

SOCIO-CULTURAL FACTORS AS CORRELATES OF WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN POLITICS IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The study examined socio-cultural factors as correlates of women's participation in politics in Ekwusigo L.G.A of Anambra State. Two research questions were posed to guide the study. The population for the study was 2,236 card carrying women members of 5 dominant political parties in Ekwusigo L.G.A. However, 224 women participated in the study. A 22-item structured questionnaire was face-validated by three experts. The Cronbach Alpha method was used to determine the internal consistency of the questionnaire items and the co-efficient of 0.90 and 0.92 were obtained. The data obtained was analysed. The results revealed that socio-cultural factors that hinder women's participation in politics include: poverty, limited education and illiteracy, unemployment, prevalence of masculine model of political life and fear of slander and verbal abuse or physical violence against women during or after election among others. Also the result revealed that empowerment of women through formal education and vocational training, media advocacy on women's rights and elimination of all kinds of violence and intimidation during election among others will enhance the political participation of women. Recommendations were made based on the findings of the study.

KEYWORDS: Socio-Cultural Factors, Women's Participation in Politics in Nigeria, Masculine Model, Political Life, Ekwusigo L.G.A

INTRODUCTION

The general trend in the modern world politics is towards democracy, a political system in which power is exercised by the people as a whole disability notwithstanding. This principle supports the people to exercise powers based on their elected representatives whose mandates must be subjected to periodic renewal based on the provisions of the laws of the state in accordance with democratic practice (Afolabi, 2010). Politics refers to the art or science of government or governing, especially the governing of a political entity, such as a nation and the administration and control of its internal and external affairs. Politics also means "any persistent pattern of human relationships that involves, to a significant extent control, influence, power or authority" (Idahosa and Idisi, 2005). Politics is all about sharing power, distribution and exercise of power and this power is vied or sought for. The person who obtained the power has the opportunity to participate actively in the allocation of limited resources in the society. In the view of Nwabuzor and Mueller (1985) politics embraces all social intersections and dispositions which are directly or indirectly aimed at getting binding decisions about who allocates resources, when and how these are obtained in a given social system or society.

In most parts of the globe, politics refers to "polity" which is an institutionalized system by which a society distributes power, sets the society's agenda and makes decisions (Macionis and Geber, 2005). Politics is all about power which brings considerable disagreement around the world as well as in the family. The exercise of power is the sole responsibilities of the government which directs the political affairs in the society. Power involves the ability of one person to wield influence or control the actions of another person or the ability to make things happen or done, to force people do

what you want despite their dislike of carrying out the orders. In other words, political participation can be any activity which aims at changing or influencing the structure of a government, the appointment of leaders and the policies they execute. These activities can have the goal of supporting the existing structures and politics or changing them. They include “active and passive actions, collective or individual, legal or illegal, support or pressure actions, by which one or several persons try to influence the type of government that may lead a society, the way the state of that particular country is led, or specific government decisions affecting a community or their individual members” (Labani, Kaehler and De Dios Ruiz, 2008-2009: 9).

In other words, individuals or people who meet the criteria for selection need to vie or obtain this political power through electoral process or appointment before they can exercise it. Men and women who are qualified can participate in the election process; both sexes can vote and be voted for during election; unfortunately men are favoured more than their women counterparts. This is simply because men dominate the political arena, they formulate the rules of political game and they define or detect the standards for evaluation; and this male dominance results in women either rejecting male political fashion or rejecting politics altogether (Shvedova, 2005 and Parawansa, n.d). studies have shown that women with disabilities show determination and recognize the importance of accessing leadership positions to achieve greater impact unfortunately women around the world at every socio- political level are poorly represented in parliament and are far removed from decision-making levels. Research has shown that women with disabilities are not only marginalized socio economically but also politically. They face the challenge of not only being discriminated against on the ground of being a woman but also being disabled and this greatly limits their capacity to exercise their political rights (Schur, 2003; Handicap international, 2003))Women who want to enter politics find out that the political, cultural, public and social environment is very unfriendly or sometime hostile to them. The reason is that most African countries, Nigeria inclusive are unable to conduct credible elections and this is as a result of “long period of military rule and weak democratic processes which have led to the emergence of a political system characterized by discrimination, electoral violence, monetized politics, low political accountability, abuse and personalization of power, general apathy towards elections and low participation of critical segments of the society especially women” (Afolabi, 2010:1). Also, historical analysis of the constitutions and electoral laws and processes in Nigeria are not gender sensitive, even a critical look at the current composition of political decision makers/ policy makers in any region shows evidence that women still face numerous hindrances in participating in political arena (Shvedova, 2005).

