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The need for participation of women in local governance: A Nigerian discourse

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This paper seeks to examine studies on participation of women in governance as applicable to the local government levels in Nigeria. Again, it sets out to identify what propelled the quest for more women participation in governance. Examination of treatments given to women by both male and female counterparts is critically explored. The paper employed mainly secondary source of data collection. In its finding, it observed that there is high women participation in governance in other parts of the world than Nigeria, as well as having more women participation at both Federal and State government's level above the local government level. It finds out that there is male domination in local governance over and above the women for low political consciousness. The paper revealed that attitude of women towards local governance is poor because they lack funds to achieving '30 percent affirmative action declaration' for women at the grassroots.

Key words: Local government, local governance, political participation, affirmative action, women.

INTRODUCTION

This study demonstrates that the level of involvement of women in governance at the local government level is not in tandem to the policy requirement of 30 percent affirmative action. Recall that it was through a cutting-edge effort that women show-cased pool of achievements at the national or regional level; either collectively or individually as recorded in Aba Women Riot of 1929 over tax imposition by the colonialists as well as the role played by late Mrs Funmilayo Kuti, Dr (Mrs) Okonjo-Iweala, Professor Dora Akunyele and host of others.

A discourse of this magnitude demands first and foremost, an empirical foundations of how women in different parts of Africa galvanized themselves into a formidable group towards the articulation of a common cause of action, which of course, would give a searchlight in fine-tuning a workable blue-prints to ensuring women earn and hold their inalienable rights including positions as the case may warrant. Due to the strictness, rigidity,

cultural complexities and ascending competitive nature of governance, the women bloc have not been actively involved. And when 'they are admitted', the support accorded them is inadequate, epitomized with their small attendance at board meetings, political rallies, voting and political offices (Afolabi and Lanre, 2003; Anifowose, 2004; Bari, 2005; Burns et al, 2003; Makinde and Oladipo 1999)

Women participation in Nigerian politics at the grassroots' level is an issue of great concern because women have been relegated to the background politically for a long time, which of course made them loose their rightful place in local governance. Studies have been documented on what constitute in the world's population and their contribution to societal development (Afolabi and Lanre, 2003; Anifowose, 2004). According to the 1991 census in Nigeria, women account for about 50% of the population but they are underdeveloped, they are under-

represented in politics (Population Reference Bureau, 1998; Makinde and Oladipo 1999).

Factors are identified in extant literature as essential determinants of women participation include social and political relationships in a given society (Bari, 2005), Patriarchy (Eisenten, 1984), male domination, political parties and culture of formal political structures (Bari, 2005), wrong socialization of women (Burns et al, 2003).

It is against this background that this paper attempts to bring to fore the inept scenarios associated with women at the local government which have plagued their level of participation and argue how these have continuously deepened the rate of women marginalization in governable space at the grassroots. This paper is therefore structured as follows; conceptual clarification, theoretical underpinnings, discussion and conclusion, as well as findings and recommendations.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION: DICTATORSHIP, AFFIRMATIVE ACTION AND WOMEN/GENDER

A linkage of three distinctive but connected issues are raised and discussed in a bid to justify the imperative of women participation in local governance, particularly as Nigeria moves to another transition with the 2011 election polls. They include the following:

i. Dictatorship,
ii. Affirmative Action, and,
iii. Women and/or Gender.

Dictatorship

The attitude men hold towards women when it comes to governance is that of relegation, denial, insubordination and sympathy. Silently, women have suffered enormous mishap in religious setting, office place, academic institutions, family living due to lack of proper representation and imbalances in leadership scheme. What this means is that, men are regarded as 'dictators' because they refuse to tolerate organized minority group and insist on a State monopoly of those forces - the press, the radio, the film, and even the culture. Dictatorship in itself is vehemently frowned at globally for being anti-democracy. Appadorai (2004:239-240) identified four traceable causes of dictatorship that presents male dominance over women. These include the First World War, weakness of democratic governments, lack of democratic traditions and the personal factor. However, those aforementioned factors of dictatorship tends to engender gaps and incompatibility between existing political institutions and processes on the one hand, and emergent values, beliefs and practices on the other
(Ayeni-Akeke, 2008:74).

Hence, dictatorship in this context is the conscious and direct imposition of political will and mandate of men over women, regardless of place, event and time with a view of occupying and maintaining a leadership position within a given political space. This definition tenaciously perceives of men as the holder of political power and therefore manifests its rulership over the society, without exempting the women. This male dominance, imposition and superiority have provoked passionate plea for women as examined in the subsequent template.

