THE ISSUE OF GENDER INEQUALITY IN NIGERIA

Linda Anyalebechi
Medical Library - College of Medicine
Chukwuemeka Odumegwu University Teaching Hospital, Amaku Awka

Abstract
The paper is a foray of issues in gender inequality in Nigeria with a view to proffering solutions. Gender inequality has been a topical issue in academic debate in Nigeria. In spite of the extensive discussions in various conferences, academic debate and fora the issue of gender imbalance and poor women participation in politics is still very low. In the light of the identified constraints solutions were proffered.

Keywords: Gender, Discrimination, Subjugate.

Introduction
The term gender is derived from the Latin noun, which means kind or group. Recently the word was used as a grammatical concept to classify word into masculine and famine. Today the connection of gender is being untidily used to denote the different and unequal perceptions, views, roles, relevance or rewards that a society assigns to the two sex categories, discrimination happens to both male and female in individual situations, particularly the female, or women group. The act of subjugating women is an inherent tradition, which has consistently been kept in an active state and coupled with its debilitating ability. As society has been grappling with the problem of creating a fair, just and equitable arrangement among different people, the mainstream agenda of development is challenged through; how to enhance the role of women in politics and governance. There is no human society where women are not discriminated or marginalized. Women are an entrenched, global pandemic. Udegbe (2004) specifically explained that male and female goes along with a number of stereotype that virtually imposes both role performances, possibilities of different kinds. That is why Margaret (1982) confirms that women have been traditionally designated to occupations, which require such skills with cultural values. To Agbalajobi (2010) the key point that lead to discrimination against women has its roots in the nature of our societies which celebrate men as being unique, stronger and fit for the public space while women are feeble and weak meant to stay within the confluence of the private space. All these are consequences of cultural norms of the society which are embraced by the people of the world.

Factors inhibiting women participation in politics
1. Discriminatory Culture and Norms:
Agbalajobi 2010 postulates that the cultures of many societies are based by subjugating women to men, and undermining their self-esteem. Women are typically associated with domesticity according to Abiola in Lanre (2003), Gender inequality remain pervasive in many dimensions of life, the nature and extent of the discrimination very considerably across countries and regions.
In Nigeria, the female are discriminate, even in the families. Consistently, men were trained not to partake in most domestic chores such as cooking, sweeping, fetching water and firewood, which are exclusively left for women. In favor of this, Ihimodu (1995) agree that women were relegated to the domestic sphere that were not renovated or valued. In line with these, Ogwu (1992) observed the implementation of gender differences are created and sustained by society through its traditional customs, conventions, norms and regulations. Obikeze (2006) posits that family responsibilities and child bearing to women makes women not to feature in public matters as they are likely to be away on maternity leave and other household matters and that are likely to take them away from the scene of politics. Anya (2003) believes that the basis of societal norms regulate women to the background when he explains that the greatest dangers to the practice is the internationalization of these belief system which make women see politics as something out of their spheres. As Anya (2003) wrote that the society sees women who go to politics as rebels and prostitutes, this attitude differs women from participating in politics. Actually, the tradition or cultural beliefs in Nigeria as a typical patriarchal society see women as property of her husband who has moral right to decide the actions which the woman will take, whether she will come out to join the active politics is a matter which the man will decide since the tradition has ascribed the headship of the family to the man. In the concept of inequality and subordination of women to men, there is no relationship, and women are like slaves working to enrich their husbands and masters, who the tradition has ascribed the pillar of the family and the key to continuation and retention of the family name. Ogunabayo (2011) added that Marriage institutions are still in the hands of the males, many sons after the death of their fathers try to push away their matters from the property and a also a woman have no custody of the children from her marriage in the events of divorce, making the women in question an object of caricature and of unimportance to the society. Vividly, in the cultural and marriage institution choice of life partner, young girls are denied the right to choose their husbands, or even forced into early marriage, into the life of a man whether love is there or not. More so, in marriage institution, some practice polygamy while some cases resulted to progeny syndrome; families without a male child are deprived some rights and privilege. In some society, this enhances involvement in polygamous families and the concept of inequality and subordination of women to men. Furthermore, women are being restricted from access to sources of power both economically, politically, socially and otherwise. Conversely, the women in Igbo land are forbidden from being where men are discussing issues concerning landed property. Moreover, in Nigerian society, the role of men and women are socially constructed in such a way that the women occupy an inferior position in the scheme of things. There are many obstacles and prejudices that prevents women from participating in the social activities or even owing properties, the society regards women as things to be possessed, as objects of rights rather than regards them fit. Take for instance, women are not allowed to bail somebody out of the police cell or to stand as a surety for somebody. Decades ago in Igbo land, women are equally forbidden from going to the section of the market were they are selling meat since they are culturally forbidden to eat meat and egg which men thought will motivate women to steal. Therefore, cultural norms are unfavorable to the women folk. So, women need to embark on education as the only inspiration to redress their flight.

