DEMOCRACY AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN NIGERIA: SOUTHWESTERN EXPERIENCE

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[1]Bolanle Nafisat Akeusola, [2]Olawale Oyemade Oyekanmi & [3]Gbadegesin Saliu Shittu
[1,3]Department of Social Studies, Adeniran Ogunsanya College of Education, Otto Ijanikin, Lagos State
[2]Department of Arts and Social Science Education, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria

Abstract

This study examined the place of women empowerment in politics and democratic societal sustainability in Nigeria. It elucidates the threats, experiences and contributions to the democratic process. Strategies that can assist women realize their political leadership potentials were proffered. The study adopted a survey research design. Stratified random sampling technique was employed using Democracy and Women Empowerment Questionnaires (DWEQ) administered to 500 purposively selected women politicians, activists and professionals in the South-Western geo-political zone of Nigeria (ie. Otto-Awori, Sagamu, Bodija, Ore and Ado). Results revealed that women are marginalized and feature minimally in government since Nigeria lacks a legislative design that ensures full recognition for women in political parties. Patriarchal attitudes, poor informal network, finance, religion and educational status were found to militate against women's empowerment and participation in politics. To subdue these challenges, the study

recommended amongst others, the need for girl-child education, the development of electoral reforms that promote equitable representation of women and respect for due process. Empowerment of women by ensuring their access to self-reliant job opportunities and credit facilities were suggested. The study concluded that the institutionalization of varieties of special mechanisms is most needed in increasing women's participation in governance.

Keywords: Illiteracy, Education, Literacy, Democracy, Women, Empowerment, Sustainable development.

Introduction

Globalization has greatly improved the lives of women worldwide, particularly the lives of women in the developing world. However, Women still require a high level of empowerment to help them contribute their quota to sustainable national democratic development irrespective of cultural background to ensure realization of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 4, 5 and 10, that is, to "Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all"; "Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls"; and "Reduce inequality within and among countries". The woman still remains disadvantaged in many areas of life, including education, employment, health, and civil rights. According to the United States' Agency for International Development and the World Bank, 57 percent of the 72 million primary school-aged children who do not attend school are females. Additionally, girls are four per cent less likely than boys to complete primary schools (Gender Statistics, 2010b). Education is the process of becoming critically aware of one's reality in a manner that leads to effective action upon it. An educated woman understands her world well enough to deal with it effectively. Such women, if they existed in sufficient numbers, would not leave the absurdities of the present world unchanged. In the opinion of Edukugho as cited in Imogie (2002), "the prosperity of a country depends not on the abundance of its

revenue, nor the strength of its fortifications, but on the number of its cultivated citizens, especially women, of a solid education, enlightenment and good character". The Federal Government of Nigeria has adopted education as an instrument per excellence for effecting national development (National Policy on Education, 2014). The implication is that the government realizes the importance of education as a veritable tool for national development. Thus, the Federal Government of Nigeria, through the policy guidance of the NPE asserts that: Education will continue to be highly rated in the national development plans, because education is the most important instrument of change, as any fundamental change in the intellectual social outlook of any society has to be preceded by an educational revolution (NPE, 2014).

Furthermore, the Nigerian government expressly states in section 18 of the 1999 constitution that:

> Government shall direct its policy towards ensuring that there are equal and adequate educational opportunities at all levels. Government shall promote science and technology. Government shall strive to eradicate illiteracy; and to this end shall when able provide: Free compulsory and universal primary education; Free secondary education; Free university education; and Free adult literacy programme.

Specifically, the national policy on women, section 6.1.3 submits that:

> For (the) Nigerian women to enjoy the fringe benefits of contemporary living, they require basic education to contribute meaningfully to the development of the country. Government shall in this regard increase girls and women's participation in education irrespective of their location and circumstances (17).

