugation and control. These other institutions are; "ogo" system, the "eto" age grade system and the new yam cultural festival system known as "ike-jii.

In the "ogo" system, the women are not allowed to be seen within the "ogo" setting especially when the elderly men known as "nde-ichie" are seated to take important decisions as they affect the land.

The "eto"age grade system in the second highest traditional law making and dispute settlement body in Afikpo where women are still not represented, but are made to comply with the laws made by their male counterpart even when it does not favour the women folks.

Finally, the new yam festival system culturally known as "ike-jii in another period where women are robbed off their rights as citizens of the community, in other words, Afikpo Edda and Ohoazara women perpetually and politically suffer rigid marginalization. During this period, new yams are harvested from the farms which the wives accompanied their husbands to bring home. As the activities or ceremonies of the new yams are going on among men in the village square, the women are left in the kitchen preparing the yam with special soup (nsala soup) to go with.

To a very large extent, these cultural practices have really affected the women as women are made to run into their shelves, or hiding places when their male counterparts are seen gathering. These male counterparts in the communities are the same men that still dominate the political system in the contemporary local, state and federal levels.

Through cultural socialisation also, Imhanlanlahimu and Eloebhose (2006), opine that girls are protected and discouraged from explorative and risky activities, while boys are encouraged to be assertive and challenge their mental power. These socialisation processes lead to certain personal characteristics regarded as masculine or feminine independent qualities, initiative and assertiveness for boys, and dependency, submissiveness, and compliancy for girls. The later personality characteristics for girls affect their attitudes and behaviour in politics and economy.

Bamgbose (2012) defines gender as a cultural and social construct in society by which men have been culturally socialized as "self" while women become "others". These constructions are produced by the patriarchal culture of the society which designated women as inferior beings and men as superior. Men being constructed as superior beings use these advantageous positions in the scheme of culture to subjugate, marginalize and oppress women.

One of the key issues addressed at the 1995 World Conference on women in Beijing was the elimination of violence against women which also cut across ethnic, racial and cultural barriers and its prevalence is high in many cultural settings. In some cultures, physical, abuse of women is often considered as an acceptable behaviour as women are often blamed for inciting men to engage in it. For instance, in Ebonyi state, beating of wives and children is widely accepted as, a form of training and instilling discipline Abayomi (2014).

Afro News (2007) reports that the common forms of abuse were as follows; shouting at partner (93%), slapping or pushing (77%), punching and kicking (40%).

Economically, Chukwuemeka and Eze (2011) argue that women are relegated and this is directly related to poverty. Culturally women do not own property both in their fathers' house and husbands' houses when married. With the huge amount of money involved in politics in Nigeria, women do not participate actively because they are poverty stricken. The culture of Nigeria does not allow many women into politics no matter how brilliant or skilled she is because the woman depends on the advice or support of her husband. They are created as helpers to men and so must act on instruction and by permission. Anything short of that is an insubordination and unacceptable despite western education and exposure. Exclusion of women in political participation affects nation building.

International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) (2003) notes that gender equity is the process of being fair to women and men. But the society is not fair in terms of gender equity to women. Even today, women continue to be left out of politics and decision making. When recognized, they are given a token appointment and still addressed as those who need welfare assistance rather than actors in the historical process.

The subordination and exclusion of the position of women in Nigeria seems to be legitimized in the area of political participation and decision making processes. Many stories depict women as disloyal, disagreeable, untrustworthy, stupid and even gullible, (Kabira and Nzioki 1995). But a society that thinks so heads for total destruction because women are deposited with tremendous potentials that shall be harnessed for societal development. To support this assertion, Asetola (2018) argues that women must be part of major development processes in any society because of their numerical strength, industriousness, and enterprising abilities and are good managers. Therefore, any national development equation without women will not be completely meaningful and thorough.

