Research Article

Integrating Women in Polity and Leadership for a Sustainable Development in Nigeria

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Abstract: Women are born with great potentials both in mind, spirit and brain. The management of the domestic affairs of many homes is usually in the hands of women. If women can manage their homes effectively, they can as well manage office position and political affairs of any nation since homes and families make up the society, state and nation. Unfortunately in Africa, most especially Nigeria, there is gender inequality in power distribution, leadership and political affairs of the nation. Women exclusion in Nigerian polity and leadership has resulted to a lot of challenges such as democratic deficit, which include social insecurity, food insecurity, infrastructural decay, poverty, unemployment and others. The paper therefore discussed the need for women integration in leadership and polity of Nigeria, the impact of the past women is different political positions and the socio-economic implications of women exclusion in the nation’s polity.

The paper also discussed factors militating against women participation in leadership and polity in Nigeria and various strategies to improve women integration.

The paper recommends equal opportunity in policy-making and execution irrespective of gender differences. Educational and economic empowerment by the government for the interested women in leadership and politics in Nigeria.

Keywords: women integration, impacts, socio-economic implication of women exclusion, strategies and challenges.

Introduction

Generally in Africa, women have been treated as second class citizens whose major duty is home keeping, domestic affair and child bearing machine. Among the Muslim women, they are not even allowed to appear in the public according to their religious belief, culture and practices. The African traditional religion does not equally give equal treatment to male and female citizens in the nation while the Christians on the other hand attach tradition to the religious practices which does not give women much freedom to operate in the society.

The western education came in and liberated women from such discrimination, cultural and traditional belief of gender in equality. For women to contribute their quota in the nation’s political, social and economic development they must be integrated into the country’s leadership and political system, since Nigeria today can boast of many educated women from different field of study.

In the past, there were some women that played active role in transforming the politics and economy of the nation such women include Queen Amina of Zazzau, Iyalode Efusetan of Ibadan, princess Moremi of Ife, princess inikpi of igala and Emotan of Benin. Others were Mrs. Margret Ekpo of the famous Aba women riot of 1929, Madam Tinubu of Lagos and Egbaland, Mrs.Funmilayo Ransome Kuti of the Abeokuta womenUnion of 1948 and Haijia sawaba Gambo of Northern Element progress Union (NEPU) to mention but few. Since the history of Nigerian polity, men have always dominated the political sphere of the country setting and making women supplementary actors or subordinates. The question of equality in the decision-making body does not arise since there were no people to support the women to fight for their rights. The international Beilgn conference gave women an insight of their discrimination most especially in Africa polity. Fortunately in Nigeria during the pre-colonial era, those women that played an active role in leadership and economy of Nigeria did well. The heroic exploits of Queen Amina in the military and political ascendancy of Zaria in the sixteenth century were paroled by those of Joan of arc who led her French country men to record notable victories against the evading English forces in 1429. Queen Amina conquered Nupe and Kwararafa, collected tribute from them and ruled for 34 years. In another
development, the leadership roles played by both Mrs. Funmilayo Ransom-kuti and Mrs. Margaret Ekpo in Nigerian pre-independent political struggles of 1950’s are incontrovertible. Mrs. Kuti was an advocate and campaigner of women freedom and right across the nation while, Ekpo on her side was the only female member in the seven man committee in 1951 to organize the national political organization geared towards achieving self-government within five years. She became the vice president of the Eastern house of chiefs in 1959. Nathan (2016 p8) another important woman activist and role model professor (Mrs.) Grace Alele-williams distinguished herself in the field of mathematics education later became the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Benin did extremely well to transform the University academically as a leader. Similarly, late Prof. Dora Nkem Akunyeli (OF12), who was once the one time director of National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and control, reduced the incidence of fake drugs from about 90% to 60% during her period of service thereby performing credible. Dr (Mrs.) Ngozi Okonjo-Iwuala also successfully transformed the Nigerian Economic platform when she succeeded in negotiating a debt relief package for Nigeria as the Minister of finance on July 2003 to June 2006 under the Obasanjo’s regime. She spearheaded the fuel subsidy removal policy by the Nigerian government which led to protests in January 2012 under the Goodluck’s regime. She equally stressed the need to reduce the country’s re current expenditure, which is 74% of the National budget at that time and embarked on capital project which improved unemployment challenge.

**Reasons for women integration in politics and leadership in Africa**

Women are more sincere and honest in discharging their duties and responsibilities.

Women are perfect in the management of any little resources available within their reach.

Women may not be as corrupt as men in fraudulent activity.

Women are more dedicated in carrying out their functions effectively.

Women are experts in peace and conflict resolution, no nation can achieve any sustainable economy without having peace in such environment.

Women fear God more than men and can therefore discharge the governmental duties with the fear of God more than men in any organization.

Women believe in justice more than men in any office.