It can be said therefore, that the main focus of government on the education agenda is to bring about optimal development of its human resources, which, put in another word, is a viable source of

human capital. This investment however will not be complete without women education. According to James Aggrey as cited in NCCE (1998), "if you, educate a man, you educate an individual, but if you educate a woman, you educate a family (ie a nation)". Women from time immemorial have been saddled with many family responsibilities and are traditionally assigned many roles including custody of children, maintenance of the home, feeding of the family, and preservation of family health. Okpani as cited in Oyekanmi & Orulebaja (2014) said "consequent upon those traditional role expectations, they (women) become a significant factor in socio-economic and political development of a country". Apart from the roles previously enumerated for a typical woman, the modern-day woman, who is expected to perform the dual role of a wife and a mother is, like her traditional counterpart, expected to play the role of a dutiful home keeper. In playing this role, she is also expected to be capable of handling challenges of modern world of automation and computer (Akeusola, Oyekanmi & Shittu, 2018). Another challenge before her is that which is imposed on her as the first and the last teacher of the child before and after school. This is especially pertinent because, she is expected to prepare the child to be able to cope with the challenges of the contemporary world. The simple implication of this reality is that the typical contemporary woman is not likely to play these roles efficiently unless she is fortified with adequate and functional education (Oyekanmi & Orulebaja, 2014; Akeusola, Oyekanmi & Shittu, 2018).

Women's involvement in politics varies throughout the world and their participation in politics and the democratic process has become an integral part of contemporary discourse on development and governance. In spite of the clamor for women's political empowerment by international organizations, research consistently shows that in many parts of the world, women still linger on the fringes of political realm and their participation in government structures and the democratic process remains low (Oyekanmi & Orulebaja, 2014; Akeusola , Oyekanmi & Shittu, 2018). Although, women constitute 50 percent of the population and 51 percent of voters in elections in Nigeria, yet they do not enjoy their full political

rights as their male counterparts (Ofong, 2002). Available statistics reveal that women's overall political representation in government is less than 7 percent (Agbalajobi, 2010). Also, women have not still attained the recommended 30 percent seats in government as prescribed by the Beijing platform of Action to which Nigeria subscribe.

It was not until 1979 that women in Northern Nigeria had the franchise to exercise their voting rights. This implies that they could not contest for political positions nor participate in choosing their political leaders until 1979 (Baobab, 2003). Currently, although the right to democratic governance is an entitlement conferred upon all citizens by law, implying that there is no legal exclusion of women from governance in Nigeria; other barriers still impede their full participation. The increased involvement of women in the democratic process is essential to broadening and deepening the Nigerian government's commitment to democratic governance which by definition allows for diversity and participation of different groups. Women can therefore only make meaningful impact after they have reached the critical mass needed. It is within this context of subsisting relegation and marginalization of women that this paper examines democracy and women empowerment in the light of sustainable development in Nigeria.

Illiteracy and ignorance have been said to be major contributing factors to most of the problems of the Third World nations. While it may not be easy to establish a direct, logical or causal link, it is an incontrovertible fact that there is a close relationship between illiteracy, ignorance, political apathy and underdevelopment. In response to the challenges of illiteracy and underdevelopment, latter-day educators have come up with different solutions to the problems. All the solutions revolve around education especially, literacy education. Paulo Freire saw the solution to the problem as going beyond literacy for reading and writing, it includes the creation of critical consciousness. Conscientization and literacy are thus coincidental in Frère's philosophy for enhanced democratic processes (Oyekanmi & Orulebaja , 2014).

Paulo Frère's thought of education was influenced largely by the socio-economic and political situations of his native Brazil. These same ugly and dehumanizing conditions are now evident to a generous degree in Nigeria. Hence, Frère's view of education as "the practice of freedom" is very relevant to the Nigeria situation. Most of the social, economic and political problems in the Third World nations have their root in the intractable problem of illiteracy. The ugly level of illiteracy in Nigeria for instance is said to be mainly responsible for the problems of political apathy, ignorance, disease, partition, poverty, political instability and underdevelopment, among others. While most governments have come to realize the need for literacy as a way of tackling the problems rooted in illiteracy.

The Nigeria government for instance, realizes the important role of literacy in individual and national development. Efforts have therefore been directed at mass literacy education at different levels of government in the country to empower her women for democratic viability. The directorate for Social Mobilization (MAMSER) among other agencies of government has been created to address the situation. MAMSER'S three main programmes are: (i) Mass Mobilization for self-reliance, (ii) Social justice and economic recovery and (iii) Political education, Mass education. This effort is an acknowledgement of the need for literacy - education to be integrated with the creation of consciousness, which took literacy - education beyond the level of the 3RS (Oyekanmi & Orulebaja , 2014).

