

CHALLENGES OF WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN POLITICS OF YOBE STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

Generally, Women seem to be more in number but poorly represented in politics and other public issues particularly in Yobe state of Nigeria. Liberal feminism theory is used in this study. It is discovered that discrimination, poverty, low education, patriarchal nature of the society, fear, intimidation, biological and physiological factors were responsible for poor women participation in Yobe state politics. The study concludes that except these numerous human resource are empowered and utilized, the state's quest for socioeconomic and political development might be a mirage. It is therefore recommended that Men/ husbands, religious leaders, politicians and political parties are to cooperate and support the women politically to boost the state and nation's political development in this epoch of liberalism.

Keyword: Women; Men; Politics and Participation

Introduction

God the creator of mankind in His wisdom created people; determined their gender and provided each individual in the gender category the potential for growth and improvement in all ramifications. State and its other institutions are man's establishment for the survival of man and woman beside the other creatures by providing the necessary environment for each creature to pursue its goals and aspirations in a peaceful and more organized manner. Societal rules and regulations, custom and tradition, physical strength, economic prowess, educational attainments, among other factors play vital functions in the day to day's activities of human being in the state. Competing for the limited resources in the society is a common feature at both intra- and inters- gender equation levels.

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Generally, male seems to be above the women folk in terms of socioeconomic and political opportunities. The female are constantly aspiring for a better or even an equal placement with their male counterparts for long which seems not be forthcoming as expected and in some cases has caused frictions. In Yobe state of Nigeria in particular, the women seems to be far from the political kingdom in spite of their huge numbers unlike their counterparts in other states of the federation where there was and are woman as deputy governor, speaker, senate and house of representative members etc. The research identified and examined some factors inhibiting positive women participation in politics of Yobe state.

Background of Yobe State

Yobe State as one of the states in Nigeria came into being on the 27th of August, 1991 and has 17 local government areas. The state is made up of people of different ethnic groups, socio-cultural and religious backgrounds. Based on 2006 population census, Yobe State has a population of about 2,532,395, with the women folk higher in percentage (Wikipedia, 2011). The state shares borders with Bauchi, Borno, Gombe and Jigawa States. It also shares international boundary with Diffa and Zindar of Niger Republic. Being a border state, it enjoys the advantages of both domestic and international trade. Politics which is both an act and art is practiced by mankind for the development of his/her polity. In each polity, there are both male and female; each of this gender classification/categorization has unique roles to play and none of the gender is useless and inferior in terms of contributions to the state and the country's development. Since the creation of this young and enterprising state, she has had both military administrators and politically elected leaders. Democracy gives individual and group of people the opportunity to participate in politics by joining a political party, contesting election and possibly wining so as to contribute to national development or to vote for candidates of their choice whom they think can represent them appropriately. In pursuance of the above, both male and female interact together; everybody in the gender equation is seeking for favours in a comparative advantage over the other.

Paradoxically however, in spite of the women folk huge number in the state; the national and international conference held in respects to women rights and self-determinations, concessional offers and commitments of some political parties in favour of equal rights in matters, which relates to socio-political and economic benefits, Women in Yobe state however seem to be passive and inactive in both state and national politics. For instance, there was never a female elected or appointed as acting local government chairperson; house of assembly, representative or senate member in or from Yobe state since the return to democratic rule in 1999. This is quite unfortunate for the women and the state politics in this epoch of global liberalism and social justice. It is against

the above background that this study was undertaken to ascertain the rational for such anomalies or rather the challenges inhibiting the participation of women Yobe politics.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

There are many theories relating to gender issues, but this research used liberal feminist theory for its theoretical frame work. Protagonists of this theory like Walby (19990), Igube (2004) and Rose (2005) are of the view that all people (male and female) are born equal; therefore equal opportunities should be given to them. Sha (2007) on his part opined that the women marginalization and subordination arose because of non-recognitions and implementation of this theory. The liberal feminist warns that nobody benefits from existing gender differences because both male and female are important in the development of the society, so they should be treated equally. Proponents of this philosophy argued that, no society can prosper if half of its resources (women) are neglected. For most societies in the world, life has been harder for women than it is for men. In the past, women often could not go to school; it was hard for them to get jobs, and if they did, they were not paid as much as men.

The core lamentation of liberal feminist theory is gender inequality; that men and women are situated in society not only differently but also in inequality. Specifically, women get less of the material resources, social status, power and opportunities for self-actualisation than men who share their social location base on class, race, occupation, ethnicity, religion, education, nationality etc. The theory believes that these inequalities is not naturally or biologically created but are social constructions made by men. Liberal feminism thus calls for equality among men and women since all human beings are created equal.