According to Ebosele (2014) it is a historical misfit and disservice for any country (including Nigeria) to ignore its women population in its development efforts. Therefore, the need for effective women participation in politics should be compelling and women should be seen as partners in progress. Even Ben (2018) observed that Nigeria women value their participation very much since it confers prestige and power on them, and maintained that any attempt to plan or even implement plans without seeking full co-operation of women is doomed to failure. Furthermore, Anand (2013) confirms that the role of women in development cannot be overemphasized because Nigeria women have so far been showing the stuff they are made of. In their little ways in their communities and groups, they are not spectators on the political scene, but have been providing effective political and positive contributions to their small groups socio-economic advancement. For instance, the analysis of women's traditional and preservation responsibilities demonstrate that they have significant roles in the economy and in society such as food cultivation, food processing, food preservation, animal husbandry, marketing, and caring for their homes and families

(Okereke 2017). These are very important roles which these women perform effectively with high results. If allowed to be expanded, women will collectively contribute to national development.

If we look at agriculture, the International fund for Agricultural Development highlighted that women in particular are responsible for half of the world's food production (an opposed to cash crops) and rural women produce between 60-80% of the food in most developing countries. But Ene (2017) argues that these women's efforts on agriculture are truly undervalued even when the food security in the poor regions is often dependent on women's subsistence production to feed the population.

Egonmwan (2016) posits that women also have an important role in establishing sustainable use of resources in small scale fishing. In this study only the women in the author's clan and local government, Afikpo know how to bring fish, both dried and fresh to the market square. When empowered, they will feed the nation with fish.

Water production and management must be democratic and transparent and represent the need of the people especially women who are the primary users throughout the whole world. It has been observed that water is not often provided for use. It is the women who organize themselves in this modern time, contribute money to construct bore-holes to serve them in the villages. African women may walk over six kilometres per day in search of water spending at least 8 hours collecting water Nwoba (2019). For a commodity that is taken for granted in more advanced countries the lack of water is an indication of lack of other things such as abundance of food.

2.1. Data Presentation and Analysis

Presented below are data showing further the gross exclusion and underrepresentation of women in politics, across Nigeria. The first table is culled from data published of the Inter-parliamentary Union (IPU). The data show the value and level of participation in politics by women of Nigeria; from 2000 to 2019; about two decades.

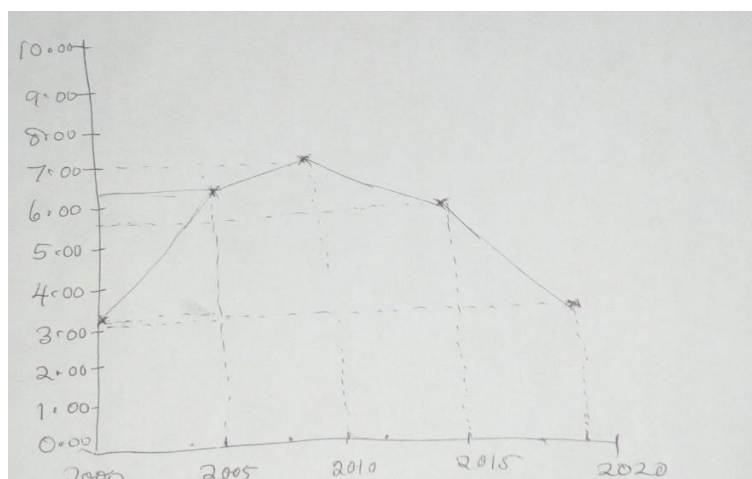
Table I: Value of women participation in politics in Nigeria

Year	Value
2000	3.40
2001	3.40
2002	3.40
2003	4.90
2004	4.70
2005	6.40
2006	6.10
2007	7.00
2008	7.00
2009	7.00
2010	7.00
2011	6.80
2012	6.70
2013	6.70
2014	6.70
2015	5.60
2016	5.60
2017	5.60
2018	5.60
2019	3.38

Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) www.ipu.org

A graphic representation of the above table clearly shows that within the two decades under review (2000 – 2019) women participation slowly climbed up by 2007 but by 2011, it had started a descent, almost a nose dive to insignificance.