Women have more population to be taken care of more than men and need representative in policy and decision-making to take care of their needs and protect their rights in governance.

Women are more development conscious more than men, they need and enjoy development as a result would like to speedy up development in rural areas.

Women are more trust worthy in public sector and can easily render accountability of their work; Azikiwe (2000), Aiyede (2007/p 190).

Women need to be integrated in order to explore their wisdom, knowledge and other potentials in them for sustainable economic-social and political development of the nation. This is because the country has produced many educated women in different field of studies and therefore need to contribute their ideas in the development of the country both at home and abroad.

Women that ruled in different capacities in Nigeria performed creditable well like other women that ruled their various countries in different parts of the world and therefore, Nigerian women need to be given opportunity to rule in this nation, Arowolo (2010).

**The impact of women in leadership and polity in their nations**

1. Israel: the Prime Minister Golda Meir of Israel ruled from 1969-1974. She successfully led Israel and brought victory in the international war of ‘Yom Kippur of 1973 in which Israel was unexpected invaded by Egypt and Syria. Though the war tested Meir’s leadership, Israel was victorious thereby demonstrating the country’s military strength in the face of the hostile neighbours.

2. UK: Prime Minister Margret Thatcher that Cher of United Kingdom ruled her country from 1979-1990 effectively she became the longest serving female leader in the world who really transformed the economy and social welfare of her nation. She maintained in the international relationship between her kingdom and others and kept intact the common wealth Nations allies of her domain. Ideologically, Thatcher was best known for steering her political party and country to the right through an aggressive agenda of tax cuts/privatizations, union busting and cuts to government spending. In 1982, she led her country in a brief successful war against Argentina to liberate Britain Falkland Islands from foreign invasion. Indeed, she had tremendous achievement during her regime in UK.

3. In Philippines, president Corazon Aquino ruled from 1986-1992, Aquino led a highly reformist government that introduced a new democratic
constitutions and removed the various political restrictions that had contributed to the repression of the Marcos year and thus reformed their economic and political institutions.

In Germany, Chancellor Angela Marker was elected on November 22, 2005 her government gave financial aid to some European’s troubled nations; she also pressed hard for austerity reforms to play a prominent role in any plan for long term economic recovery both at home and abroad. Indeed her administration really transformed Germany in all aspect of life endeavor. Here in Africa, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of Liberia took over power as an elected president of Liberia on January 16, 2006. Her presidency focused mostly on rebuilding Liberia’s democratic institution and fostering national reconciliation after decades of civil war and oppression as well as helping to modernize the country’s economy. In 2011, she became the first female leader to be awarded a noble peace prize.

In India, (Mrs.) Indira Ghandu also helped to transform Indian’s economy, maintain the territorial boundary in India but was killed. Others include Eugenie Charles of the Dominican Prime Minister and Violeta Chamorro the Nicaragua President whose remarkable economic and political landmarks can never be forgotten in their countries. The sustainable economic development and nation building is not only for men. The history shows that women have done well in the past to develop the nation, most especially during the Dora Akunyili’s period. She was appointed in April 1 2001 as the Director General NAFDAC by Obasanjo’s regime. Dora reduced the production of fake drugs in Nigeria by 90% from what it was in 2001 as per the time she left office in 2007. The production capacities of local pharmaceutical industries were increased and about twenty-two (22) new drug manufacturing outfits were established within a period of five years 2001-2006.

Prof Dora Akunyili stopped the importation of fake drugs and total destruction of the ones found in the country was done. She also monitored salt iodization in Nigeria to the extent that UNICEF was able to rate Nigeria as the first country in Africa to achieve universal salt iodization. Sunday (2012), Okafor (2009). Another important woman that helped in the nation building is Dr. Oby Igwe Ezegebili who was appointed on October 2003 as the senior special assistance to the president on due process or BMPIU by the Obasanjo’s government to oversee the prudent and integrity-anchored procurement system that would power the economic growth of Nigeria and reward productive efforts; Arowolo (2010) p583.

The task of BMPIU was on strict compliance with the laid down rules and procedures guiding the process of contracts invitation, contract award, project implementation in the public sector of the nation’s economy to prevent corruption in the award and execution of contract, Nnabuife (2010). Under the leadership of Ezekwesili, BMPIU was able to make huge gains. In fact, Nigeria should as a matter of fact reserve the position of vice president of the country exclusively for women because of the various achievements and performances which some women made in their past offices. Ezegbebo (2013), Usoro (2013) and Ekpo (2012).