The theory also calls for the re-patterning of key institutions such as law, work, family, education, politics, etc. to give women equal opportunities with men. Liberal feminists have worked through legislative processes to ensure equality in education, end job discrimination, sexual harassment in work places and desired pay equity (equal pay for all workers irrespective of gender). Liberal feminist theory thus is consistent with the dominant American ethos in its basic acceptance of democracy and capitalism: Its appeal to the value of individualism, choice, responsibility and equality of opportunity. The theorists do not seek revolutionary changes in the society; they want reforms within the existing social structure. In the patriarchal system, money, land and power were passed down from a man to his sons; daughters and wives were left out. Until less than a hundred years ago, most of the world's women were not even allowed to vote. The role of women tended to be seen as just being in the home, doing household work, seriously engaging in agriculture for food production, bearing and training up children. Women were seen as less intelligent and less

good at things than men. It may simply have been that as women are usually slightly smaller and physically weaker than men, men have always been able to take control. This theory is trying to bridge the wide gap between male and female but in the past few hundred years, things have started to change. The women's movement, also called feminism, is the name for women's efforts to gain equality with men according to Anugwon (1999). Although it has not totally succeeded yet, there have been many huge changes.

In the 19th Century, women in Europe and America began forming feminist groups to campaign for the same legal rights as men. From about 1860 onwards, a group of women called the suffragettes began to carry out protests calling for women to be allowed to participate in politics. Gradually, the laws were changed and women were given the opportunity in many countries around the world, from New Zealand in 1893 to Switzerland in 1971 to vote. Some countries, though, still do not allow all women the opportunity to vote and to be voted for (franchise). This theory emphasizes that women should be given equal opportunities to participate in day to day activities as their male counterparts.

The theory also tries to eradicate sexism and stereotypical view of women and men from children's books and mass media, in all human endeavors. This would have been the way to bridge the gap between men and women in political development in particular and the society in general (Microsoft Encarta, 2007). The history of women liberation in Nigeria has under gone multiple processes and challenges observed Afigb (1991). What in essence, may be referred to as political right consciousness and trade union activity for the Nigerian woman was founded in concerted actions taken by women of Southern Nigeria, who in protecting their means of self-employment had organized demonstrations between 1929 and 1938 to force the colonial government to soft pedal on its taxation policy on them. Okoronkwo (1985) reported that this action by the women achieved their objectives. Similarly, in 1946, women in Onitsha Province rioted to protest the establishment of Nsula Oil Mills; while in 1950, it was the turn of the Calabar women (Nwabughuogu, 1981). Between 1941 and 1947, Egba Women in Abeokuta opposed the taxation policy on women and all forms of discrimination against women and in 1953, Nigerian women formed a Federation of Nigerian Women's Societies (FNWS) where the voice of all Nigerian women will be heard and known (*Sunday Guardian*, July 21, 2002).

In spite of decades of socio-economic and political struggles, women continued to suffer deprivations in many sectors of the economy. Moreover, since the declaration of the years 1976 – 85 as United Nations Decade for Women, it was assumed that women especially those in the workforce will show more interest and participate actively in politics and trade unionism. However, women seem to be passive in Nigerian politics. In Nigeria, women are regularly exposed to

various forms of physical, psychological, sexual and emotional violence. This may be traced to the unequal power relations in the society between men and women and the legendary patriarchal norms that support the inequality. Enemuo (1999) acknowledged the fact that women constitute half of the world's population and have contributed significantly to the wellbeing of human race. In Nigeria, for instance, women have always played five key roles-mothers, producers, home managers, community organizers, socio-cultural and political activists. Despite their contributions to the development of the various communities and socio-economic activities, it is disheartening to note that they receive only one-tenth of the world income and own less than one hundredth of its property.

Corroborating with the above, Thelma (2012:136) lamented that women constitute a significant proportion of world population and contributed significantly to the socio-economic and political wellbeing of the societies, yet they are underrepresented in politics. Women effective participation and representation especially in the higher hierarchy is very essential to the democratization process because it will protect their rights and express their views she argued.

In some developed countries and of recent in some developing countries as well, women have actively participated in politics and contributed their quota, even at a higher level. For instance, Mary Mc Aleese, who was the President of Ireland in 1997; Margaret Thatcher who served as Britain Prime Minister in the 1970s to early 1990s; Paskistan Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi in the 1970 and 1980s, followed by Benizar Bhutto in the 1980 to early 1990s all of the same country; Michelin Calm-Ray, Switzerland President in 2007; Angela Markel and Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, German Chancellor and Liberian President respectively among others. Sweden according to Hamalai (1998:23) ranked the highest in terms of women participation in politics and decision making. This may not be unconnected with the fact that Sweden was the first country to implement affirmative action (positive discrimination) since 1972 which enforced quota for women in political parties and political appointment.

