

AN ASSESSMENT OF FACTORS AFFECTING WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN NIGERIA LABOUR CONGRESS

Mustapha Alhaji Ali
Department of Political Science,
Yobe State University, Damaturu.

Abstract

Virtually, every government policy in world claim to support women participation in labour unionism. Every regime in the last two decade switches their language if not strategies to the new empowerment mantra. Yet excellent policies and intentions have not translated into reality or action to make the changes required if women are to participate effectively to the nation development. The national gender policy is yet to bear fruits, while implementing the convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women (the women Bill) has stall. But gender in equality has become a universal phenomenon more especially in third world nations; gender inequality at the political level has become much more rampant in this present political dispensation which has affected the political development of the third world nations. In this world today gender inequality has affected the world socially, economically, politically and even intellectually. This paper will critically examine how gender inequality has affected the world in many ways. E g, it affects government in policy and decision making as women constitute half of the world population. It has also affected the nations educationally more especially in the African nations where only few women are allow to participate in any unions of their choice. Hence the government should put it into constitution the right for women to participate in any unions of their choice in order to bridge the wide gap between men and women in order to sustain equal development in the world.

Keywords: assessment, factors, women, participation and labour congress

INTRODUCTION

Women constitute half of the world's population and have contributed significantly to the well-being of human race. African colonial experience contributed significantly to the current marginalization of women on the continent prior to colonialism, women in many African countries occupied few positions of power in specific sphere of social life. These situations have not changed under colonialism.

In third world nations for instance, women have always played five key roles –mothers, producers, home managers, community organizers, and social cultural and political activist. Despite their large number and crucial functions, the division of power between the male and female sexes as prescribed by most cultures, assign the subordinate position to women. As a consequence, women have for long suffered various forms of discrimination, inequality, exclusion and violence in third world nations. In African nations women are regularly exposed to various forms of physical, psychological, sexual and emotional violence. This can be traced to the unequal power relations in the society between men and women and the pervading patriarchal norms that support the inequality. Hence, no any nation can prosper if half of its resources are neglected (women).

Women in third world nations have been under represented in the labour unionism; simply because they command very limited economic resources and that the prevailing cultural norms see their place as being in the home. It is not surprising that women are grossly under-represented in labour unionism in Africa and decision making position in most nations. Indeed, it has been estimated that women make up half of the population in

the world (Encarta 2006). It is important to note that religious precepts are sometimes used to subjugate women. Islamic injections are usually cited as justification for confining women in 'purdah' as is done in some part of the African countries and to give away girls in early marriage and thereby deprive them of education and effective participation in the labour union of their choice.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The paper, is very important in many ways, it will help the unions to identify and understand that women under-representation is a serious problem affecting labour unionism in third world nations. Hence, such knowledge will help in making feature decisions. The study would serve as a reference point to scholars in research and in similar area, so also to policy and decision makers in both private and public sectors. This paper will also help in motivating women to participate in any unions of their choice. It would be useful to government and women organizations. The result or outcome of the research will be useful to other unions, researchers, policy makers, governmental and non-governmental organizations in the world, and to students writing or conducting research on similar topic. It will also help in bridging the gap or encouraging women to participate in labour unions. It will also expose the effect of women under-representation in labour unionism, at both individual and societal level.

Factors Affecting Women Participation in Labour Unionism

There are a lot of factors affecting women participation in unionism in the third world nations. Among are;

i. Poverty; women do not have enough resources to enable them participate effectively in labour union of their choice. Majority of them are found in rural areas, with few of them involved in economic activities that do not generate enough resources. Most of them are peasant farmers, petty traders with just subsistent income. The economic situation has heightened this problem. Very few women have the economic power to finance themselves in unionism, they have to depend on their husbands or close family relations to sponsor them. These people in cases do not encourage them because they see unionism as waste of time and resources.

ii. Religion and some other socio cultural factors account for some of the strategy used to exclude women from labour unionism. In the third world nations, women are excluded and not allowed to participate in any public matters like trade unionism. There is the belief in some culture that women cannot lead but to be led and that it is an abomination for women to lead men. African culture has separate roles for men and women. Women areas are in the home and family (private sphere) while that of men is the public this has in many ways affect the nations building.

iii. Low level of education is another factor affecting women participation in labour unionism, although, women do not have equal educational opportunities with their male counterparts. This is as a result of our cultural attitudes where the girl child education is not what parents bother about. They believe girls should get married, raise children and be cared for by their husbands. However, there are some women that are more talented and progressive than some men, if given the opportunity they will contribute their quarter toward nation building.