The quest for women education in Nigeria is entrenched in the nation's new National Policy on Education which states inter-alia that: "With regards to women education special efforts will be made by ministries of education and local government authorities in conjunction with ministries of community development and social welfare and of information to encourage parents to send their daughters to school" (NPE, 2014).

The tacit reference made to women education in the national policy on education is contained in the primary education section of the document. It must be observed here that no further reference was made to the provision of women education in this all important document on education. The absence of a policy

statement on women education as reflected in the National Policy on Education (NPE) makes the NPE fall short of women expectations and it amounts to a total disregard for that section of the population in this country.

The plight of women, in terms, of education is further compounded by the negative attitude of parents toward female education. Some parents are usually reluctant to send their girl-child for formal education especially to higher levels like their male counterpart. Another problem closely related to this is the reluctance to acquire western education and misunderstanding on the part of the girls themselves about the values of the acquisition of formal education. In education, equity means equal opportunity to good schooling. According to Ocholi (2002), quoted in Oyekanmi & Orulebaja, (2014) said geography (in term of location) and families' relative wealth have been discovered to also affect equity. For example, in Nigeria, in the last few years, the regression (toward male-female education in balance) in basic education is reflected in the fact that the net enrolment rate of girls in primary school is lower than the female literacy rate. Ocholi noted that 25.09 percent of girls who should have enrolled in school did not. It was equally observed that the average primary school completion rates for boys and girls were 56.3 percent and 43.7 percent respectively. Most girls leave school due to inability to pay cost, among other reasons (Akeusola, Oyekanmi & Shittu, 2018). It is however, an open secret today that Nigeria women are educationally backward when compared with their male counterparts. It has been discovered also that 70% of Nigerian women 35 years and above are illiterate (UNESCO, 2002). The level of illiteracy is said to be thrice as high in the rural areas when compared with the urban areas. Thus, it is stated that the problem of resistance to women advancement are culture based and they include those brought about by home-network conflict; ignorance on the part of many parents, erroneous belief that religion is against the provision of sound formal education to the girl child, gender stereotyping and stigmatization, socio-economic constraints and poor attitudes of some parent (NCCE, 1998; Oniye, 2010; Akeusola, Oyekanmi & Shittu, 2018). Three fundamental barriers

have been identified by Awe (1990) quoted in Oyekanmi & Orulenaja, (2014) to be responsible for low level of development and empowerment of women especially for educational advancement. These barriers are (1) Restricted access to education (2) Reluctance to aspire and (3) Resistance to women advancement within a patriarchal system.

Other problems against women education include the familiar problems in Nigerian education like lack of funds, inadequate facilities, inadequate manpower, sexual harassment, conflicting societal role expectations, government policies and lack of political will power to implement the entire educational programme. At present, the forces which combine to hamper women empowerment and development in Nigeria could be viewed broadly to include denial of access to education, early marriage, confinement to solitary living, subjugation by culture to accept choices forced on them, discrimination and harassment at work, political disenfranchisement from elective and political appointment and exposure to cruel mourning rites upon the death of their husbands (Oniye, 2010; Akeusola, Oyekanmi & Shittu, 2018). It can thus be said that the poor educational opportunity for Nigerian women would rob them of two things, the ability to positively affect their children's educational development and the opportunity to make meaningful contributions to their socialization process (and by extension the overall national development of the country).

A careful observation of the literacy programmes in Nigeria so far reveals that the slant has been towards reading, writing and arithmetic. UNESCO'S functional literacy was introduced to improve on the traditional literacy method. In spite of these efforts, the problem of illiteracy appears intractable. Besides, the social ills which literacy education was supposed to eradicate are still with us to a generous degree. This study advances the argument that literacy education limited to the 3RS or even to UNESCO'S functional method has not been able to help Nigeria sufficiently well especially the women folk. Since, it is common to find that women and girls are more at risk to drop out of school or not go to school at all, go into early marriage in order to give the limited

opportunity available to the family for the male- child to go to school at the expense of the females' empowerment against reasonable democratic participation. In politics, fewer women that care to participate only occupy subordinate positions such as deputy governors, and members of National Assembly. The only woman that summon courage to venture for the post of Presidency in 2011 got only one vote during the PDP national convention, which of course was automatically her own vote, because other women in the convention could not rally round her for support. Also, the only woman that aspires in 2019 political era for presidency in the person of Dr. Obiageli Ezekwesili declined her interest after the presidential debate. Our thesis is that the situation above lacks the consciousness creative elements which would empower the women to take charge of the adverse situations around them particularly political apathy.