Some African culture and ethno-religious practices seems not to be feminist friendly. Chukwuma and Chijioke (2013:132) decried that most cultures and sub-cultures in Nigeria give preference to the male children especially as they are often regarded as the heir of the family. Female children were seen as having less privilege and consequently not given adequate opportunity to acquire western education and formal training. Consequently, a reasonable proportion of Nigerian women are still apprehensive of how to join politics not to talk of contesting for elective positions. The political shyness and fear may not be unconnected with certain factors such as level of education, poor economic

base, insecurity and cultural ties. Corroborating with the above, Yahaya (1999:132) states thus: “considering the population of women in Nigeria, a conscious and unconscious under representation of Nigeria women in educational, economic, social and political programme could lead to a serious setback and also the need for women empowerment cannot be overemphasized.”

Beside their large number and crucial functions notwithstanding, the division of roles between the genders, as prescribed by most cultures, assigns the subordinate position to women (Anne, 2004). Their inability to leverage on their number may not only be attributed to their lack of political and economic consciousness or their lack of will power to surmount challenges from their male counterpart. It was perhaps against the above background that erstwhile President Goodluck Jonathan pledge to conduct credible election and the drive to have more women who could contribute to national development through active participation in politics is a right step in the right direction. About 5,000 women politicians from the 52 registered political parties in the country were invited to the summit which started with plenary sessions at the International Conference Centre Abuja, at least one hundred (100) women from each of the 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) were present at the summit to draw up a national women political agenda for 2011 and beyond.

According to the Minister of Women Affairs and Social Development, the summit was an opening to mobilize women for participation in the build-up to the 2011 general elections and beyond, especially in creating a critical mass support for female candidates and lobby groups. Josephine Anenih said that the summit will also examine the role and responsibilities of stakeholders in engendering the election of female political office holders in Nigeria. She added that a special session with the political parties was also expected to identify gender friendly political parties in Nigeria. The summit also underlined the need for Nigerian women to register with existing political parties in the country as well as cast their votes for their preferred candidates, all of which will guarantee their even participation in the democratic process. While addressing the large gathering of women at the summit, the minister further explained that it was not something new to mobilize the women for any particular registered political party in the country as the case may appear. She however noted that it was an opportunity for these party leaders to convince the broad window of opportunities available to support their aspirations on their respective platforms

The summit paved the way for Nigerian women to express their displeasure at their political status and shut-out from mainstream politics by the society. One thing that they left the summit with was an obvious realization of the strength and potential in their number as well as their resolve to play an all inclusive

politics to the benefit of their colleagues. It is a matter of great concern to note that the poor participation of women in politics and voluntary unions in Africa and particularly in Nigeria, during the 1999-2003 general elections in both the seats of the presidents and the vice president were given to men. In the senate out of 109 seats, only 3 seats were for the women, and in the House of representative only 12 seats out of 360 seats were won by women. The rest of the seats went to men. There were 44 ministers and special advisers, only 9 were women. In the whole federation, only one woman was a deputy governor out of the 36 states, one woman speaker out of 36 state houses of assembly, who eventually resigned because she said 'No' to corruption. It did not end there, in the state houses of assembly; there were a total of 990 members from the 36 states, and only 12 female members. At the local government level, out of the 774 chairmen only few were women and out of 881 councilors only 143 were women.

In the Senate, it was not anything quite different or better to gladden the hearts of women or people of good will in Nigeria. Out of the 109 senate members only 3 were women, then at the federal cabinet, there were 34 ministers only 6 were women, only 10 women were special advisers out of 35 special advisers (Anne, 2004). One finds it very difficult to believe this discrepancy. Women are not really encouraged to join politics or any union of their choice and contribute their own part. How can someone explain this disparity that continues to exist between men and women in politics of Nigeria in general and Yobe State in particular?