iv. This traditional stereotype that work against gender equality and occupational opportunities between men and women in place of work / business makes it impossible for few women to be found in high hierarchy of occupations, this constitutes a serious problems because it is here that leaders are recruited. Women constitute the majority in jobs of lower status, like cleaners, primary school teachers nursing secretary.

v. Lack of interest by the women. The ability of women to pursue union activities is low. JS Mills (cited in Held 1987) on his role of women in politics explain that "if there were a just state of things most women would rightly choose as the first call upon her exertions to marry, raise children and manage house work exclusive. Some time, lack of interest by women in labour union is borne out of their socialization and the belief that politics and leadership are not for women.

vi. Time constraint a large proportion of women's time is allocated in household duties. Any union active women member must be ready to devote a large part of her time to the union activities. Women participation in the unions is hindered by family and domestic obligations. They cannot cope with combining their roles as mothers and unionism especially holding elective or appointive positions that are tasking.

vi. The timing of union meetings. Because of their commitment the unions prepare to hold meeting at the

night, this also affect women participation in labour unionism.

THE CONCEPT OF GENDER

Recently United Nations Organization has called for the elimination of gender discrimination in remunerations in the workplace advocating equal pay for equal work which brings out the best in people regardless of gender. Nigeria with an estimated population of 140 million people, it is common knowledge that Nigeria is the most populous country in sub-Saharan Africa. But poverty remains a widespread issue in Nigeria; nine out of ten Nigerians live on less than US\$2 a day just as the population keeps growing at an astronomical rate of 3.2% per year, Nigerian women make up a good proportion of the huge population of the country and they have equally remained the most impoverished segment of the society all thanks to antiquated and appalling laws, customs and norms contributing in no small measure to keeping them on the breadline.

Their inability to leverage on their number may not only be attributed to their lack of political and economic consciousness or their lack of will power to surmount challenges from their male counterpart. The pledge of President Goodluck Jonathan to conduct credible election and the drive to have more women contribute to national development through active participation in politics and labour unionism. About 5,000 women politicians from the 52 registered political parties in the country were invited to the summit which started with plenary sessions at the international conference centre Abuja, at least one hundred (100) women from each of the 36 states and the federal capital territory were present at the summit to draw up a national women political agenda for 2011 and beyond. Society cannot progress unless men and women, young and old, have equal chances to achieve their potential, the Chairman of Media Trust Limited, Malam Kabiru A. Yusuf has said.

According to the minister of women affairs and social development , the summit was an opening to mobilize women to participation in the build –up in the 2011 general elections and beyond, especially in creating a critical mass of support for female candidates and lobby groups. Anenih said that the summit will also examine the role and responsibilities of stakeholders in engendering the election of female political office holders in Nigeria. She added that a special session with the political parties was also expected to identify gender friendly political parties in Nigeria. The summit also underlined the need for Nigeria women to register with existing political parties in the country as well as cast their votes for their preferred candidates, all of which will guarantee their even participation in the democratic process. While addressing the large gathering of women at the summit, the minister further explained that it was not something new to mobilize the women for any particular registered political party in the country. The summit paved the way for Nigerian women to express their displeasure at their political status and shut-out from mainstream politics by the society. One thing that they

left the summit with is an obvious realization of the strength and potential in their number as well their resolve to play an all inclusive politics to the benefit of their colleagues. (*Sunday Guardian*, July 21, 2002).

ECONOMY

Gender inequalities within the overall society, and across all sectors, reflect the wide disparities between women and men which, in turn, contribute to uneven development and the feminization of poverty. Among the 70% of the population estimated to be living below poverty line, over 65% are projected to be women. Income and purchasing power is estimated to be US\$1,495 for men as compared to US\$614 for women and men have greater access to high-paying, secure employment. For example, 76% of Federal Civil Service workers are men, whereas women make up 24% of the workforce and occupy less than 14% of the overall management positions, despite the appointment of women to the position of permanent secretaries (beginning in 2000 and in line with affirmative action initiatives). Additionally, approximately 17.5% of medical doctors are women whereas 82.55 are men. These disparities have a significant impact on the capacity of women and men to contribute to the economic growth of the country, the reform agenda, and efforts to reduce dependency ratios within family units and achieve the desired value reorientation goal of government. Other indications of gender inequalities include disparities in participation within the formal sector which stands at 87% men with 11% women compared to 30% men engaged in the industrial sector. The extractive industry with annual business volume of over US\$42m has almost zero level participation of women.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

