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Women's Participation and Gender Issues in Local Governance in Nigeria

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Abstract

Local governance, interpreted as the active involvement of the local population in ensuring improved quality of service and leadership at the local level, involves greater participation by civil society in decision-making processes. The paper examined women's participation and the prevailing gender issues in local governance in Nigeria. Analysis in the paper derived from an empirical study of gender issues and women participation in local governance at Amuwo-Odofin Local Government in Lagos State and Ilorin West Local Government of Kwara State. Qualitative methods such as focus key informant interviews, personal observation and focus group discussions were used to generate data for the study. The study discovered that the Nigerian society, operating largely on patriarchal sentiment, allocates sensitive and powerful political posts for men and deliberately marginalises women at the local level. Also, in the absence of a gender policy, planning and budgeting did not target gender equity goals and women's rights and empowerment programmes were hardly implemented at the local level. Given the devolved nature of governance in Nigeria, the paper concluded that local government represents an important political space that can strengthens good

governance by ensuring that women's interests are represented in policy making and service delivery.

Key Words: Gender issues, local governance, women empowerment, women participation

Introduction

In the context of on-going democratic reforms, there has been a renewed interest to promote the participation of women in public-decision making at the local government level. Gender equality in politics and women economic empowerment are largely seen as part of developmental agenda of current liberalisation project. Women issues have now become an integral part of contemporary governance discourse and this is largely due to the increasing recognition of women as positive contributors to economic and political developments. It has also been argued that the quest for sustainable democratic governance requires active involvement of all shareholders, including women (Fasake, 2004). In this context, the role of women in good governance and nation-building cannot be over emphasized. Equal or better representation of women is considered very important for the proper development of any country, and the seriousness devoted to this is reflected in the declaration of Affirmative Action by the United Nations Conference on Women in Beijing (Economic Commission for Africa, 2010).

The rationale for promoting women's participation in political dispensation is based on equity, quality and development. Four interrelated areas of concern are emerging from on-going studies of gender inequality in political representation. These are: (i) structural impediments attributed to patriarchal ethos and entrenched gender biases that impede women's representation in governance processes; (ii) institutional barriers and failures to systemize, domesticate and enforce gender equity instruments; (iii) contextual challenges, such as violent conflicts, political instability, and reconfiguration of political power; and (iv) internal challenges within women's movements and networks (Ekiyor & Lo, 2009, p. 23). The current democratization process is characterized by consistent and conspicuous under-representation of women in elective and appointive positions of leadership despite the fact that women are estimated to be 50% of the population of over 140 million, and registered voter population of about 70 million. Nigeria women remain marginal to men when measured by social, economic and human development indicators (INEC, 2013, p.18).

Local governance is interpreted as the active involvement of the local population within the territorial boundaries of a local government in ensuring improved quality of service and leadership at the local level. It includes greater participation by civil society in decision-making processes and involves consensus-building and civic

awareness (Ofei-Aboagye, 2000, p.2). The Federal Government of Nigeria, through the 1976 Local Government Reforms, described Local Government as the government at local level, exercised through representative councils established by Law to exercise specific power within defined areas (FGN, 1976). Local government refers collectively to administrative authorities over areas that are smaller than a state. The term is used to contrast with offices at state level, which are referred to as the central government, national government, or (where appropriate) federal government. Local government, generally acts within powers delegated to it by legislation or directives of the higher level of government and each country has some kind of local government which differ from those of other countries. Federal states such as the United States and Nigeria have two levels of government above the local level: the state government and the federal government whose relations are governed by the constitution.

As the level of government closest to the community, local government bears direct witness to the persistent and extreme poverty and chronic hunger which still beset people at the grassroots; the damage caused by natural disasters and environmental degradation; the impact of the global recession and of high food and fuel prices on local people; and to the effects of discrimination and social exclusion. In tackling such problems, local governments must be seen as critical components of integrated systems of governance. A higher percentage of the people in the Nigeria live at the grassroots and women account for a larger percentage; therefore, the local government is expected to touch their lives in terms of development programmes targeted at bringing about social transformation at the locality (Ighodalo, 2009).

This paper adopted the gender and governance discourse as its analytical framework. A gender analysis of governance highlights the critical interdependence between participation, representation and responsiveness. Balanced participation is an important step towards improving the quality of governance. For this to happen, there is need for well-conceived social inclusion and equity-oriented policies in all areas, perused by a critical mass of social equity oriented women and men who should occupy key positions in judiciary, and executive and legislative functions of the state (European Commission, 1992). The paper focuses on the nature and importance of local governance; gender issues in local governance; socio-cultural factors affecting women's participation in local governance and; an empirical analysis of gender issues and political participation in Amuwo-Odofin and Ilorin West local governments of Nigeria.