Affirmative action

A discourse on women with respect to virtually every aspect of life has found solace creed in the affirmative action. And as such, affirmative action measures are aimed at enhancing women's political representatives in decentralized government bodies, which is no doubt an emerging and growing area of research for development practice.

What needs to be succinctly stressed is the fact that women capacities to and/or for leadership can be channeled by articulating their enfranchisement, achievement and potentials from the very grassroots' level of governance being the cradle of public governable space.

The issue of strengthening local governance among women, using the 2011 election polls, can be explained along the view of Kinuthia-Njenga (2010):

As the level of government closest to citizens, local authorities can play a vital role in addressing gender inequality and in building the capacities of women by involving them in local decision making, planning and management; the importance of that role was recognized by the International Union of Local Authorities and in the 1998 World Wide Declaration on women in local government earlier, increasing the participation of women in politics and decision making was central theme of the Beijing Platform for Affirmative Action (1995), and re-affirmed in 2000 in the third Millennium Goal, to 'promote gender equality and empower women.'

Emanating from Kinuthia-Njenga position arose a pertinent question. How affirmative is the affirmative action at the grassroots level of power sharing, decision making, planning and management of local government affairs in Nigeria? While trying to attempt an answer to the local governance based affirmative action, we argue that the greatest obstacle and threat to women emancipation in their quest for governable space lies within and amongst them.

Given that majority of them find it very difficult to reach a commendable consensus on matters relating to public domain; rather they cast the blame on their male counterparts without tiding their own end. Another reason, very many of them would always dance along the tune/tones of their husbands: 'he who pays the piper dictates the

Table 1. Low level of women's participation in political positions in Nigeria.

Year	House of assembly	House of representative	The senate
	Seats / No. of available/ women	Seats / No of available/ women	Seats / No. of available/ women
1999	978 / 12	360 / 13	109 / 3
2003	951/ 39	339/ 21	109/ 4
2007	990/ 54	358/ 25	109/ 9

Source: Onwuka Nzeshi; Nigeria: 'Women, Still in Underdogs in Nigerian Politics, This Day Lagos; 11 May, 2007.

tune', considering the fact that enormous Nigerian women have low political consciousness and thereby affecting patronage in politics. It is worthy to note that the system of associations and unions offers the best medium for the participation of the masses of the people (women) in development of their community such as electricity and infrastructural projects in the South-Eastern part of Nigeria (Olowu and Erero, 1997:61).

Apart from a high level of apathy among local women towards governance, we have witnessed a case of total negligence, abandonment and failed support from Nigerian women towards the only female presidential aspirant under the PDP primaries in early 2011, with a single vote to her credit.

Women and/or gender

It is quite important to note that there had been recurring misconception on the subject 'women and/or gender' in very many public debates. In which case, the terms ' women' and 'gender' are often used to mean one and the same thing, while at some points they are used con-currently, and in many cases people do not even under-stand what gender is all about, thereby eliciting contro-versy in definition, comprehension and usage among professionals.

An organizational based definition refers "gender" as economic, social, cultural attributes and opportunities associated with being male of female (UN-Habitat, 2003). That is well shown or demonstrated in virtually all so-cieties, the disparities between women and men in various activities and undertakings, regarding access to and/or control over resources affects the level of participation of women in decision making,
In its clarification, Miller (2001) defines gender as "sexual division of power". Further, Miller buttresses that gender is different from sex, as sex is biologically determined, while gender is socially constructed. Resemblance to Miller is the submission below:

Gender defined as the sexual division of power departs from the commonly accepted definition of gender as the sexual division of labor, women's work being restricted to the private sphere of the household while men's work extended to the public sphere (Dex, 1985; Reddock, 1994).

Simply put, gender is all about men and women; perhaps one is concerned about their roles during a specific task. It may be more suitable when drawing comparison between a male and female member of staff in particular local government regarding their job performance within a space of ten years. Hence, special concern is placed on women in this discourse. Gender bias can be seen as presented in Table 1 as touching women representation at the state and national assemblies.

The table has rightly revealed that there is gradual in-crease in the level of participation of women in governance, yet, there is a long way to go.