Figure 1: A graph women participation in politics in the Decade 2000 – 2019



Source: Ebonyi State Electoral Commission (EBSEC) Abakaliki Nigeria.

The above graph shows token participation of Nigerian women in politics. For one thing and very important, it never peaked to 10.0 value; but hovered around the 7.00 value and nosedived back into oblivion. The years of apparent rise to 7.00 value may have taken men by surprise and they may have reasserted their possessive authority again. Civil rule came back to Nigeria after a long military interregnum, in 1999. A retired General Olusegun Obasanjo became a 'civilian' and ruled from 1999 – 2007. Between 2007 and 2015, two real civilian politicians, Umaru Yar Adua and Dr. Good luck Jonathan, were Presidents. Within this period women participation in politics received a great boost as can be seen in the table above. When Gen. Buhari who defines the role of women as "in kitchen and the other room" took over the mantle in 2015, women participation nosedived and continues to fall.

Further classification of political posts in Ebonyi State such as Chairmen of Local Government, members of House of Assembly, Senate and House of Representatives and so on, from 2011 to 2019 clearly show that what is above (federal) obtains 'below' (in the state).

Table II: Status of Women Participation in Ebonyi State, 2011.

Posts	Male	Female	Total	Remarks
Chairmen of Local Government	12	1	13	Male dominance is clearly portrayed all through
House of Assembly	21	3	24	
House of Representatives	5	1	6	
State Commissioner	19	1	20	
Senior Special Assistants	3	0	3	
Special Assistants	4	1	5	
Senate	3	0	3	
Total for 2011	70	7	84	

Table III: Status of Women Participation in Politics in Ebonyi State: 2015

Posts	Male	Female	Total	Remarks
Senate	3	0	3	Male dominance is clearly portrayed all through
House of Representatives	6	3	6	
Chairmen of Local Government	10	3	13	
State Commissioner	9	3	12	
Senior Special Assistants	4	2	6	
Special Assistants	20	6	26	
Total	83	17	100	

Table IV: Status of women Participation in Politics in Ebonyi State, 2019

Posts	Male	Female	Total	Remarks
Senate	3	0	3	Male dominance is clearly portrayed all through
House of Representatives	6	0	6	
Chairmen of Local Government	10	3	13	
State Commissioner	20	3	23	
Senior Special Assistants	13	2	15	
Special Assistants	20	5	25	
Total	83	16	99	

In the 3 years under review, namely 2011, 2015 and 2019, data presented above demonstrate without an iota of doubt that Ebonyi Women have been almost excluded from participation in the State politics, this is despite the fact that women are more than men in the State according to census figures.

3. DISCUSSION AND SUGGESTIONS

In discussing this paper, we have chosen the theory of patriarchy as the most enlightening in the issue of women exclusion from political participation in Nigeria, especially in Ebonyi State. According to Ritzer (2008) the situation of women in politics is essentially that of male domination, exclusion and oppression.

This type of women or female oppression in Africa in general, Nigeria in particular (with Ebonyi State as a case Study) derive its foundation from the structure and pattern of traditional societies. This basic primitive arrangement of domination of women by men is called patriarchy. A patriarchal society is intentional, fundamental and directional in its exhibition of male dominance in the areas of power, economy and social hierarchical structures. Patriarchy derives its *raison detre* and *summon borum* from quintessential sources and justification such as nature (heredity) and nurture (socialization), religion and sex-role identities, or even a rigid class system. All these project a peculiar power arrangement that makes women deficit while men have a head start in the handicap chase of power. To this extent all theories of gender oppression, gender differences and gender inequality are derived from the patriarchy structure of society. Men are born and socialized to dominate while women are born and socialized to be dominated. Indeed, some gender theorists argue that women are socialized to fear success, position of dominance and acclaim.