Methodology

A variety of qualitative methods were used to conduct a gender situation-analysis of political participation and developmental issues at the Amuwo-Odofin Local Government in Lagos State and Ilorin West Local Government of Kwara State.

These methods include: a review of relevant literature to examine the nature of governance broadly and local governance, specifically. The review also examines gender issues in politics and development. The literature review also involved document review and policy analysis in order to identify gender gaps within the level of policy and practice. Field studies were conducted at the headquarters of the two selected local government using instruments such as focus group discussions, personal interviews, key informant interviews and personal observations. Participants in the focus-group discussions and interview comprised political appointed and elected officers, women's representatives from different groups such as market women, aspiring political office holders, women-focused non-governmental organizations and women professional groups. Participants for the focus-group discussions and interviews were purposively selected to include both men and women. Data collected were analysed descriptively Data collected at different levels were triangulated to provide in-depth understanding and analysis of the subject matter.

Conceptual Issues

Governance

Governance is the relationship between government and citizen in terms of sound administration and management of public resources, as well as a concern with democratic politics. It is 'an expression of power between state and civil society; the interactive relationship between and within government and non-governmental forces' (Gerry Stoker, 1998:38). At the local level, governance is interpreted as the active involvement of the local population within the territorial boundaries of a local government in ensuring improved quality of service and leadership. It includes greater participation by civil society in decision-making processes and involves consensus-building and civic awareness.

Governance affects every aspects of sustainable development and achieving sustainable development will require effective governance at local levels. Governance includes the organizational arrangements for following up on policies and plans and monitoring performance. Governance covers the rules of decision-making, including who gets access to information and participates in the decision making process, as well as decision. Therefore, its improvement is needed at all levels of governance-local, national, regional and global. They should rest on the three pillars of sustainable development- environment, social and economic.

Africa society generally operates on a patriarchal sentiment, providing sensitive and powerful political posts for the men and deliberately consigns women into domestic undertakings even at the local level. Like many other places in Africa, local governance in Nigeria have been fraught with severe marginalization of women,

persistent and extreme poverty and chronic hunger, damage caused by natural disasters and environmental degradation; impact of global recession and high food and fuel prices on local people; and the effects of discrimination and social exclusion; poor financial base and limited revenue; limited autonomy; leadership problem; lack of basic social amenities such as power supply (electricity), transport and telecommunication facilities; unqualified, inexperienced and unskilled staff; corruption and misappropriation of funds; lack of local plans and weak programming capacity.

Gender Issues

Gender is a socially constructed definition of women and men. It is the social design of a biological sex, determined by the conception of tasks, functions and roles attributed to women and men in society and in public and private life. It is a culture-specific definition of femininity and masculinity and therefore varies in time and space. Gender issue/concern arises when there is a discrepancy, discrimination and injustice against man or woman, boys or girls.

Evolution of Local Government Administration in Nigeria

The Nigerian local government administration can rightly be traced back to the traditional local administration system that existed prior to the colonial era. This was followed by the Native Authority System which was introduced to better service the colonial authority. At the time of independence in 1960, local government was essentially a regional responsibility. During the early military era (1967 – 1976) local government system remained more or less an extension of the states, with local governments performing essentially, residual roles for their military overlords at the state level. In the later military era (1976 – 1979), effort was made to transform the basic roles of local government as exemplified in the 1976 local government reform. The 1976 reform represented a fundamental change in the development of local government in Nigeria. For the first time, the country was given a common, single-tier structure of local government in place of the different structures of various states. The reforms instituted statutory allocations of revenues from the federation account with the intention of giving local governments fixed proportions of both the federation account and each state's revenue.

The Local Government system by democratically elected Local Government Councils is guaranteed under the 1999 Nigerian Constitution, Section 7. Based on this section, the 1999 Nigerian Constitution provides for the functions of a Local Government Council under its Fourth Schedule. According to the Fourth Schedule 1 of the Amended 1999 Constitution, the main functions of the local government are as follows:

(a) The consideration and the making of recommendations to a State Commission on economic planning or any similar body on:

    i.   The economic development of the State, particularly in so far as the areas of authority of the council and of the State are affected;

    ii.   Proposals made by the said Commission or body;

(b) Collection of rates, radio or television licenses;

(c) Establishment and maintenance of cemeteries, burial grounds and homes for the destitute;

(d) Establishment, maintenance of and regulation of slaughter houses, slaughter slabs, markets, motor parks and public conveniences;

(e) Naming of roads and streets and numbering of houses;

(f) Provision and maintenance of public convenience, sewage and refuse disposal;

(FGN, 2010, p.205).