Statement of the Problem

Over the years, the role of women in the Nigerian society has been erroneously conceptualized to child bearing and house-keeping. This is why, in most developing countries males are groomed for career in technical and scientific fields while women are guided to concentrate their efforts on home economics among others. In Nigeria, the social relations and activities of women and men are governed by patriarchal system of socialization and cultural practices, which favour the interest of men above those of women. The women are in subordinate positions particularly at the community and household levels and the male children are preferred to the females. Women empowerment opportunities are universally narrow with respect to prevalent trend. In fact formal education has tended to be pyramidal in structure, hence, several persons are excluded from it (Okedara, 1983). In a study on access to education for women in Kano and Oyo state of Nigeria, it was discovered that there are more males in all levels of school than females (Obanya, 2003). This trend has not changed in spite of the global declaration on Education for All (EFA) (Fordham, 2000). Further, the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF, 2007) identified poverty, early marriage and

teenage pregnancy; inadequate school infrastructure; cultural and religious biases; gender bias in content and teaching and learning processes; poorly qualified teachers among others as some of the barriers to women empowerment. Women therefore require a high level of functional education to help them contribute their quota to national democratic development irrespective of cultural background to ensure realization of SDGs goal -4, 5 and 10, that is, to "Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all"; "Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls" and "Reduce inequality within and among countries".

Purpose of the Study

This study is to enable the Nigerian woman and the girl-child in some parts of the country to regain their virtue through education. The specific objectives are to

i.   Determine the relationship between women empowerment level and women education level to community political development; and

ii. examine the relationship between women empowerment level and political awareness and contributions within the community.

Hypotheses

$H_0 1$: There is no significant relationship between women empowerment level and women education level to community political development.

$H_0 2$: There is no significant relationship between women empowerment level and political awareness and contributions within the community.

Methodology

The descriptive design was adopted in this study. The population of the study is restricted to selected women in Otto-Awori, Lagos State, Sagamu, Ogun State, Bodija, Oyo State, Ore, Ondo State and Ado, Ekiti State. Stratified random sampling technique was

employed using Democracy and Women Empowerment Questionnaires (DWEQ) administered to 500 purposively selected women politicians, activists and professionals in the South-Western geo-political zone of Nigeria (ie. Otto-Awori, Sagamu, Bodija, Ore and Ado). The women selected in the study were 100 from each State within the geo-political zone, while the total number sampled were five hundred (500) respondents. The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire with a four (4) linker scale format. That is, Strongly Agreed (SA), Agreed (A), Disagreed (D), and Strongly Disagreed (SD). The questionnaire was validated by two experts in Social Studies and political science department respectively from Adeniran Ogunsanya College of Education, Otto-Ijanikin. Split-half reliability test was applied to ascertain the internal consistency of the instrument; hence reliability coefficient of 0.77 and 0.80 was obtained for the test respectively. The data collected was analyzed using Chi-square formular.

Results

The method adopted in testing of hypothesis is chi-square (x^2) test of statistics at 0.05 level of significance and (k) degree of freedom where k is the number of options, If x^2 calculated value exceeds x^2 tabulated value and (k-i) degree of freedom, reject the null hypothesis and otherwise accept the null hypothesis.

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant relationship between women empowerment level and women education level to community political development.

Table 1: Women Empowerment and Women Education Level

Variable	N	SL	df	X Cal	X Tab	Decision
Empowerment Level	500	0.05	12	66.19	21.03	Rejected
Education Level						

From table 1, calculated value is greater than tabulated value, the null hypothesis is rejected. Therefore, there is significant relationship between women empowerment level and education level to community political development, this is in consonance with the opinion of Fordham (1983) quoted in Oyekanmi and Orulebaja (2014), Akeusola, Oyekanmi and Shittu (2018) that in the denotative sense, connection has been established between mass illiteracy and poverty, ignorance, disease, famine, oppression, exploitation and political participation. Therefore, the illiterate women are at a clear disadvantage when they try to participate in either the world of work or the world where decisions are made politically, for they are increasingly dependent on others and denied access to western cultures or to further education, above all, they are not able to make a full contribution to the life and work of any nation.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant relationship between women empowerment level and political awareness and contribution within the community.

