Gender Equality and Its Implication for Good Governance in Nigeria

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Abstract

The paper examines the imperative of gender equality as basic factors that contribute to the socio-economic development of any nation in the world today. The discrimination against women remains a common occurrence in today's society and serves to hinder good governance. The empowerment of women through such things as the promotion of women's rights and an increase in the access of women to the socio-economic opportunities and good governance served as advancement of economic development. The influential role of gender equality on socioeconomic development is most directly illustrated in the participation of women in the society. Therefore, the paper discusses the impact of socio-cultural factors hindering the gender parity in governance and decision making in Nigeria. The objective of the study is to determine the effects of gender inequality on good governance in Nigeria. Methodologically, a qualitative research design was adopted through the use of secondary sources of relevant materials. Subsequently, content analysis was employed in the interpretation of documents, reports and other publications. The findings reveal that there is a nexus between the gender and good governance in Nigeria. However, women also constitute a larger percentage in our societies, thus in most cases deny them opportunity of equal participation with their male counterpart in governance. Hence, the study recommends, among others, that government should engage the support of gender emancipation and socio-cultural re-orientation with women's movement NGOs and Civil Society Organisations, and put an end to women subordination, discrimination and stigmatization in the society.

Keyword: Gender, Political Participation, Empowerment, Good Governance, Socio-Economic Development

Introduction

Precisely, Nigerian women have been the perpetual victims of failing statehood, through the resultant effect of the social injustice, economic and religious construct of the society (Ette,2017:15). Broadly, the Nigerian women are continually at a lesser average and treated unequally when compared to her foreign counterparts in some other nations. The issues of gender inequality and social injustice in Nigeria have become the concern of many Non-Government Organisations due to imbalance in the ratio of male-female in government. More, often than not, culture is usually adduced as the reason for the imbalance in what seems to be the perpetuation of gender-centric and social injustice in Nigeria. Some of these harmful cultural practices pervasively promote the harmful practices against the Nigerian women such as the female genital mutilation (FGM), domestic violence, trauma experience or forced marriages, rape denial of inheritance and many other cases of abuse against women (Luckham and Mukumu, 2015:231).

In Nigeria today, the power relations between men and women still challenges the women's role in politics, their socioeconomic development with diplomatic values due to the socio-cultural consideration of women as only relevant to the social life, and the cultural composition of the society that propagates the gender roles. Notwithstanding, the role of women in governance has been sustained toward the attracting of international feminist campaign that has been at the centre of discourse over a decade, especially since the conception of the gender inequality in the society (e-journal, *Feminist Africa,* in 2002) (News and Views, 2003).

The dawn of the 21st century has signaled the matter of gender equality and better representation of women as very important for the proper development of any country. The seriousness devoted to it is reflected in the declaration of affirmative action by the United Nations Conference on Women (2000) in New York Declaration which is yet to be considered and put in place. However, women are being enlightened and encouraged by women's organizations and governments, notably the National Council of Women's Societies, the Ministry of Women Affairs, the Family Support Programme, and International Agencies, to participate fully in both societies and democratic governance (Adedokun, 2000: 139).

Moreover, women's participation is a *sine qua non* of good governance for any nation to realize the noble ideal of democracy with its emphasis on participation, competition and liberty of the society; there is need for the promotion of gender equality. It is a fact that any democratization process is not complete without the active participation of women (Anifowoshe, 2004:207)

Objectives of the Study

The major objective of this study is to analyze the impact of gender parity (equality) on good governance in Nigeria while the specific objectives of the study are to;

i. examine the socio-cultural factors hindering the gender equality in good governance and decision-making in Nigeria; and
ii. propose a comprehensive approaches or solutions toward enhancing the capacity of women's right and participation in governance and society in Nigeria.

Conceptual Discourse

The main concepts discussed in this paper relate to Gender, Good Governance, and Development.