2. **Educational Factors:** Another constraint that hampers women from equal access to politics or encounter restricting their quest to participate in active politics. Afolabi (2003) specifiable sates that most women in Nigeria are illiterate despite the facts that they constitute half of the country’s population. Regardless, of the vital key roles they perform in the society; mother, producer, home
manager, community organizer, social-cultural and political activities. Anifowose (2004) postulates that most families prefer to send their male child to school, irrespective of the fact that female children are more important to attend school. In the words of Jonathan (2011) “Train a boy, you have trained a nation” in the same vein, Alita (2011) emphasis that parents prefers to send their son to school instead of their daughters whom they feel will after, get married and thus get incorporated into another family. Therefore, the girls’ education is not pertinent as they are expected to marry, bear children and stay at home to nurture their children and the young girls are to nurture their siblings and to be married off at tender age. To Makinnen (1989) it is not. Gaub (2004) analyses the report of the United Nations that women constitute 70% of the world’s illiterate. Gender gaps are spread in access to educational opportunities. Achieving literacy education is the most crucial step to enabling literate women to take control over their lives to participate as equals in society. Education gives women a sense of belonging in the society, as it will encourage them to make a positive impact in their chosen carrier. Though the discrimination that makes women less likely to have access to paid employment has a negative impact, economic disparity favors men to the disadvantage of women. Green (2006) noted that when a woman is professionally empowered, she will make use of her endowment in a way that her entire family will benefit from it. Surprisingly, the women constitute the majority of illiterate population; larger percentage of the girls remains uneducated and unexposed. Makinnen (1989) affirms that this marginally increases illiteracy in women and stiffen their competition with their male counterparts in politics. Invariably, lack of education makes women ineligible for either elective or appointment position. Professionally empowered, she will make use of her endowment in a positive way.

3. Economic Factors: lack of economic incentives is one of the factors preventing women from participating to active politics in Nigeria. Historically, women experiences discrimination that put them at a disadvantage economically. Agbalajobi (2009) emphasis that lack of finance brings hindrance to effective female participation in Nigerian Politics. Similarly, large portion of the Nigerian female population is not as financially strong as their male counterparts. Political campaigns are expensive and require solid financial backing for success. Only a few affluent women have the financial economic power to enroll in political campaigns. Consequently, political financiers or sponsors of politicians prefer male candidate to female one, Anifowose (2004). Life for women is on the average not only hard and poorly compensated, it is dangerous due to sexual division of labour and job opportunities offered on sex basis has given men productive gender roles enabling them to possess more purchasing power over their female counterparts. Discrimination plays out in the preferential treatment within the job economy. Presently, economic system, which is based on acute competition everywhere in the world, is always a very expensive project, while men are willing to take risks, including taking loans or selling their properties to finance their electoral campaign. Women are verse to taking risks, or lack tangible properties to take off. Women political aspirations have been grossly incapacitated by lack of financial bedrock to subsist their endeavors.

4. Political factors and rule of Law:
According to Anifowose (2004), the perception that democracy would automatically boast gender equality in political participation has not been vindicated after years of return to civilian rule in Nigeria. Specifically Kira (2003) infers that women are unjustifiably discriminated against
irrespective of the fact that world over today; democracy has become a vital tool for attaining sustainable development. The impact of democracy remains elusive for women. Political participation, which is a sine-quanon of democracy allows for diversity of opinion and participation of both men and women into political gathering.

The constitution of Federal Republic of Nigeria states that human beings are equal and women possess the same rights as men to participate in governance and public life. In Nigeria, women are to inherit their late husband’s property. Often, these rights are being violated due to one reason or the other. In the same bid, Ogwu (1996) states that statutory and Islamic law provides for women’s capacity to inherit assets following the husband’s death.

In practices, this is often overridden by local customary laws on succession. Uche (2008) opines that women are the chattels of men who are the head of the family saddled with the responsibilities to provide for the cross-check. Therefore, there is a mutup. Hitherto, the statutory laws in some African countries do not give recognition to women as equal to men. Until 1988, a married Nigerian woman was given discriminating leave and housing allowance which her husband obtained rebate in taxation on her behalf and her four children.

Earlier in 1948, when declaration of human rights was being worked out, an earlier draft which stated “All men are equal” was changed to “All human beings are equal” female members of the drafting committee insisted on the change of the language. The United Nations chapter also pledges equal opportunity for men and women.