Gender Issues in Local Governance

The contemporary governance at the local level is extremely discouraging for women. Local government presents a hostile, alienating and male dominated environment. Women feel continuously marginalised, stereotyped, taken for granted and experience little understanding or support. Engendered governance implies men to give space to women and work together with them. Training and orientation plays an important role in the engendering of governance. Gender-sensitive local governance has the following principal objectives:

- To increase women's participation in politics, not only in formal political structures but also the civic engagement in politics.

- To strengthen gender-awareness and capacities among both women and men politicians and civil servants.

- To deliver services that addresses the specific needs and interests of women and men in the community, which requires engendered economic development, development planning and resources allocation.

- To create awareness of women's rights.   (Donk, 1997).

Local politics impacted directly on the lives of women, as they carry disproportionate responsibility for social reproduction. The goods and services provided by local government have a direct bearing on their lives. If basic services such as water or electricity are absent, it is often women and children that feel the daily

burden. Women, cast as caregivers and guardians of household nutrition and health, are the main users of basic municipal services. Their input into municipal decision-making and policy is therefore critical. Gender activists have argued that women's participation in local government is likely to lead to more efficient and effective delivery of services, which will have a positive impact on the democratic system as a whole. Women's understanding of the needs of households can be translated into knowledge for local planners and delivery agencies, leading to a virtuous circle of gender-sensitive policies and increased and better valued participation of women (UNIFEM, 1999).

Women spend more of their time in the neighbourhood than men, usually being responsible for the household, care taking tasks and the community management. They have a vested interest in safe water, sewerage, sanitation, refuse services, fuel, and health services. Thus the conditions in which essential services are delivered are important questions for women. For example: as the main users of water, women are well qualified to advise on the choice of pumps, where to run the waterlines and to place the standpipes, so as to avoid basic design flaws disadvantaging women and children. Women also take responsibility for the maintenance of such services, for example cleaning and sweeping around community water pumps and standpipes, collecting contributions, and organising for repair of equipment (United Nations Centre for Human Settlements - UNCHS, 1999).

In general, women and men perform different tasks and live in different economic and social conditions. Therefore, they have separate political interests. Being the one primarily responsible for reproductive activities, women have a particular interest in the allocation of local resources and services, such as water, fuel, electricity, sanitation, housing, public safety, and health services. Men politicians normally do not automatically represent women's interests. Women's active participation in decision making is essential in order to ensure that women can promote and defend their specific needs and interests. They can be prime actors in promoting gender sensitive governance that addresses the interests of both women and men and enhances access to and control over local resources for both (UNDP, 2000). A focus on gender differences is of particular importance with regard to sanitation initiatives, and gender-balanced approaches should be encouraged in plans and structures for implementation. Simple measures, such as providing schools with water and latrines, and promoting hygiene education in the classroom, can enable girls to get an education, especially after they reach puberty, and reduce health-related risks for all (UNESCAP 2001)

From the analysis of the various reforms undertaken in local government in Nigeria, it is clear that local governments in Nigeria had failed to realize their

fundamental political, economic and administrative objectives and were unable to ensure participatory development that is inclusive of women. Their dependence on the federal and state for policies, programs, funds, the inability of the majority to generate revenue and poor accountability to the public were major hindrances to their operations. In the absence of a comprehensive review of the system to improve its accountability to the public, gender issues had not been incorporated into the system at the national and state levels to increase the system's accountability to women (Afonja, Afolabi & Alagbile, 2006).

Results and Discussion of Findings: Women Political Participation and Gender Issues in Local Governance

This section presents empirical evidence and discussion of the findings from the field studies and assessment undertaken in two local government areas of Nigeria on the state of women political participation and gender issues in local governance.

Political Participation

Data collected as presented in Table 1 (see appendix) shows that in both zones while there was high level of political awareness among women, however this did not translate into significant increase in the number of women appointed or elected into political offices. The study identified several factors that contributed to the invisibility of women in politics at the local government level. These are: patriarchy, religious and traditional belief of the position of women in the society, poverty and illiteracy, political violence, money politics, god-fatherism, lack of confidence in the women folk, absence of coordinated media support for women, ineffective and uncoordinated formal training for women aspirants into political offices.