The past and present women who occupied political positions did not fail to make input in the politics and economy of the nation. Prof Mirian Ikejiani Clark of the blessed memory transformed the federal Capital Territory as the minister of FCT during the last military regime in the nation, Mrs Olajumote Akinjide – Ministry of state, Federal Capital Territory, Hajiya Zainab Maina- ministry of women affairs and social development, Mrs Stella Odua – Ministry of aviation, Mrs Ama peele – ministry of lands and housing, Prof. Raurayatu Rufai – Ministry of education, Mrs Onaobola Obada – Ministry of information and technology; others are Erelu Olusola Obada – ministry of state for defense ,Prof. Viola Onwuliri – Ministry of federal justice, Hayiya Zainab Kuchi – Ministry of water resources, Mrs Sarah R Otchekpe ministry of water resources too, Mrs Mailatia – Ministry of environment and other women who worked in other capacities. Those ones include Mrs Sarah Jibric - special adviser to the president on ethics AND VALUES, Mrs Sarah Akuben Pane – Special adviser to the president on gender issues. All these made 2011-2015 political leadership a success economically and otherwise; Ihekwuaba (2016) p 9. Inspite of the fact that these women served the government well, Nigeria is yet to integrate women up to 35% affirmative.

The national and international bodies, organizations and government have severally adopted systems to integrate women into leadership and governance of the various countries in the world for development studies. A programme related to women gained light at Cairo under the auspices of the international conference on population and development (ICPD) Aliegbe (2005). One the crucial goals of ICPD was to bring women into the mainstream of development through the promotion of their health and education, and encourage their economic contribution which will ultimately lead them to political participation Agishi (2002). The need to note that the struggle for the rights of women started long before the creation
of the international human rights system. In 1993, the inter-American women’s commission of the organization of America states (OAS) was established in 1928 and adopted convention on the nationality of women which was the first legislation on women’s right, Aliegbe (2005). In the United Nation’s system, women fought for the recognition of sex discrimination in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Committee on the status of women (CSW) which was created parallel to the commission on Human Rights itself, at its first meeting in 1946. As a consequence, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women, signed in 1979 and ratified by Nigeria in 1985. This was integrated in Nigerian constitution as gender equality matter. In spite of the numerous national and international instruments as well as constitutional provisions affirming the equality of men and women in all spheres of life, party politics inclusive, very few women are found participating in party politics, legislative assemblies and executive councils. There is an evidence to show that the number of women involvement in the polity and leadership of Nigeria are very low. The table below shows the number of women in the leadership programme from 1999 till date. This women representative in democratic governance in Nigeria is thus;

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/N</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>no of available seats</th>
<th>No of women in 1999</th>
<th>No of women in 2003</th>
<th>No of women in 2007</th>
<th>No of women in 2011</th>
<th>No of women in 2015</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Presidency</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Senate</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>House of reps</td>
<td>360</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Governorship</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Deputy governorship</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>36 state house of assembly</td>
<td>990</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>1,533</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Source: Lance Onyewu, Maureen (2011), Chizaram Nwachukwu 2016 p4

Precisely in 2007 elections, women constituted about 11% of all candidates with only one woman contesting for the office of president, 33.9% for governorship positions, 13.5% for senate position, 15% for House of Representatives and 15.8% for the state house of assembly. At the end of the election, women occupied only about 7.5 percent of the key leadership positions in Nigeria. During president Yaradua’s administration in Nigeria, he promised to keep 30% position for women to occupy which was equally less to the 35% affirmative in the (National Gender policy). At the end of his regime, it was only 11% that he was able to integrate. It is interesting to note that during president Goodluck’s regime, women occupied 33% of the cabinet positions. This decreased to 19 percent in PMB cabinet. This is very poor compared to some other countries in Africa. For instance, Rwanda has 63.5 percent in lower house and 38.5 percent for the upper house; Senegal 42.7 percent; South Africa 41.9 percent for lower house and 35.2 percent for upper house; and Burundi 36.4 percent; Chizaram (2016) p8.

**Strategies for the women empowerment in Nigeria leadership and politics.**

1. Compulsory education for girl child and women in Nigeria
2. Enacting decisions and policies to favour women in politics by the government.
3. Abolishment of religions and cultural practices affecting women in the society.
4. Economic empowerment and provision of employment opportunity for girl child and women.
5. Gender equality both in the offices and the society at large.