Theoretical underpinnings

The issue of discrimination against women in governance at any level is not simply an African or Nigerian phenomenon but a global one, except that the developed countries are fast moving towards gender equality and equity (Agbalajobi, 2009:77), with the view of maintaining gender balance in every endeavor. There are quite a number of views that describe women in the contem-porary period. Fundamentally the bulk of support and clamoring for women emancipation, liberalization, and even empowerment have emanated mostly from the feminists. According to Marxist-feminists, while exposing the ills that capitalism has brought upon women, they opined that there is high level of oppression on women, particularly in the sexual division of labour (Costa and James, 1981; Eisenstein, 1984 cited in Olojede 2008: 2005a), the liberalization of women will only be possible when the liberal state is overthrown and its capitalists and patriarchal structure is dismantled (Olojede, 2008:2005b). What this suggests is that there would be a time whereby sexual reordering in terms of division of labour, specialization, politicization and even reproductive activities will witness a transformation. However, it must come with some form of reorientation and change of values for us to have an ideal space for women in governance.

A shift from the Core Marxist-Feminists is the

psychological approach that treats local women gearing towards governance as outcome of social experimental and personality processes which is based on personality dispositions, belief or attitude (Cole and Stewart, 1996; Duncan and Stewart, 1995; Crossby, 1982).The forlorn and bane of attitude that describes women led to a brand of moves to liberate women from the shackles of retrogressiveness and stereotypic way of life epitomized by other school of thoughts, but with a blend of governance elements.

Cementing women with governance is quite relevant to ongoing debates on their role in nation building, particularly, as the election polls draw very close in Nigeria. The term governance can be contextual in nature. This is because its foundation and meaning is premised on the level, goals to be achieved and the approach being followed (Adeyemo and Ihemeje, 2008). In its political shade, the World Bank defines governance as the exercise of political authority and use of institutional resources to manage societies' problem and affairs (World Bank, 1991).

To find women in a governable sphere demands two key components that are very essential in a dexterous governance structure: operational and technical committees. While the executive committee sets policy, makes vital decisions and commits agency with resources to implement policy but its members are not always involved in the daily operational information flow within and among agencies. The operational governance school holds that committees are essential for understanding, analyzing and defining the business of justice within a given state, while technical committees assess current technical environments, policies and solutions that allows for speedy decision implementation (Kelly, 2001). What is worrisome about the efficacy of this approach is that women were hitherto not given consideration or slots to occupy specific positions in committees, which is assumed to be the starting point in modern administration. The society that frowns at women in elective positions is somehow discouraging the interested ones to indicate interest to contest for power as evidenced in Nigeria. Institutionalizing women interest groups could be used to reposition women for governance, which is effectively deployed within a political purview towards transforming class and gender relations (Robson, 1993).

In the Nigerian experiment of governance which had given enormous legitimacy/platform to involve women in politics regardless the supposed restrictions placed by the male hegemony are juxtaposed on two grounds. First, the right to democratic governance is an entitlement conferred upon all citizens by law. For instance, the Nigerian constitution by virtue of Section 40 states that:

Every person shall be entitled to assemble freely and associate with other persons, and in particular area he may form or belong to any political party, trade union or any other association for the protection of his/her interests: provided that the provisions of this section shall not derogate from the powers conferred by this constitution or the Independent National Electoral Commission in consonance to *political parties to which that commission does bestow recognition.*

Second, the age requirement to vote can be attained and equally used to involve women in governance even at local government level. The Section 77(2) of the same constitution holds:

Every citizen of Nigeria, who has attained the age of eighteen years residing in Nigeria at the time of the registration of voters for purposes of election to legislative house, shall be entitled to be registered as a voter for that election.

Contrary to the above-mentioned grounds is the fact that complexities by the operation of the tripartite system of laws in Nigeria are most evident in marriage and family law. However, the three systems of law such as statutory, customary and religious apply on equal force depending on the marriage contracted, in which case these laws have prevailed discrimination of some sorts, whereby male supremacy is seen to have perpetuated patriarchy in the context of marriage (The National Gender Policy, 2006:45).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Central to this section, attention is focused on three core issues: one, comparative perspective of women and governance in Africa; two, how to determine advocacy for women at the local government level towards effective participation in governance; three, assessment of need for such advocacy. The concluding remarks however capture arguments and discussions based on the approach adopted in this paper.

Women and governance in Africa: comparative perspective

It has been observed that Women's movements that had once been dominated by organizations engaged in "developmental" activities involving income-generation, welfare concern, and home making skills, were now witnessing emergence of organizations that lobbied for women's political leadership, pressed for legislative and constitutional changes, and conducted civic education. The Tanzania Gender Networking Programme held a conference in 1999 on Gender and Political Empowerment, bringing together women activists and members of parliament from throughout Africa. These kinds of concerns would not have been raised in similar Africa conferences in the 1980s although they had been briefly

Table 2. Change in representation of women in legislatures per cent change.