Challenges of Women in Politics of Yobe state

Women in Nigeria generally and those in Yobe state in particular, have encountered and are confronted with multiple challenges while venturing into politics which includes:

- i. **Discrimination:** There is large scale of discrimination from the men folk against the women, in the process of buying of nomination forms, screening and during party primaries or during the general voting. Beside the intra-party discrimination, during allocating of political offices at both state and national levels, women of Yobe state are hardly considered. For instance, in the past regime before 2015 elections, in the whole 17 local government areas of the state, there was no women legislature; out of the 17 chairmen, no woman was appointed, much more of being elected and even among the commissioners, only two women were appointed. This is absolutely inadequate and amazing in this epoch of political liberalism and integration. More often than not, men constitute a larger percentage of the party membership and this tends to affect women when it comes to electing/appointing of party executives, conducting of primaries and presenting of candidates for various elective posts. Since men are usually the

majority in the political party setup, they tend to dominate the party hierarchy and are therefore at advantage in influencing the party's internal politics (Afigbo, 1991). Women usually constitute a smaller percentage of political party membership because of the social, cultural and religious attitudes of different Nigerian societies which most often tend to relegate women to the background. As a result, only very few men, even among the educated, allow their wives to come out and participate in politics.

- ii. ***Inadequate education***: Another fundamental challenges inhibiting women participation in Yobe state politics is lack of adequate education; as women constitute a larger percentage of the illiterate group in northern Nigeria. This could be attributed to the fact that in most families, parents prefer to send their sons to school, instead of their daughters whom they feel would eventually get married and get incorporated into another family. Thus, a larger percentage of the girls remain uneducated and unexposed. Besides, women in Yobe state lack proper political education and socialization in particular that could enhance their political ambition, skills and efficacies in politics at all levels. Corroborating, Fapohunda (1998) observed that ignorance of their political rights; privileges and potentials have perpetually kept the women at the receiving end in spite their large numbers and aspiration for all round national development of Nigeria.
- iii. ***Inadequate finance/poverty***: Lack of finance is a major hindrance to effective women participation in politics of Yobe state and perhaps the nation at large. Large portions of the Nigerian women population are not as financially strong as their male counterparts. Majority of the women are found in rural areas, with few of them involved in economic activities that do not generate enough resources. Most of them are peasant farmers, petty traders with just subsistent income; the economic situation has heightened this problem. Very few women have the economic empowerment to finance themselves in politics; hence, they have to depend on their husbands or close family relations to sponsor them which are not always easy. Politics in every part of Nigeria is capital intensive: buying of nomination forms, hire campaign offices, pay the staff, print posters, buy vehicles, equip same with strong sound systems, fuelling etc are expensive for the average woman. This is a major factor affecting gender politics according to Lovenuski and Norris (1993).
- iv. ***Religious and socio-cultural factors***: Religious and socio-cultural considerations affects women efficacy in Yobe politics. In some parts of Nigeria and Yobe state inclusive, women are secluded and not allowed to participate in any public matters, especially politics. It is important to note that religious precepts are sometimes used to subjugate women. Islamic injunctions are usually cited as justification for confining women in 'Purdah' as is done in the state and to give away girls in early marriage and thereby depriving them of education and effective participation in politics generally and during electing candidates of their choice. The practice of

“purdah”, where by women are secluded from public observation, prevails within the Muslim community in most northern states. Women in purdah cannot leave their homes without permission from their husbands and must be accompanied by a male at all times when in public. Purdah also restricts women’s freedom of dress in that Muslim women must be veiled in public. There is the cultural belief that women cannot lead but to be led and that it is an abomination for women to lead men. This religious and traditional philosophy that work against gender equality and occupational opportunities between men and women in places of work / business makes it impossible for many women to be found in high hierarchy of occupations (Abdu, 2002). Women constitute the majority in jobs of lower status, like cleaners, primary school teachers, nurses, secretaries; but yet they are marginalized when it comes to politics. These factors keep women as passive political actors in Yobe state.

- v. ***Participatory time constraints:*** A large proportion of women’s time is allocated to household duties. Any politically active woman must be ready to divide a large part of her time in to domestic and public duties. Women political participation and availability is hindered by family and domestic obligations. They hardly cope with combining their roles as mothers and politicians especially holding elective or appointive positions that are tasking which could lead to role conflicts; especially if the husband is not understanding and cooperative. This is not peculiar to African women alone observed Rees (1990).
- vi. ***Lack of interest by the women:*** The interest by majority of women in Yobe state, to pursue political activities is low. Sometimes, lack of interest by women in politics is borne out of their socialization; the belief that politics and leadership are not for women; not being interested in any form of competition in any political party with male contenders; social stigmas; socio-cultural and religious issues, among others. Abdu (2002) explains that if there were a just state of things, most women would rightly choose as the first call upon her exertions to marry, raise children, manage/ house work exclusively and not politics.
- vii. ***Patriarchalism:*** Nigeria is a highly patriarchal society, where men dominate all spheres of women’s lives. Women are in the subordinate position (particularly at the community and household levels), and male children are preferred over the female. The influence of the mother and the father is particularly significant in shaping and perpetrating patriarchy. The mother provides the role model for daughters, while the father demonstrates to sons what it means to ‘be a man’ (World Bank 2005:6). Central to this analysis is the image of patriarchy as violence practiced by men and by male dominated organizations against women. Violence may take the form of physical cruelty, sexual harassment in the work place, unpaid wage work, unpaid household drudgery, rape, sexual abuse,