This can explain why there has been very little success in the areas of gender inequality and affirmation, despite the many declarations at the international level, of which Nigeria is a signatory; examples are the Cairo Conference of 1994, the Beijing Conference of 1995 on gender equality.

In most parts of Nigeria, Patriarchy is rigid and unwavering because of entrenched hedonistic and atavistic traditional rituals religious beliefs and practices. The consequences are what we have shown in the paper, with data and theories. No woman marries a man; therefore, no woman can head a family. If a woman cannot head a family, the traditional patriarchs argue, how can a woman rule a society in any political arrangement? Narrow and myopic as the perception may look, traditional society are often built on false perception.

In Nigeria, the low participation of women in politics and legislative position has affected the ability of women in promoting favourable legal and regulatory arrangements of laws for the promotion of gender equality and women participation in politics. When you take a look at the tables provided so far (Tables I-IV) from Ebonyi State; no effective legislation in favour of women can be achieved in their absence. Between 1999 and 2007 in Ebonyi State House of Assembly in the absence of any woman, a man was appointed to take charge of "Women Affairs". Rotate this picture or scenario in 36 States and 774 local governments of Nigeria, and a very pathetic trend begins to energize.

These are two legs in Patriarchy theory of male domination, namely;

- a) Psychoanalytic feminism, and
- b) Radical feminism.

In Psychoanalytic patriarchy, the structure of male dominance is so pervasive that it has taken hold of the female psyche in traditional societies. Occasionally, women sprung up to challenge this domination by men and even try to upset the existing status quo, in some radical ways. In Nigerian history the stories about "Queen Amina of Zaria", "Queen Moremi of Ile-Ife" or the Aba women riots of 1929; have become legendary.

However, such eruptions quickly cool off and women go back to their accepted traditionally assigned roles which exclude power dominance. According to Lengermann and Niebrugge (2008), men have deep seated emotions and motivation to control women; though all men are reared by women but traditional rituals of male initiation very early in life, separate a boy from the influence of his mother, from then on, the male boy looks down on the mother and boldly tells the mother that many secrets of menfolk cannot be divulged to women. This is the beginning of traditional male power dominance over women.

4. SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

This paper has examined the issue and problem of women exclusion from political participation in Nigeria, with a case study of Ebonyi State. Data have clearly indicated that the extent of exclusion is staggering in the last two decades and if changes are not brought in to bear on the contemporary political and economic life of an Ebony woman, the next decade will still present the current pattern and trend.

The paper therefore makes the following suggestions and recommendations:

1. Nigeria is a signatory to all international conventions on gender equality and woman rights. External pressures from the various conventions should be brought to bear on Nigeria since the hope of internal enforceability of the recommendations is bleak in the foreseeable future.

2. Women are achievers to doubt, as those few who have been given the opportunity have demonstrated in Nigeria. More women should therefore be given more appointive positions in government, to enlarge their experiences and capacity for future elective positions.

3. Women are more in number than men; they should therefore unite and become a formidable political force in the state and country.

4. Economic power is the basis for political power. More women should become more economically endowed in order to run for political offices.

5. Knowledge is power and knowledge comes from education, training and skills acquisition. The Millennium Development Goals (MDG) of 2000-2015 did not do much to enhance the education of women in Nigeria. The current Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 2015-2030 should be focused among others, in raising the literacy levels of women in Nigeria, especially Ebonyi State.

6. The perception of women by men needs social reengineering of their attitudes.

7. A special scholarship scheme for the education of the girl child up to womanhood should be instituted in all states of Nigeria; especially in Ebonyi State.

8. A political empowerment endowment fund for women (PEEF-W) should as matter of urgency be set up in Nigeria and Ebonyi State. Through the fund women can be economically empowered to become politically empowered.

9. All traditionally and culturally harmful practices against women should be abolished in Nigeria.

10. Women should form a political party of their own. Politics is a game of numbers, so women like the Labour party of Britain in formed in 1948, should use their own party to gain power politically.

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