To buttress the issue of under-representation of women in politics, Afolabi (2010) states that from available statistics/records women’s overall political representation and participation in government is less than 7% and the records of Nigeria electoral system shows that 2003 and 2007 elections witnessed unimagined increase in the number of women candidates and increased local mobilization of the majority of women, but at the end very few made it. For instance, out of 339 candidates for House of Representatives, 318 (94%) were men and 21 (6%) women; of 109 Senate, 105 (96.3%) were men while 4 (3.7%) were women and none for governor (100%) and president (100%). Again in 2007 -2011 elections out of 990 Houses of Assembly 936 (94.5%) were men and 54 (5.5%) were women; of 358 Houses of Representatives, 333 (93%) were men while 25 (7%) were women; of 109 Senate 100 (91.7%) were men and 9 (8.3%) were women; none for governor and president (United Nations Committee on Elimination of all Forms of Violence against Women, 2008).

This low participation of women in politics may be as a result of some socio-cultural, political, socio-economic, ideological and psychological factors which include: gender and cultural patterns, ideology, pre- determined social roles assigned to women, male dominance and control, limited access to education and illiteracy, poverty and unemployment, lack of confidence in other women, lack of access to information, conflicting demands on time of women candidates

among others (Afolabi, 2010; Shvedva, 2005; Prarawansa and Inter-Parliamentary Union, 1999). The marginalization and low participation of women ran through all the political parties. For instance, the cultural tradition which supports patriarchy in most African societies upholds that men should be considered first in all human endeavours because women are looked at as second class citizens therefore should be under men's control. Women are relegated to the background and are placed in subordinate positions in the family and the society at large. Men assume leadership positions in the family and take major decisions in the family even at the detriment of women; due to this subjugation, many girls and women are not educated so as not question the authority of men because women education ends in the kitchen as men usually say. Also this culture of patriarchy is a very strong determinant of male dominance over female and as a result men will sit back in the family to keep the family name and lineage growing while women will be married out. Thus men are being trained for leadership activities while women are confined to domestic activities; roles ascribed to them by culture which affect them later in life, thereby making them to lose self confident/worth and have low self- esteem in their career in adult life, politics inclusive. However, in politics, the manifestoes of the parties reveal the inclusion of gender provisions which exists only in theory and not in practice. For instance, "the articles of PDP and APGA titled 'the character of the party' and 'the policy of women' have it that the parties shall be a non tribal, non religious and non sexist democratic organizations (Afolabi, 2010:3) ; it shall promote the emancipation of women by encouraging their representation at all levels devoid of gender discrimination and shall emphasize more on the need to work in accordance with the Beijing declarations and promote gender parity and more inclusive democracy (Moghadam, 1993). But none of the parties abide by the rules guiding the parties on election matters with regard to women's participation.

Similarly, Beijing Platform for Action calls on governments, national bodies private sector and political parties to implement measures to ensure women's equal access to and full participation in power structures and decision making, establish the goal of gender balance in all government bodies and committee, protecting and promotion of equal rights of women and men to engage in political activities. Yet most of these bodies ignore women when it comes to political matters or leadership positions because of the cultural belief that women are weaker sex. Equally the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) upholds the importance of women's involvement in the political machinery of state parties and elimination of discrimination in women's political participation through legal and temporary special measures and affirmative action (CEDAW, 2002).