Gender

According to various definition by Scholars, gender refers to how a person's biology is culturally valued and construed into locally accepted ideas of what it is to be, a female or male or the socially single-minded ideas and practice as to what it means to be female or male. Gender is opined as the hierarchical power relations between women and men. These are socially constructed, and not derived directly from biology. Gender characteristics and associated expectations of roles and responsibilities are, therefore, changeable among and within cultures. Gendered power relations permeate social institutions so that gender is never absent. In different societies, there are different sets of rules, norms, customs and practices by which differences between males and females are translated into socially constructed role differences between women and men, boys and girls. These cultural practices determined gender identities, define rights and responsibilities and what is 'appropriate' behaviour for women and for men. This often results in the two genders being valued differently, often reinforcing the idea that women are inferior and subordinate to men. Furthermore, gender, like development, had a specific usage before feminist theorists extended its meaning. One of the earliest uses of gender in feminist theory can be traced to the 1976 University of Sussex Workshop on the Subordination of Women and the school of thought that emerged from this workshop. Scholars such as Olivia Harris, Maureen Mackintosh, Felicity Odium, Ann Whitehead, and Kate Young argue that women, like men, are biological beings but that women's subordination was socially constructed and not biologically determined. They argue further that to conceptually differentiate between these two realities, it is necessary to identify "sex" as the biological differentiation between male and female, and "gender" as the differentiation between masculinity and femininity as constructed through socialization and education, among other factors. What is biological is fixed and unchangeable, but what is social is subject to change and should be the focus of attention for feminist theorists (Faseke, 2001:157). Hence, gender simply put is socially constructed roles of men and women.

However, for the purpose of this paper, the concept of gender according to United Nations Development Programs (UNDP)(2005:20) is adopted which states that gender is a social attribute associated with being male or female and the relationship between the masculine and feminine in the society.

Women Political Participation

Political participation as opined by Anifowoshe (2004:206) that women's participation in politics should be seen from four perspectives which are: participation, access, representation and transformation. Participation of both male and female in governance will enhance equilibrium as it gives access to political power to both sexes. Access to political participation which includes control of power within such institutions with quantitative and qualitative representation will engender social and political transformation in the polity and the society at large. Participation and Access of both sexes will give room the representation of the male and female gender to be represented in governance which in turn transforms the polity. Definitely, with the four perspectives at play, women empowerment will be enhanced and the society will be transformed.

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Good Governance

The National Democratic Institute (2015:26), opines that governance is'the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country's economic and social resources for development". Instrumentally defined, governance is made up of aggregated elements including: political leadership, bureaucratic capacity, representation and accountability, transparency and non-corrupt judiciary enforcing the rule of law, and participation. Also, good governance is the management in the process of development and the keys to good governance are leadership's political will and political capacity.

Development

Development refers to the process of bringing about fundamental and substantial changes in the society. It encompasses and embraces such aspects of the equality of life as social justice, equality of opportunity for all citizens, equitable distribution of income, and democratization in the development process. Development according to World Bank (2014:111), refers to improving peoples' lives through economic, social, political and technological change. Its transformation that certainly requires nations to grow but it is also about reducing poverty and inequality, building individual skills by having access to social services thereby raising the quality life.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework engaged for this study is Liberal Feminism Theory (1784). This theory emphasizes equal individual rights and liberties for both women and men in the

society with sexual differences. Liberal feminism is the most widely accepted social and political philosophy among the feminists, which also postulated by Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797). Liberal feminism theory described the equal rationality of the sexes and stresses the importance of structuring social, familial, and sexual roles in ways that promote women's autonomous participation and self – fulfillment.

Theory emphasize the similarities between men and women rather than the average difference between them, attribute most of the personality and character differences between the sexes to the social construction of the gender, and tend to promote a single set of hermaphrodite virtues for both women and men in societies.

The strength of Liberal feminist theory is that it challenges male dominance and advocates social, political and economic equality of women and men in society. Thus, the theory recognised that some choices made by women are questionable because of condition made by chauvinist social practice. They also tend to avoid materialism and any second guessing of those choices made without coercion or threats by the male counterpart within the egalitarian society.

The limitation of the theory presumed that there is a strong claims of sexual difference that guarantee the different and potentially hierarchical rights and social role.The liberal feminists otherwise avoid the promotion of particular conceptions of the good life for either men or women in the society, instead of defending a broad sphere of neutrality and privacy within which individual may pursue forms of life that is the most agreeable to them.

Methodology

This paper relied on qualitative research design through the use of primary and secondary sources of gathering relevant materials such as document, diaries, reports, internet material, journal articles, and international publications, etc. Content analysis was employed to analyze the sociocultural factors hindering the gender equality in governance and decision-making in Nigeria.

The Socio-Cultural Factors Hindering the Gender Equality in Governance and Decision- Making in Nigeria.