enforced prostitution, incest. Others include; sexual molestation of children, sadism in pornography, the historic and cultural practice of which burning or stoning to death of adulteresses, the persecution of lesbian, the abuse of widows, female genital mutilation medication etc. Patriarchy is a near universal social form because men can master the most basic power resource, physical force to establish control once in a particular place, the other power resources economies, ideological, legal and emotional also can be marshaled to sustain or protect patriarchy. Anugwon (1999) has identified the patriarchal structure in politics and of union as a major constraint inhibiting effective participation of women in politics and unionism.

This is in the sense that politics are structured and functioned on the basis of male dominance, observed Malam Kabiru A. Yusuf (Chairman of Media Trust Limited). He made the remark at the 7th Annual Trust Dialogue with the theme 'The African Woman and Politics' in Abuja. He opined that "It is accepted by even the most obdurate male chauvinist that women are the natural partners of men in the home. But when it comes to their role in wider society, in the economy, politics, art and culture, many men are unwilling to concede them their due. But society cannot progress unless men and women, young and old, have equal chance to achieve their potential". He commended ex-president Olusegun Obasanjo who was the chairman of the occasion, for appointing more women into his cabinet and other arms of government, than any other previous administration, during his tenure as civilian President from 1999 to 2007. He said the Obasanjo government was the first in Nigeria, to give women high profile positions such as Minister for Finance, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Minister of State for Defense. The absence of such opportunities in Yobe state is not good for effective women participation in politics and national development.

- viii. **Biological and Physiological Factors:** Women unlike their male counterparts are biologically deficient and subject to physiological changes which affects their public image, efficiencies; all month and year's availabilities or functioning. For instance, a married and productive lady elected as state assembly member, governor, president or federal assembly member and got pregnant, for those nine months, how can her legitimate duties be performed? If she eventually delivers, for how many months will she be on maternity leave? How will her baby be breastfed when she is on foreign trips or assignments with other foreign leaders or political office holders? Family responsibilities and childbearing also hinder women from participating effectively in politics, except for the aged women or those who no longer desire to give birth. During a sizeable part of their adult lives, most women are involved not only in child bearing, but also in child rearing. Thus, much of the time they may have wished to devote to politics is taken

up by their maternal challenges and obligations. African culture has separate roles for men and women. Women areas are in the home and family (private sphere) while that of men is the public. With this stereotyped roles, it became difficult for the women to participate in politics since they are in the private sphere. This is why men do not see or accept women as leaders, especially in northern Nigeria. Similarly, any woman who aspire to do those things that men do, she is seen as 'cultural deviant' (Oruwari, 1999).

The implications of the above is that women in and from Yobe state will continue to be subservient to men; that is, the male will continue to be far and above the women in terms of politics and public affairs; women from the state will lack the necessary political skills and experiences necessary for good governance and the dream of having a woman deputy or even governor will be a mirage for some years as the women remain underdeveloped politically; the apprehension of harassment of women by men may continue for some time as there are no women in the state parliament to present and support a strong legislation against both domestic and social violence against women. Above all, the God given wisdom and talents of the women of Yobe state will remain redundant or useless which the state and nation need like Queen Amina of late memory in this time of recession for robust socioeconomic and political development.

Conclusion

In spite of the great numbers of enlightened and able women, there are numerous factors challenging and limiting women participation in politics of Yobe State in particular and Nigeria at large. The identified challenges explain what is responsible for the arbitrary rate of exclusion of women from partisan politics and why few of them hold position in the state while no other outside the state. The challenges is also depriving the proper utilization of the prowess and the wisdom of the women folk in the state and negatively portraying the image of the state. Except this is changed for the better, there could be delays in the state's quest for holistic advancement in this epoch of political liberalism.

Recommendation

- i. Women should be given special consideration and equal opportunities with their male counterpart by the various political parties when aspiring for any political position.
- ii. Men/ husbands should respect and give women and their wife(s), the opportunities to participate and aspire for political positions so as to exhibit their prowess for state and national development.
- iii. Women should encourage themselves, overlook their gender challenges to exhibits/showcase their skills and thrive to excel in their career without neglecting their matrimonial obligations

- iv. Educationists and religious leaders should give the women folk the courage and support to aspire for political post in view of their compassions as mothers and care givers in the state for all round development.

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