The socio-economic and political implications of women exclusion in polity and leadership of the...
country are enormous. 
First and foremost, some women who were or are 
opportunized to study in the same environment or 
institution tend to perform better in exams or 
schools more than their male counterparts. There is 
no field of study or profession women will involve 
themselves in without excelling. Today, in different 
field of study, one can find, women Lawyers, 
Engineers, Doctors, Accountants, Scientists, etc. to 
mention but few, but these huge Nigeria population 
of women with resource development are not 
contributing their quota in governance, leadership 
and administration of their nation. Women if 
integrated fully in the political system in Nigeria 
should serve a check and balance on the dubious men politicians and help to reduce the culture of 
political corruption among the leaders and political 
office holders. In spite of the fact that women form 
almost half of the Nigerian population, they do not 
contribute their best on decision and policing 
making which could have helped to reshape the 
economy of the nation. The current food insecurity, 
poverty and hunger the nation is passing through is 
the failure of the government to enact policies that 
will favore women farmers in Nigeria, since women 
participate and show more interest in agricultural 
production than men. As a result of this, women 
exclusion on decision-making, the potential of the 
half of the Nigerian population remain unexplored 
and the scope of labour, energy and human resource 
development available for national development is 
restricted or completely ignored. Women’s political 
empowerment continued to be impeded by 
traditional obstacles to females and their educational 
and economic empowerment. The choice of the path 
of educational training made early in life by young 
girls under the strong influence of families, peer 
groups, and so on often closes many opportunities to 
women and propels them toward the direction of 
traditionally socially approved female careers; this 
situation has a social implication for national 
development in Nigeria. It also have profound 
consequences on women’s’ role in politics. Better 
educated women are more likely to be politically 
active but yet they are not fully integrated. 
Women need to be politically activated through 
political and economic empowerment to bring 
balance of power that could be used to improve both 
the social, economic and political development in 
the country.

Factors Militating against women participation in leadership and politics in Nigeria

1. Culture: African tradition, culture, philosophy 
and ethics do not give gender equality in politic 
and leadership of Nigerian government. Women 
are always treated as house wife, managing the 
affairs and domestic matters at home.
2. Religion: In Africa, both African traditional 
religion and philosophy and Islamic religion do 
not allow women to appear in public places nor 
partake in decision making and policy 
implementation.
3. Illiteracy: many families in Nigeria most 
especially northern part of the Country that has 
bigger population than the rest part do not 
educate their daughters; they usually send them 
early into marriage or human trafficking or street 
begging and hawking. This does not give women 
opportunity to make themselves available either to 
context in any political office or leadership.
4. Poverty: the system to which politics is handled 
in Nigeria demand huge amount of money which 
most of the women who have keen interest to 
partake may not have access to the huge amount 
to be paid before somebody is allowed to 
context in any political party is highly 
discourageable.
5. Political Corruption: Nigerian politicians are not 
much interested in national development but in 
self development, women may not be able to 
carry out the party instruction on how to run a 
particular position, rather, she will be restricted 
by her party on how to carry out her duties and 
make a reasonable returns to her political 
godfather who must have sponsored her, Sabine 
(2003).
6. Political Culture: Politics is supposed to be a 
game of love but in Nigeria, it is full of war, 
violence, kidnapping, rigging in election, 
spiritual projections, sexual harassment on 
women and killing of innocent souls discourages 
and scares women from polity and leadership of 
Nigeria.
7. The attitude of women in politics: most women 
in politics and leadership do not have regard to 
their fellow human being. They insult their 
husband and run after money. They have little or 
no interest in caring for their children, husbands 
and home. They keep late always because of 
political meetings.
8. The society: the African society at large sees 
women who are in politics or leadership as 
prostitutes and mad people. This societal norm 
and values tend to discourage women in politics, 
9. The use of African science and Technology by 
some African politicians is a very big challenge 
to women not to fit in. this African science and 
technology such as use of charms, manipulate
technology in form of traditional herbs, diabolic acts used either to eliminate political opponents or to win election by all means is a bid discouragement to women in Nigeria's polity.

10. Family Approach: some husbands and family members do not find it easy to release wives and mothers because late keeping as a result of political meetings done late at night and sometimes been over occupied due to the political office work.


Conclusion

Women can be able to manage the home resources and the home resources and the domestic affairs of the family with the little resources given to them, they can as well manage, control and administer the national resources and governmental affairs of home.

Women full of great ideas, knowledge and skills should be encouraged and integrated into the leadership and polity of the nation Nigeria. This can be done through the support of families, the society, the policy-makers and the government in particular. Let the seat or position of the vice president of Nigeria be occupied by a woman in order to bring change and transformation in the polity and economy of the nation.

In another development, to encourage more women into leadership and polity of the country, there should be a principle of gender equality initiatives at all levels of governance. The government needs to work towards changing the political culture/structure which produces gender inequality. This gender inequality should also be addressed in relation to women’s deprivation, socio-economic and political factor, Nathan (2016 p 14).

Recommendation

1. Proper counseling and educating girl children before giving them out for marriage.
2. Removal or restructuring some religions and cultural hindrances to girl child in the society.
3. Putting up stringent policies that will encourage women into polity by the Nigerian government.
4. African families from home should give equal rights to both male and female children at home.

Women should be recognized, respected and given more attention in public and private places, offices and social gathering as it done in Britain.

The adage women first should be implemented to our political, economic and social life of Nigerians irrespective of culture and religion.

Economic Empowerment of women should be given urgent consideration.

The rights of women should be broadened and respected in the society.

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