There are several sociocultural factors that have hindered the effectiveness of gender equality in governance especially in policy and decision-making programs from taking active roles in Nigeria. The factors include the following:

Poverty

The feminization of poverty does appear to be "deadly plague" that affects about 70% of women in Nigeria, inhibiting their participation in policy and decision-making power, in particular, and advancement and development, in general. A recent FOS (2020) report, based on the analysis of a series of consumer expenditure survey for poverty in Nigeria over the two decades of years between the periods (2000-2020), observed that the female-headed households are over represented among the poor. Lack of access to economic opportunity and productive resources has been largely responsible for the growing incidence of poverty among women, extensive poverty and ignorance, which manifest in the form of illiteracy, ill health, malnutrition, destitution and high level of discrimination in the labour force act as a major barrier to active participation of women in governance and decision-making process in the societies. The incessant invasion by both the Insurgents, Kidnappers and Armed Bandits of which the majority of their victims were men have made many women in different parts of Nigeria widows thereby impoverishing them. This unequal economic status directly translates into unequal social relations at the expense of the women within families at the micro level, and within the economy at the macro level.

Patriarchal Culture

The crucial issue is the patriarchal nature of our customs that permeates the Nigerian society hence, it is a subjugated culture which make men to treat women as an inferior thereby put them in secondary position in society. Men can marry as many wives as possible at the same time but the culture prevents women from having more than one husband. Until recently, the culture had subjugated women as the property of the husband. The patriarchal culture of male supremacy still remains rooted, obscured and protected within traditional institutions and structures held in abeyance and relative utmost inviolability. A major challenge to the task of executing gender-sensitive and gender-equality policies in Nigeria, therefore, is the patriarchal culture norms, attitudes and practices, which have been accepted as the natural order of things. This culture is still in-grained in men and it is demonstrated both consciously and unconsciously, despite the general drive for a meaningful change in gender relations through policy initiatives and actions as well as sundry international conventions and accords to which Nigeria is a signatory.

Inadequate Capacity

Capacity building and utilization has been trenchantly argued as the missing link in Nigeria's socioeconomic development (IMF 2012:51, Also see World Bank, 2014:34). The level of capacity building in any society can be measured or assessed using the financial, human, institutional and infrastructural criterions or indicators. Despite the huge financial

resources in Nigeria, the quality of human, institutional and infrastructural capacity has been adjudged to be grossly inadequate. The inadequate capacity has grossly affected the way public resources; programmes, projects and activities are managed and coordinated in Nigeria. As a consequence, the ability to formulate, analyse and implement policies and programmes for the accomplishment of national development goals and aspirations has been largely constrained. The poor capacity for dealing with socio-economic programmes in Nigeria is, therefore, due to false public investment in institutions and processes for capacity-building and the gradual dismantling of the enabling environment for maintaining and enhancing the existing capacity. Central to the problem of achieving the Millennium Development Goal of gender equality and women empowerment in Nigeria is arguably the existing inadequate capacity.

Political Will and Genuine Commitment

Constructing a gender friendly, responsive, equitable and egalitarian society demands the full-blown support from all levels or tiers of governance, particularly the Federal Government that formulates general or macro policies that are expected to provide the direction for the micro policies and activities at the lower levels of governance, particularly the states. To this end, the presidency, the Federal Executive Council, the Legislature and the Judiciary must accept, embrace and show commitment through clear-cut gender equality principles and practices. Such commitment will be reflected in the level of participation, supportive climate and productive investment in terms of financial and time resources (Ejumudo, 2005:94). Once the above are in place, the commitment will not only be discerned by other stakeholders like private and civil society organizations and individuals, it will also engender support and co-operation that are germane for the realization of the goal of gender equality and women empowerment in Nigeria. To this end, policies, partnerships and programmes reforms through genuine commitment to gender concerns at all levels is a desideratum. Although the Nigerian government has severally expressed its commitment to gender equality and women empowerment, the existing policy environment across sectors, inter- sectorial cooperation and programming priorities belie this commitment that is more theoretical than pragmatic. In actuality, the present relatively tolerant policy environment was preceded by a regime of resistance to gender equality. A possible explanation for the previous atmosphere of lackadaisical attitude to gender equality in Nigeria was the patent weak conception of the implications of gender balancing for sustainable national development. The truism of the above reasoning is evident in the fact that in the past twenty-nine years to recent time, there has been a shift away from looking at gender inequality as an issue that affects women alone (IDEA, 2010:66).

Socio-Cultural Re-Orientation

it in Nigeria has created a climate of conservatism and resistance to the centrality of the role of gender equality in attaining national development on a sustainable basis. There is, therefore, the need for a re-orientation by individuals, groups, institutions and agencies (both governmental and non-governmental) on gender equality issues that will translate into attitudinal change and response, which is germane for the efficiency of gender equality and women empowerment in Nigeria. Thus, there is the need to institute the culture of respect for human and gender rights in Nigeria.