Region	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	1960-2000
Eastern Europe/Eurasia	23.11	25.37	31.10	9.10	11.44	-50
Eastern Asia	5.98	6.33	9.16	9.88	11.92	99
Pacific	2.50	1.86	1.31	3.41	5.98	139
Mid-East/North Africa	2.00	2.06	3.39	3.52	4.84	142
South Asia	1.94	2.98	4.47	5.07	5.56	186
Scandinavia	9.66	10.42	21.24	31.86	37.58	289
Western Europe	3.25	3.21	7.16	10.61	17.49	438
North America	2.90	1.35	4.35	9.85	16.40	465
Latin America	2.00	3.74	7.54	9.44	13.18	559
Sub-Saharan Africa	0.94	2.21	6.46	7.78	9.90	953
Overall	4.93	5.41	8.74	9.14	12.21	148

Source : Data compiled from Inter-Parliamentary Union, Women in Parliaments, 1945-1995: A World Statistical Survey, Series "Reports and Documents," No. 23, Geneva, 1995; http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.htm ("Women in National Parliaments: Situation as of 25 September 2000).

a concern around the time of independence when women were being introduced to concepts of citizenship and modern electoral politics (Cited in Aili (n.d)).

In the Sierraleonian's case, women are given great kudos for being the only group that openly defied soldiers as they demonstrated to demand that free and fair elections be held even when rumours began to circulate that the military might postpone the February 1996 elections (Bangura, 1996).

Countries in Africa have competed and achieved to an extent, some degree of representation in parliamentary fora with other parts of the world which in a way has boosted the quest and need for enhanced opportunities for women in local, state and national administrations in Nigeria. Table 2 is a presentation of the transition of women in legislatures across the globe between the 1960s and the year 2000.

From the foregoing, it is important to note that even countries with advanced democracies, having success-fully introduced multi-party system and electoral demo-cracy, placing equality, justice and fair representation very high, were often seriously lagging behind in political and civil liberties (Diamond 1986; Zakaria 1997; Huntington 1997). Today, women, in spite of the limitations of political liberalization have continued to net-work their way through governance gradually. And of course, Nigeria women have not been left out in the struggle for political liberation, not only from their male counterparts in political sphere but also wrestling with the already existing gender (women folks).

Determining advocacy for women towards effective participation in local governance

The idea of finding and determining the modus operandi to work out ways in which women can become relevant in government is vital to this exposition, considering the fact

that scholars and practitioners of local government over the years have been faced with the question of viability, desirability and longevity of local government itself as a third tier of government. This has generated incessant arguments that local people will understand the problems affecting them (felt-needs) more than any other people living outside the community, and then be able to locate ways to solving the problems.

On the hand, the term local government has its definition in various forms and writings. The United Nations Office for Public Administration defines local government as:

A political subdivision of a nation or (in a federal system) state, which is constituted by law and has a substantial control of local affairs including the powers to impose taxes or to exert labour for prescribed purposes. The governing body of such an entity is elected… (Adamolekun, 1983*)*

Contrary to the above assertion is the report that dislocates the position and worth of local government in Nigeria:

The local government is the closest tier of government to the people in Nigeria, yet the resident population in it is denied the benefits of its existence. The failure of the local governments in the area of service delivery has made the citizens to loose trust in government as an institution. In some areas, council officials are better known for the harassment of citizens than service delivery. Many Nigerians crave for change in the local government system as presently constituted in order to not only bring it in conformity with present day realities but also to make it live up to the expectation of the people who have been yearning for grassroots development. But this will require a lot of processes like constitutional amendments and inputs from the civil society (Answers.

com, 2011).

On the other hand, 'governance' as a term is viewed to be synonymous with good government. For purpose of contemporary relevance, governance needs to be quailfied good (Hyden, 1999 cited in Osumah and Ikelegbe, 1999). In their expression, good governance can be measured with six essential elements viz; participation, equity and fairness, transparency, decency or respect for the rule of law, accountability and, efficiency and effectiveness. The critical question here is how to guarantee a good government for women in the midst of harsh and disadvantaged conditions.

There exists disadvantaged conditions or factors affecting women participation in politics in Nigeria's local arena in form of:

gender and cultural patterns, ideology, predetermined social roles assigned to women, male dominance and control, conflicting demands on the time of women candidates due their domestic and social responsibility and women's lack of confidence to run elections, perception of politics as dirty game, lack of funds and resources, poverty, unemployment, illiteracy and limited access to education, dual burden of domestic task and professional obligation, as well as nomination and selection processes of candidates in political parties as women are considered second best (Akiyode-Afolabi, 2010).