Through socialisation, women and men are allocated different and unequal roles in society. Women are assigned the private sphere, taking care of the home and family, while men are assigned the public sphere, running the affairs of society. When women venture into public spaces, they are expected to play roles similar to the home – that is nurturing roles. Also grafted into the gendered division of labour is a difference in power relations. Whether in the home, in the community, or in national life, men occupy the decision making roles. Patriarchy is the system that defines these power relations between women and men, allocating a dominant role to men and a subordinate role to women.

From the elective positions in Nigeria since returning to democratic governance in 1999, it is evident that women have not attained 10% political representation, which is even below the 35% Affirmative Action for political representation. From 1999 till date, no woman has been vice president of Nigeria and not to talk about president. In 2015, five women out of fourteen persons contested the

vice presidential position while fifteen men contested the post of president. Out of 109 Senate members in Nigeria, only seven were women in 1999; four in 2003; nine in 2007; five in 2011, and; seven in 2015. In the House of Representative, out of the 360 members of the house in 1999, seven were women, while in 2003, 21 are women; 27 in 2007; 25 in 2011; and 14 in 2015. Nigeria has not produced any elected woman governor from 1999 till date (Ogazi, 2016, pp. 1-2)

Local politics can be more interesting to women as they are well acquainted with their community, being the major users of space and services in the local community (water, electricity, waste disposal, health clinics, and other social services). They also participate actively in organizations in their neighbourhood, and it's easier to involve these organizations in formal political decision making at the local level (Black and Erickson, 2003). However, in Nigeria, even for the local government councils that are closer to the people: in 1999, out of the 774 council chairmen, 13 were women; 18 in 2003; and 27 in 2011 (Ogazi, 2016, p. 2).

From the literature, among the factors identified as determinants of women participation in politics include social and political relations in a society; Patriarchy (Aina, 1998); subordinate status of women, economic factor, constitutional provision (Shamim, & Nasreen, 2002); wrong socialization of women and; educational status (Zaman, 2006).

Gender Issues in Local Governance

From the findings obtained through the administration of various research instruments, it was glaring that the knowledge of what really constitute gender issues was very shallow at the local government level. Many of the respondents confirmed that opportunities and benefits were considered on the basis of merit without any consideration for gender. However, what many of the respondents considered as gender issues were tokenism women intervention projects like empowerment scheme, distribution of foodstuffs to women, granting of loans and employment of women cleaners. Without a clear understanding of what constitute gender issues, gender mainstreaming strategies were not undertaken in the two local governments. Allocations were not made with consideration to gender issues while data was not disaggregated according to sex to find out the beneficiaries of opportunities in the local government. While the two local governments had undertaking some women focused projects, the real issue of inequality in power relations and benefits were not adequately addressed through policy intervention and budgetary allocation. The following were considered as critical for gender issues in the local governance: political appointments; women empowerment/poverty alleviation and maternal health, education, agriculture to mention a few (see Table 3).

In Nigeria local government councils that are closest to the generality of the citizens, commitment to gender equity is still very much limited. Gender considerations did not guide the reforms of the local government system. The slow evolution of democratic institutions, the centralized state and administrative inefficiencies had detracted the system from instituting participatory and equitable development (Mohammed, 2006). In the absence of a gender policy at the local government, planning and budgeting did not target gender equity goals and few women's rights programs were implemented at the local level. In order to engender developmetal process at the local level, implementation of National gender policy, the Local Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (LEEDS) and the Millennium Development Goals is necessary to strengthen sustainable development and women's rights.

Measures to Increase Women's Participation in Local Governance

From the findings of the field study as presented in Table 3 (see Appendix), the following measures were recommended to improve women's representation and participation in local governance: changing of orientation through public enlightenment campaign, education and training; women empowerment through quality education and skills acquisition; repeal of laws and practices discriminatory against women; affirmative action should be entrenched into law and made legally binding; changing of orientation of women through workshops, training, and education; involvement of NGOS in political mobilization and training of women political aspirants; political party reforms through adherence to democratic principles in the internal working and structures of the political parties; lobbying political parties, and other key gate keepers; granting waiver for nomination fees to encourage women political aspirants, and; reform of the political environment to reduce violence, electoral rigging that tend to discourage women aspirants.