Table 2: Women Empowerment level and political awareness

Variable	N	SL	DF	X Cal	X Tab	Decision
Empowerment Level	500	0.05	12	90.53	21.03	Rejected
Democracy Awareness						

From table 2, calculated value is greater than tabulated value; hence, the null hypothesis is rejected. Because the empowerment of women has influence on political awareness creation and enlightenment within the community. This result corroborates the views of NCCE (1998), Oniye (2010); Akeusola, Oyekanmi and Shittu (2018) that inferiority complex observable in Nigerian women can be attributed to the influence of environmental manipulation resulting in low political awareness and contributions. For example,

through the traditional socialization process of the typical African society, women are made to accept negative self-fulfilling prophecy, stereotype and stigmatization that they are members of a weaker sex. Also, the forces which combine to hamper women empowerment and development in Nigeria includes denial of access to education, involvement in early marriage, confinement to solitary living, subjugation by culture to accept choices forced on them, discrimination and harassment at work, political disenfranchisement from elective and political appointment and exposure to cruel mourning rites upon the death of their husbands. So, their political involvement is little or next to nothing.

Discussion

In the light of the findings in this study, there is significant relationship between women empowerment level and education level to community political development. This is in consonance with the opinion of Fordham (1983) quoted in Oyekanmi and Orulebaja (2014), Akeusola, Oyekanmi and Shittu (2018) that in the denotative sense, connection has been established between mass illiteracy and poverty, ignorance, disease, famine, oppression, exploitation and political participation. Therefore, the illiterates women are at a clear disadvantage when they try to participate in either the world of work or the world where decisions are made politically, for they are increasingly dependent on others and denied access to western cultures or to further education, above all, they are not able to make a full contribution to the life and work of any nation.

Moreover, the empowerment of women has influence on political awareness creation and enlightenment within the community. This result corroborates the views of NCCE (1998), Oniye (2010); Akeusola, Oyekanmi and Shittu (2018) that inferiority complex observable in Nigerian women can be attributed to the influence of environmental manipulation resulting in low political awareness and contributions. For example, through the traditional socialization process of the typical African society, women are made to accept negative self-fulfilling prophecy, stereotype and stigmatization that they are members of a weaker sex. Also, the

forces which combine to hamper women empowerment and development in Nigeria includes denial of access to education, involvement in early marriage, confinement to solitary living, subjugation by culture to accept choices forced on them, discrimination and harassment at work, political disenfranchisement from elective and political appointment and exposure to cruel mourning rites upon the death of their husbands. So, their political involvement is little or next to nothing.

Conclusion

The democratic contributions of literate and illiterate women to community development through educative programme were viewed. Education for all Nigeria citizenry is the aim and objective of Federal Ministry of Education via the States Ministry of Education. The pertinent question is "Where does Nigeria nation stand today in the measuring scale for EFA?" Therefore, access to primary, secondary and tertiary education should not be denied any girl-child in the country in order to ensure realization of SDGs goal -4, 5 and 10, that is, to "Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all"; "Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls" and "Reduce inequality within and among countries". Hence, women empowerment for proactive democratic participation in Nigeria governance is the answer to sustainable national growth and development in this 21st century and beyond.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study that illiteracy on the part of women is a disadvantage hampering their social cohesion and political inclusiveness in a fast evolving world and that their empowerment through education has influence on political awareness creation and enlightenment within the community, the following recommendation should be considered:

1. Enabling environment should be created for women to participate in all education programmes. Market women should be encouraged to actively participate in programmes that will empower them.

2.   Content methods and strategies of empowerment trainings' should be relevant to the needs of the women folk. To raise self-reliant citizenry that is proactive for sustainable democratic nation's development.

3.   International organizations, civil societies and private sectors should scale up their supports for funding enviable empowerment schemes in the interest of Nigeria women and girl-child. While the three tiers of government should be sincere in the formulation and implementation of empowerment policies as well as programmes targeted at women skills acquisition and development for a better Nigeria.

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