The 1995 Beijing declaration demanded for 30 percent women representation in government. Thus, in 2000, the United Nations also proclaimed eight points Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), one of the objectives targeted for the year 2015 is the goal of women empowerment and gender equality. Similarly, some African countries have made progress in giving better access to women in political representation. Uganda, Cameroon and Mozambique have achieved measurable result.

According to the United Nations human development index, women in Mozambique and Cameroon have 16 and 14 percent quota respectively, reserved for them in Parliament. Currently, Gabon has actively promoted gender parity to the level that the countries now boast of women generals in its army. Presently, Uganda’s vice president is a woman. However, in recent times, successive Nigerian government, in reaction to the various international conventions and covenants on women have undertaken legislative and administrative reforms that would give women full access to economic and productive resources.

The constitution of Nigeria takes cognizance of the disadvantaged position of women and has no provision for gender equality. There is nothing in the constitution redressing the disparities existing along gender lines. In other words, the Federal character principle which is meant to ensure equitable representation of states and ethnic groups in National appointments, actually places women at additional disadvantage by implying that they can only represent their states of origin.

In the same vein, the political parties have so far not demonstrated any inclination to introduce mechanisms for equal representation within the party executives as required by the creation of post of the women leader, most political parties in Nigeria fail to adopt any system to increase the number of women holding party offices. The injustice behind some oblique references to the women’s lifestyle, which shows that Nigeria electorate are still largely based against women, clearly float section 191 of the Beijing declaration and platform of action which require political parties to remove all barriers that clearly discriminate against women participation in politics.
According to Okoghenun (2011) man is inclined to injustice, therefore, democracy is necessary. This assertion underscored the imperativeness of women participation in democratic government. Hence, it is obvious that men have gone beyond inclination, but from time to time, dished out unbelievable dose of injustice to the female gender. For women, they have sincerely left their future in the hands of uncompromising brothers and husbands.

Although, the Nigerian Constitution states that all human beings are equal, obviously, the nation has not achieved equality of male and female in all spheres of leadership. Aluko (2004) suggests that for over a decade right from the time the country gained independence till date, men formulate policies and their decision reflects human experiences and potential not of the constitution. Nigeria constitution gives both men and women the opportunity and right to the benefits of equal and full participation in all activities of life. Ibemere (2011) emphasizes that the removal of necessary barrier that impinges on women’s right to participate actively in politics will assist the achievement of the societal peace and harmony in the scheme of national leadership. Women must be involved to contribute to the goals and aspirations of the nation. Women should be ultimate on the decision making at all levels both nationally and internationally. Simply, Akpoveta (2011) suggests that the prospects of Nigerian politics will be bright if women are allowed to participate effectively in politics.

The 1999 Census figure show the numerical increase of women more than men. Aluko (2000) infers that unless women strive harder, they may still have to remain the passive old self without having the chance to contribute meaningfully in the decision-making. Attah (2011) states that women need to be involved politically in order to force their issues on the discussion agenda, even at the household level, women should be involved in family decision-making. Inam (2011) noted that some of these obstacles highlighted earlier have been removed through the efforts of some past Nigeria First Ladies. While the efforts of early famous Nigerian politicians which nictitated female participation in politics, such women as Margret Ekpo, Mrs.Kuti etc.

To buttress these points further, Editorial (2011) put it that life is a challenge and we can only meet the challenges on our feet not on our knees. Women must not sit down hoping that men will change their attitude towards them. Concrete effort has to be made positively on the part of women. Rosaldo (1994) confirms that these have resulted in an improvement in the status of women. Women now enjoy greater participation in governance and its institutions. More women occupy Ministerial positions and seats in Parliament. For example, during the 2003 – 2007 administration, there were six women ministers out of thirty-four, and ten women special advisors out of thirty-five, as well as twenty-one female representatives out of three hundred and sixty.

In election campaign, women are nominated as women leaders in the grassroots politics within communities, local government, state and national government.

**Solution to The Constraints Of Their Marginalization In All Spheres Of Their Existence:** In accordance to these, pope John XXII as quoted by Okojie (1999) since women are becoming ever conscious of their human dignity, they will not tolerate being treated as merely rational instruments but demand rights befitting of human person, both in domestic and public life. Actually, in every human being, the inferiority complex which endure for hundreds of years is disappearing while in others there is gradual feeling of the corresponding superiority complex which had its roots in socio-economic privileges, sex and political standing. William (2011) believes that the future in which our generation is part of, has really not catch the vision for improved relations between men and women in the society adequately because of the high level of illiteracy among women fold.
Women must see the need to come up strong and active as a single tree can never make a forest, women must resolve collectively to change their condition for good so that they can provide the basis for the future of the coming generation.