Restricted Social Participation

A major critical dimension came to mind in this respect, namely religions cum cultural factors. Religion has been adjudged as one of the universal factors in the development of individuals and nations. However, misinterpretation of religions doctrines has negatively militated against women's involvement in governance and decision-making process. For instances, in many communities today; women, particularly Muslim women in purdah, are unable to actively participate in communal activities. In extreme cases, they may be secluded and unable to come out to engage in productive activities or even to participate in group activities, until they have reached an advanced, post-reproductive age. (Olawoye, 2001:39).

The Legacy of Anti-Democratic Female Power Structure

The anti-democratic female power structure, exemplified by the wives of successive Heads of State, is a major source of concern. Evidence has shown that the establishment of the female power structure largely dominated by a clique has only been an avenue of engendering corruption in the societies. For instance, the increased visibility of women canvassing women –related issues, which was experienced under the auspices of the first ladies between 1985 and 1998 during the Babaginda and Abacha regimes, has been shown to be little more than avenues for "engendering bureaucratic corruption" (Anifowose, 2004:319) due to the huge money budgeted for the programmes, even though it set the pace for women emancipation in Nigeria.

Search for Solutions and Actions Required

This paper, therefore, suggests a comprehensive approach or solution towards enhancing the capacity of women's right and participation in governance and society in Nigeria**.** This should most importantly involve the following:

i) Enhancing the women's right empowerment

It is not gain saying the fact that until women are economically empowered and their social status uplifted, the idea of active participation in governance and development may well

be a mirage. In view of this, efforts to facilitate women's right empowerment must include the following:

- Fostering supportive socioeconomic or business environment through the adequate provision of socioeconomic infrastructural facilities in places where there is a large concentration of women. In this context, there is the need for public sociocultural re-orientation to encourage the men in the society, how to handle or take care of women in their immediate environment.
- Increased access to macro-credit to encourage women small-scale entrepreneurs not the peanut ten thousand naira " trader moni" .
- Encourage women in their various capacities, in order to accomplish their vision in life.
- Integrating women into the society and mainstreaming them into the policy and decision-making process.
- Let there be deliberate effort to mainstream women into governance allotted spaces for the in the three tiers of government.

ii) Improving the human centre development of marginalized women

The 2005 United Nations Report stresses the importance of education as a key variable in raising women's status, which in turn opens up so many avenues to ensure equitable growth and sustainable development. Government priorities should be directed at bridging the education gender gap, most especially by encouraging vocational education and training. In the same vein, education loans and scholarship should be granted to the indigent students.

iii) Adoption of flexible statutory laws

The use of affirmative action is a welcome idea. In addition, bearing in mind our pluralist society, there is the need to adjust the laws to ensure women are adequately represented in decision-making at all levels.

i**v) Through effective enlightenment/awareness programs**

The media must be on the vanguard of an enlightenment campaign to eradicate both men and women to gradually change their attitudes and raise their level of cultural awareness, particularly in the areas of gender parity and relationships. Both men and women need to be reoriented in matters of gender and womanhood in the society.

The media can also set their agenda by focusing on those concrete issues capable of mobilizing women to raise their status, self-esteem, self-respect, and empower them so that they too will be inspired to pick up the gauntlet to fight for women's cause.

In particular, the media must beam their searchlight on those harmful cultural and traditional practices that are not only a negation of womanhood, detrimental to the advancement of women and development but also downright dangerous.

Furthermore, the media can expose and campaign for the removal of existing sexist discriminatory laws affecting women's status and subsequent advancement. The media will require knowledge in advocacy journalism to assist in setting the agenda and bringing issues to the forefront. They will also need not only gender-disaggregated data, but the techniques of using such data to agitate for positive change.

Conclusion

This paper has discussed the various forms of sociocultural factors and structural discrimination inhibiting the gender parity or women's drive towards their personal empowerment and subsequent mainstreaming into socioeconomic development and political life styles of women in the society. The socioeconomic status of Nigerian women at the turn of the new millennium has been briefly outlined. It is clear that, in spite of policy measures taken thus far; women are still disadvantaged, disenfranchised because they are not empowered. The quest for sustainable good governance demands active involvement of women in politics, and women's movements such as NGOs and Civil Society Organisation in Nigeria should engage the support of gender emancipation and sociocultural re-orientation against women subordination, discrimination and stigmatization in the society.

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