Consequently, in Ekwusigo local government area, women are highly marginalized and are poorly represented in political activities. Some of the reasons are that culturally, women see politics as masculine activities; and also they are being limited by their domestic chores such as child rearing, care for the family members, poor orientation about what politics entails, illiteracy or limited education and violent political activities. As such, women prefer to vote for men candidates rather than to be voted for. Despite, all these Beijing declarations and party manifestoes, the problem of poor representation and participation of women in political activities in this area of study still persist. This problem could only be reduced through the implementation of government and parties' policies. Implementation of polices and strategies are the most difficult challenges facing Nigeria and her citizens, and also the greatest obstacle to the pursuit of sustainable national development and peaceful co-existence. It is therefore necessary to identify the strategies for enhancing or improving women's participation in politics in the area of study and Nigeria in general for a sustainable national development.

Specifically, the Study Sought to

1. Find out the socio- cultural factors that hinder women's participation in politics.

2. Identify strategies for enhancing or improving women's participation in politics

Research Questions

1. What are the socio- cultural factors that hinder women's participation in politics?
2. What are the strategies for enhancing women's participation in politics?

Hypothesis

There is no significant relationship between socio- cultural factors that hinder women's political participation and strategies to enhance women's participation in politics among the political parties.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Correlation research design was adopted for the study. The design enabled the researcher to assess the relationship among naturally occurring variables with the goal of identifying predictive relationships (Shaughnessy, Zechmeister and Zechmeister, 2003).

Area of the Study

The study was carried out in Ekwusigo Local Government Area of Anambra State, Nigeria. Ekwusigo LGA is made up of twelve electoral wards with two thousand two hundred and thirty six card carrying women members of five dominant political parties.

Population and Sample

The population was 2,236 card carrying women members of 5 political parties in the 12 electoral wards in Ekwusigo local government area of Anambra state. 80 women amongst them have some form of disability (Source: women's general party leader in Ekwusigo L.G.A). The sample was fifty percent (10%) of the entire women which was 224. Simple random sampling technique was used to select the respondents. The women include literate, semi- literate and illiterate women farmers.

Instrument for Data Collection

A structured questionnaire made up of 30 items was developed from literature and used for eliciting information from the respondents. Each questionnaire item was assigned a four- point scale of strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree with the corresponding value of 4, 3, 2, and 1 respectively. Three experts, one from Measurement and Evaluation and two from Sociology of Education from the Faculty of Education, University of Nigeria Nsukka, were used for face validation of the questionnaire items. Cronbach Alpha reliability method was used to determine the internal consistency of the instrument and the coefficient of 0.90 and 0.92 were obtained. The copies of the questionnaire were administered to the respondents by the researcher with the help of three research assistants.

The instrument was administered and collected on the spot to ensure high return of these questionnaire items. The weighted mean was used to analyze the data obtained. A cut-off point of 2.50 and above was used to determine the items that are factors that hinder women's participation in politics and strategies for enhancing women's political participation. Any item with mean rating below 2.50 was regarded as not factors and strategies. Pearson Moment Correlation was used to test the relationship between socio- cultural factors that hinder women's political participation and strategies to enhance women's political participation.

Table 2: Mean Responses of the Strategies to Enhance/Improve Women's Participation in Politics (SEWPP) – Contd.,

S/N	Item Statement	Mean (X)
18.	Women should be empowered through formal education, vocational training for increased access to information+ - and knowledge of the political activities in the society.	3.73 —
19.	Establishment of the goal of gender balance in all government bodies, committees and political parties	3.70
20.	Elimination of all kinds of violence, intimidation and discrimination meted on women by their male counterparts in political parties/arena.	3.60
21.	Women should be motivated and supported by government, non-governmental organizations, women's groups and political parties by implementing measures to ensure women's equal access to power structures and decision making and increase their capacity to participate in leadership.	3.55
22.	Women should encourage themselves by developing a high self-esteem (valuing their potentials) and building up their self confidence level to enable them participate fully in politics.	3.40
	Cluster Mean (\bar{X})	3.65