Conscious of the fact that there is enormous and challenging work to be done in promoting women's participation at the local level, women NGOs, CBOs and CSOs have continued to use Sections 15(2) and 42(1) of the 1999 Constitution; the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; CEDAW; International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; the African Charter on Human and People's Rights; the Millennium Development Goals; Optional Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of women in Africa; and other international treats to advocate the cause of women political participation. Apart from the existing legal and policy framework to promote women political participation at the local government stage, several women and gender oriented NGOS, CSOs, CBOs and Networks over the years have designed programmes tailored towards achieving this objective. Some of these civil society interventions are historic as they also put issues of women on the front

burner in their campaigns and projects. These organizations with the support of diverse finding agencies have been very active in promoting participation of women in politics, providing training for would-be women politicians and creating avenues for networking and community mobilization against women's political marginalization (Ibeanu: 2009, p. 9).

Conclusion

From the analysis undertaken in the paper, it is clear that despite the progress currently being witnessed in women participation in politics and increased awareness of gender issues at the grassroots, more efforts are still needed in the areas of training and capacity building, political orientation and funding to consolidate the present advancement and made further progress. Arising from the findings, the following recommendations are offered:

- Government at all levels should integrate a gender perspective into all follow-up intergovernmental and multilateral processes relating to financing for development. This would include gender sensitive impact assessments of trade liberalization, employment and fiscal policy

- Local Government should integrate a gender perspective into their public finance system through developing a strategic plan with short, medium and long term targets;

- Policy makers should improve quantitative and qualitative sex- and age-disaggregated and gender-specific data collection and analysis to monitor changes in gender relations over the lifecycle

- Education and economic empowerment of women are required to build capacity for political participation and representation

- There is need for legal backing to make the 35% Affirmative Action binding at all levels of governance to enhance women political participation

Appendix: Illustrations

Table 1: Obstacles to Women's Political Participation at the LG level

Local Government Areas	Focus Group Discussions	Key Informant Interviews (KIIs)
Amuwo-Odofin Local Government	✦ Cultural biases ✦ Illiteracy ✦ Negative Public Perception of Women ✦ Low awareness	✦ Lack of supports from men ✦ Political violence ✦ Marginalisation by political parties ✦ Poor funding ✦ Lack of unity among women
Ilorin West Local Government	✦ Religion and cultural biases ✦ Political godfatherism ✦ Negative public perception ✦ Poor organization among women ✦ Poverty	✦ Political violence ✦ Illiteracy ✦ Cultural and religious biases ✦ Poverty ✦ Absence of unity among women ✦ Poor supports from men especially, husbands

Sources: Analysis of Fieldwork

Table 2: Gender Issues Identified in Local Governance

Local Government Areas	Focus Group Discussions	Key Informant Interviews (KIIs)
Amuwo-Odofin Local Government	✦ Poverty ✦ Illiteracy ✦ Patriarchy ✦ Weak capacity for gender mainstreaming ✦ Maternal health ✦ Agriculture	✦ Lack of supports from men ✦ Poor performance by women elected politicians ✦ Poverty ✦ Poor representation of women
Ilorin West Local Government	✦ Poor representation of women in politics ✦ Poverty ✦ Poor capacity to mainstream gender ✦ Polygamy ✦ Illiteracy ✦ Poor social amenities ✦ Maternal health ✦ Agriculture	✦ Poor representation of women in politics ✦ Poverty ✦ Poor capacity to mainstream gender ✦ Polygamy ✦ Illiteracy ✦ Poor social amenities

Sources: Analysis of Fieldwork

Table 3: Measures to Increase Women's Participation in Local Governance

Local Government Areas	Focus Group Discussions	Key Informant Interviews (KIIs)
Amuwo-Odofin Local Government	♣ Quota representation of women into position ♣ Education and sensitization ♣ Training and capacity building ♣ Waiver for nomination fees ♣ Appointing women into decision making in political parties	♣ Mobilisation by NGOs ♣ Capacity building for women political aspirants ♣ Economic empowerment ♣ Education
Ilorin West Local Government	♣ Women economic empowerment ♣ Education and training ♣ Legal backing for Affirmative Action ♣ Waiver of Nomination fees ♣ Sensitisation of men and religious leaders	♣ Training and capacity building for women ♣ Waiver of Nomination fees ♣ Increase women political appointees ♣ Economic empowerment

Sources: Analysis of Fieldwork

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