**Colonization and gender inequality**

According to Eshiet (2015) prior to colonization by the British, women in the communities that comprised cotemporary Nigeria exerted tremendous influence in the socio-political and economic spheres of their various communities. Women’s voice constitutes a vital political ‘voice’ that could not be ignored.

In Igbo land the functions of daughters (Umuada) are pertinent in various communities. Obetta (2004) affirms that Nigerian women before the arrival of Europeans had important position in our social scheme of things. Thus, women were active participant in the decision-making and administrative processes of their various communities. Awe (1992) in Eshiet (2015) states that women views were considered as important and critical factors to community life, therefore, women in these societies occupied a position that was complementary to that of men rather than subordinate to men.

During these period, men and women enjoyed same relevance. Male and female were farmers and compete equally in farming cultivation. In some part of Igbo land, women were reputed to own barns and in some part of Igbo land, the women were to engage most men in all forms of social competitions.

Perhaps there are some areas in which men out law women from engaging in, like masquerades. During that period, female personalities were head of their communities, like Queen Amina of Zaria that ruled Zaria for thirty four years, also in the Yoruba Kingdom; women were being head of the custody of the palace treasury and they act as the eyes, ears, in all the activities within the empire and were being referred to as ladies of the palace.

Also in Igbo land, the female native doctors (Eze Nwaanyi) are often more respected than the native doctors (Dibia) there was nothing like females discrimination. Aderemi (2011) emphasizes that the advent of colonization and the Victorian ideology of the exclusion of women from the public sphere practiced by the colonial government altered in this arrangement. Colonialism reinforced indigenous gender hierarchies negatively and this push women to the background.

Afolabi (2003) states that as colonial economic development set in men now started to capitalize on the traditional obligation of women providing labour in their husband’s firms. Margaret (1982) explains that right from all its adherents, in reality, these teachings were differently interpreted and applied in making women to be subject to men. Through the much orchestrated tents in the Bible which is the instrument which the colonial masters came with to convert the people from pagans to Christianity. From that period men started feeling superior to women whom Christianity through the Bible emphasizes that they should be under their husband and the Bible refer to women as a weaker vessel.

Men took over everything as regards to the affairs of the society. While women stay in the house to take care of the children and domestic works hence stay at home or indoors. Women started to have a notion that men are superior. To be kings, they take decision for the family and the communities. Women were not allowed to take part in the decision of the family; any woman that talked in the front of men will be regarded as disrespectful. Women were not to be heard thus, women felt that political participation was meant for men alone and any women that partakes in the economic, social and political aspect of life will be regarded as a prostitute. These fact is as a result of the belief that any woman that get involve into politics must use her body which means sleeping around with men at the corridors of power to consolidate with their powers in the society.
These perceptions readily draw women backwards psychologically, so to prove to the society, the women go home and seat for the men to do the activities of life, since politics is often dirty game. Therefore, men are in the forefront of politics while women lack behind in education, economics, political and other social activities. However Akiyode (2005) postulates that gender inequality in Nigerian politics has a lot of damaging effect on women, as women and children violence abound within the home. The grievous harm sustained by most women in the name of discipline by men is indeed very painful, there is no law protecting women against domestic violence or wife battery. Women face various forms of sexual assault such as rape, indecent assault, incest and defilement including widowhood practices. Therefore, women should be the one to champion the affairs of women in the society.

References

Aderemi Kehinde – Daily Sun Friday April 15, 201, page 16.


Agbalajobi, Damilola (2010) women’s participation and the political process in Nigeria.

Akiyode, E (2005), a paper presented at a national workshop on Gender and Development.

Akpveta Rotarian Grace – Sunday Sun April 17, 2011 page 36.


Paradox of Gender Equality in Nigeria: Politics Concept Publication Lagos.


Attah Aloysius; The Guardian Saturday January 22, 2011, page 80


Ebere (2003), Gender Inequality and Women Participation in Politics: The Nigeria Experience

Gaub, O. (2004), an introduction to political theory Delhi Macmillan, India.

Gender Audit and IPUPARLINE database (2012).

Gender Inequality and women participation in politics file:///C:/Documents and settings.


Makkinnen, A.C (1989), Toward a fernimsa theory of the state University Press.


Ogunabayo, Modupe (2016) News watch


Okojie (1999) women empowerment As an effective strategy for enhancing the Community Management of Development Project in Enugu State.


Oluremi, Tinubu: The Guardian Tuesday, October 18, 2011.


William, Alabi Bisi (2011); A centenary of advancing status of women. The guardian, march 10, 2011, p. 15.