Based on the analysis it can be observed that mean values of all the items ranged from 3.40 to 3.85. This signified that all the means were above the cut-off point of 2.50. The analysis indicated that the respondents agreed on the identified items as the strategies that will enhance women's participation in politics. The result clearly indicated that women's participation in politics will improve greatly or will be enhanced if these items will be adopted by the government at all levels, political parties, non-governmental organizations and every member of the society.

Table 3: Correlates of Socio-Cultural Factors that Hinder Women's Participation and Strategies to Enhance it.

Variable	X	SD	N	r
FHWPP	3.72	0.13	224	0.864
SEWPP	3.65	0.12		

Table 3 shows a very significant correlation between socio-cultural factors that hinder women's participation in politics (FHWPP) and strategies to enhance women's participation in politics. With a co-efficient 0.864, factors that hinder women's political participation seem to correlate highly with the strategies aimed at enhancing women's participation in politics.

DISCUSSIONS OF RESULTS

The findings of the study revealed 11 factors as hindrances to women's participation in politics (see table 1). The findings agree with the opinions of Afolabi (2010) who explained that poor participation of women in politics is caused gender and cultural patterns, ideology and predetermined social roles assigned to women. The findings were also in agreement with Shvedova (2008) who emphasized that male dominance and control, poverty, unemployment, lack of resources and limited access to education were obstacles to women's participation in politics. Supporting the findings, Inter-Parliamentary Union (1999) remarked that factors responsible for poor participation of women in politics include: lack of access to information, lack of self confidence and self esteem and conflicting demands on time of women candidates/aspirants among others.

The findings of the study as revealed in (table 2) indicated that eleven strategies for enhancing women's participation in politics were identified. The findings of this study were also in agreement with the views of the Moghadam (1993), Afolabi (2010) and CEDAW (2002) who explained that political party system shall be a non tribal, non religious and non sexist democratic organizations, it shall promote the emancipation of women by encouraging their representation at all levels devoid of gender discrimination, it shall promote and protect equal rights of women and men to engage in political activities and to ensure women's equal access to and full participation in power structures and decision making, empower women through formal education and vocational training among others. The result of table 3 showed that there was a significant relationship between socio-cultural factors that hinder women's participation in politics and strategies to enhance women's political participation in politics in the area of the study. This implies that if the strategies are implemented by the political parties and the government, these will go a long way to encourage women to participate in political activities.

CONCLUSIONS

Politics is an institutionalized system by which a nation distributes power and scarce resources of the society; which allows both men and women to vote and be voted for during the electoral processes. Unfortunately, the manners in which these political powers are acquired and distributed make women to be poorly represented in all political activities. Women undoubtedly play very significant roles in the family and national development and as such need to be given the opportunity to participate effectively in political activities in order to contribute their quota to leadership and national development. This could only be achieved through creating enabling or conducive political environment devoid of gender discrimination and all kinds of electoral violence or abuse; without which national development will be incomplete.

The findings of this study implied that for women to participate fully in political activities, implementation and utilization of the strategies enumerated in this study will promote and enhance women's participation in political activities.

RECOMMENDATION

The following recommendations are made:

1. There is need for government to introduce a formal quota system with enforcement mechanisms to increase the number of women members of the legislature irrespective of any form of disability.
2. There is the need for government and the political parties to introduce political, institutional and financial guarantees that promote women's candidacies to ensure the equal participation of female nominees in electoral campaigns.
3. The government and the political parties should create or establish educational programmes and centres designed to prepare women for political careers.
4. There is also the need for women empowerment through providing access to formal education and vocational training (skill acquisition centres) for poverty reduction to enable them to participate in political activities and national development.

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