From the foregoing, what seems to be repetitive is the fact that women have been marginalized and that it is high time they started becoming active participant rather than portray apathy or passive roles in government practices as done in the past.

Assessing the rationale on the need to enhance active involvement of women in local governance

A number of issues are identified as reasons why women are advocated for leadership roles in the country, particularly at the local government level.

First and historically, the competence of women to emerge as administrators or local heads at the grassroots can be traced to the colonial era. It was documented that the instance of sidelining women during the colonial era resulted to the earliest mass protest movement by women in Eastern Nigeria, the Nwaobiala movement in 1925 (Mba, 1982), and hence, this protest eventually led to the popular Aba Women Riots in the 1929. Although the women's war was both political and economic protest as against the colonial authorities but it remains on record that women have got a collective charisma and strategies to oppose arbitrary style of leadership.

Second, statistics have shown that women accounted for nine out of 774 local government chairmen nation-

wide, while of the 8,810 local government councilors nation-wide there were 143 women between 2003 and 2006 (Akiyode-Afolabi and Arogundade, 2003). This appears a little impressive compared to the previous representations of women in local- based politics.

Third, the recent clarion call on world leaders to enforce the Affirmative Action found its way into the Nigeria's political landscape with the setting up of the Uwais Electoral Reform Committee on 28th August 2007. On the basis of strengthening the compliance capacity of the committee on the said 'action', the electoral reforms process therefore gave new opportunities to actualize their Electoral and Constitutional Memoranda Committee, led by Honourable Beni Lar, the former House of Representative Chair on Women Affairs on 28th June 2008 at the ECOWAS secretariat, of which no fewer than seven amendments needed be made in the constitution as far as gender equity is concerned (Report of GEM). A deduction made here include late understanding of the political strength and place of women in Nigeria, failure to legitimize powers to women, and late passage of appropriate gender friendly bills to become laws have resulted in slow pace of women occupying political offices.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

From the foregoing, the findings derivable include more women participation in governance at the Federal and State governments' above the local level, male domination due to low political consciousness among women-that is associated with cultural barrier, lack of economic base for women is a basis for 'poor attitudinal syndrome' to achieving the '30 percent affirmative action declaration' for women at the Nigeria's grassroots.

By way of making recommendation, this study therefore beeps its search lights to areas that need to be given attention with the aim of creating opportunities for women to attain leadership positions in our local government areas. They include the following:

1. Beyond 10,811 political and contestable offices from local government councilor to the position of the President of Nigeria, the main obstacles stem from political structures, processes and parties as they determine political networks, potential benefits, reconciliation of parental and family responsibilities as well as the mobilezation of women by the media (Schalkwyk and Woronick, 1998). The above-mentioned impediments can be ameliorated through the agents of socialization viz; the family, religious bodies, school, peer groups, work place, media and re-orientation of cultural norms.
2. At the level of political enlightenment, it should be pointed out that electoral system and education has been porous towards the women especially at the local government level. It must be stated emphatically that

elections and results are products of manipulation by the ruling party, thus the urgency of having an aggressive re-orientation programs that are of course, vital and healthy for the survival of our democracy. Therefore, these programs when put in place for the rural women, which does not necessarily have to come during electioneering campaigns alone, should be geared towards enhancing their political, economic and socio-cultural consciousness. It can be carried out periodically in three stages:

1. Before elections
2. During elections
3. After elections

Poverty alleviation scheme becomes very germane for the purpose of enhancing popular and active participation of women in local governance through loans, subsidized agro-chemicals, and provision of good infrastructures backed by maintenance mechanisms.

Conclusion

This paper has critically demonstrated that more women are involved in governance at both Federal and State levels of government, particularly at the various houses of parliament. What happens at the legislative and executive arena is that men are the major occupant of political offices. It is on rare occasion that women are considered, as in the case of Abeokuta in the South West, Nigeria where a woman is local government counsellor in the President Goodluck Jonathan's administration.

Arising from literatures and theoretical framework employed in this study, it can be established that women involvement in governance is just gaining ground, despite the popular declaration of '30 percent affirmative action' in Nigeria, characterized by parochialism, poor attitude, low participation, and high deprivation tendencies.

Marginalization of women in local governance is nothing but an elongation of male dominance in virtually all political affairs. As such, historical fact of this nature is strongly associated with the attitudinal views which had often impede the chances of women to having more political representatives at the various local government levels in Nigeria.

Nonetheless, inadequate empirical attention perhaps, resulted to the unpopular outlook of the subject matter. This is informed by the fact that more women participation at both Federal and State levels often record a number of women as political office holders as against the Local governments.

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