As there are many theories related to gender, the researcher uses liberal feminist theory as theoretical frame work. This theory is of the view that all people (male and female) are born equal therefore equal opportunities should be given to them and that the women marginalization and subordination arose because of non recognitions and implementation of this theory (Sha, 2007). The liberal feminist warns that nobody should benefit from this existing gender differences because both male and female are important in the development of the society. So they should be treated equally. And added that no society can prosper if half of its resources are neglected, (women). This theory is trying to bridge the wide gap between male and female, its emphasizes that women should be given equal opportunities to participate in day to day activities as their male counterpart in order to have sustained equal development in the third world nations, The theory also try to eradicate sexism and stereotypical view of women and men from children's books and mass media, in all human endeavor. This would have been the way to bridge the gap between men and women in the Nigeria labour congress in particular and the world in general. (Microsoft Encarta 2007).

CONCLUSION

This paper has tried to examine the factors that affect women participation in labour unionism in third world nations. The above mentioned factors work against women's participation in the labour union, especially their access to high labour office. Women have contributed in no small measure to the labour unions movement in Nigeria. Right from the colonial time to present administration, women have made progress but unfortunately the progress is too slow that impacts are not felt. The male dominated structures of the African nations and have marginalized the women in many developmental programmes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Since poverty is a factor to women participation in the Labour union, economic empowerment could be a better way of enhancing women participation in labour unions. The poverty alleviation programmes will be implemented in the third world nations. The only scheme for the women is the women empowerment scheme. Where they are thought to knit, sew etc this is not positive enough to remove or reduce poverty in order to have equal development.
2. Reverse discrimination from experience has been seen as the best way to enhance women participation and representation in the labour unionism. This is a strategy where labour unions and the government would reserve mandatory posts for women, at least 35-40% candidate slots should be reserved for women in the labour unions and government appointments.
3. Nigerian labour union should formulate programmes that will encourage women to participate in labour unionism, to take up posts and to ensure that labour unions nominate women for elective offices. The government should make a law that will encourage women participation in labour unionism.
4. Women wing in Nigerian labour congress should be used as forum to discuss their union problems and ways to improve them, by organizing workshops and seminars.
5. Important union meeting should be done in the day time instead of at night. This is the usually the case and that they should be done at the union office instead of residential houses. This would allow them to participate because some would not like to attend night meeting or their husband would not allow them.
6. There is need to educate women. Education is the bedrock of any nation building and if women who constitute more than half of our population lack it, it would have serious effect on nation building. Basically, women need to know how to read and write. They should know their constitutional rights and duties. A good educational qualification will enable them take up issues and improve their chances of being put forward for leadership positions in labour unionism.
7. Women in media can help in enlightenment by making women realize their importance in unionism. This is through show casing the contribution of women in the labour unions. This will eventually imbue other women to join and participate actively in nation building. The women in the media should also make known to the public the number of women in the labour unions.

8. The non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and women in mobilization activities can help organize workshops, seminars, lectures as avenue to train women to acquire necessary skills and enlightenment that will help in their participation in the labour unions.
9. Religious leaders should encourage women to participate in any unions of their choice, because they too they have some important role to play in their unions.
10. Parent should also encourage their daughters to take part in any unions of their choice.

REFERENCES

Abati, R. Cross Road, (2002) The Sunday Guardian Vol. 19 No. 8644.

Abdu. H (2001) Women and Politics in Nigeria. A gender for Political Participation. A publication of WIN

Afigbo, A. E. (1991a). "Women in Nigeria History", Ijere, M. O. (Ed.) Women in Nigeria Economy. Enugu: Acena Publishers.

Anne Ikpeme. (2004) "Profile on Josephine Anenih" in Women Marginalization and Politics in Nigeria OSIWA, Global right Lagos.

Bashir, M. (2010) gender as a crucial issue. Paper Presented in Abuja on 21 January 2010
Daily Trust. Tuesday, June 14, 2011.

Enemu. (1999) 'Gender and Women Empowerment' in Element of Politics Remi Anifowose and Francis. Enemu. (Ed) Malthouse press Ltd Lagos.

Fapohunda, E. R. (1978) Women at Work in Nigeria: Factors Affecting Modern Sector Goodin, J. M. (1983). Working Women: The Pros and Cons of Unions, Tinker, I. (Eds.) Women Washington: California: Sage Publishers".

Okoronkwo A. O. (1985) Women Participation in Labour unions. Fashoyin et al (Eds.) Women in the Modern Sector Labour Force in Nigeria Issues; and Prospects. Nigeria, University of Lagos