

Women Leadership and Integrity in the 21st Century Nigeria

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Abstract

The 21st century Nigeria has witnessed an impressive rise in women involvement in leadership and unimaginable substantial success has been recorded both in the secular and religious settings. Scholars around the world have affirmed that gender-based division of leadership is fading gradually and women are more and more stepping up into leadership roles in most of the global societies. Yet, in a male-dominated society like Nigeria, women subjugation in the aspect of leadership is still being blamed for integrity. Using both historical and descriptive approaches and guided by Liberal feminism theory, this paper examines women leadership based on integrity in 21st century Nigeria. It establishes the fact that traditionally in the past centuries, women have been hindered from attaining some important leadership post in Nigeria. Nonetheless, some women have demonstrated integrity in leadership in 21st century Nigeria both in the secular and the religious settings. It also posits that Integrity in leadership is not determined by gender but a function of individual behavioural factors. It concludes that women are active and effective leaders with integrity that are unavoidably needed in this 21st century Nigeria.

Keywords: Women Leadership, Integrity, Secular and Religious Leadership in 21st Century Nigeria

Introduction

Leadership roles are mostly dominated by a male in a patriarchal society even when competent women are available. It is no gainsaying that many women have demonstrated effective leadership both in the past and the present, yet qualities associated with being a successful leader have been associated with masculinity; such as integrity, objectivity and acting authoritatively. Women have been disreputed and restricted from attaining some desirable height in life due to the assumed Andocentric creator of human, masculinity world and gender discrimination that has prevailed in the past centuries. Hence, this necessitates the need to examine how some women have demonstrated absolute integrity in leadership, especially in 21st century Nigeria.

Women subordination in the area of leadership has recently attracted the attention of many scholars. Engstrom reiterated the success or failure, the rise and fall of groups, be they religious or secular, to be determined by the quality of leadership.¹ According to the 2006 Nigerian population census figure, women constituted 49% of the total population of Nigeria, yet, there has been a gross gender gap between men and women, especially in political representation, economic management and leadership.² Women have been seen as different from men, universally lacking the necessary personal characteristics, as they are dependent, submissive, and conforming.³ This was confirmed by Aluko that in all patriarchal set-ups, women have virtually not enjoyed the privileges that one would have expected in a changing world, as reflective of the needs in the 21st century.⁴ Gender inequality in Nigeria Political Leadership.⁵ And Biblical context to Christian Religion leadership⁶ has been duly attended to. Yet, integrity in women leadership remains an issue of concern both in the secular and religious settings.

The paper employs secondary data gathered from libraries, newsprint and journals which were guided by Liberal feminism theory. Liberal feminism is an individualistic theory of feminism that concentrates mainly on gender equality. Its primary goal is gender equality in the public sphere, such as equal access to education, equal pay, ending job sex segregation, better working conditions and political rights.⁷ The theory is to ascertain equal leadership rights of males and females in the religious and the secular sphere through legalisms and state

intervention. Liberal feminism theory seeks to address various economic, political, religious and socio-cultural subjugations encountered by women in the area of leadership. It is an implication that leadership performance is better measured by integrity as against patriarchal leadership in 21st century Nigeria. Liberal feminism individual behaviour enhances leadership quality.

This paper is significant as it clarifies the fact that integrity in leadership is not determined by gender but an issue of an individual behavioural trait. There is also great anticipation of an effective and higher level of female leadership both in the secular and the religious world. In years past across the globe, especially in the African settings, men have traditionally dominated in political roles, paid employment and religious leadership as well while women are known for caretaking roles. The reverse is the case today, because, there are women in many leadership posts in almost every sphere of life and more are still aspiring.

Leadership and Integrity

Integrity and good leadership are like siamese twins that cannot be separated as integrity informs good leadership and good leadership is an outcome of integrity. This is evident in some definitions of leadership as well as integrity. Besides from the dictionary definition of leadership, it has also been defined by various authors and scholars in various ways based on personal perceptions and areas of the discipline. Jacobs and Jaques define leadership "as a process of giving purpose to collective effort, and causing willing effort to be expended to achieve the purpose."⁸ Leadership is a social process in which one individual influences the behaviour of others without the use of threat or violence.⁹ These authors see leadership as a matter of influence rather than authority, also as an individual behavioural trait rather than gender-based. Hence, Leadership is the process of articulating visions, embodying values, and creating the environment within which things can be accomplished.

Integrity on the other hand is one of the unavoidable attributes of a good leader. It is in this wise that Gehman defines integrity as an attitude of honesty and uprightness. It is a reasonably coherent and relatively stable set of highly cherished values and principles which a leader must possess.¹⁰ This definition presupposes that integrity itself is the heart of

any leadership character. Integrity is a major determinant in leadership, leadership without integrity will amount to the automatic failure of a leader. Integrity is defined as the quality of acting following relevant moral values, norms and rules accepted by society. Integrity is a quality of individuals.¹¹ It is expedient of every leader to have knowledge, expertise, talents and skills. In addition to all these, integrity in leadership is a non-negotiable quality of a good leader. Integrity is a function of personality and personality plays a large role in shaping a leader's potential. Adequate analysis of these definitions reflects that leadership is based on personality traits and individual behaviours of which integrity is one cogent.

Women Leadership and Integrity

Generally speaking, women leadership especially in Nigeria has been an issue of controversies day in day out. Women are endowed with passionate commitment and a heart of dignity which attracts great influence whenever assigned a leadership role. There have been many arguments regarding women as weaker vessels while some even called women second class citizens. But this has been proved negative by the virtues of some women contribution to the history of the human race. It should be noted that gender does not always determine integrity in leadership both in the secular and religious settings rather it is a function of individual behaviour. Stelter buttressed the fact that a "good" leader has always been conveyed with the impression of masculinity and the belief that men make better leaders than women which is never true.¹²

Over time in history, few women who have been entrusted with the leading role to manage human and material resources have more often than not proved the same point that, given adequate backing and freehand, they can exceed normal expectations. Research has shown that women leaders can sometimes be more efficient when it comes to conflict management than men who would often display a show of egoistic characters which often result in an escalation of tensions that eventually leave the defenceless women and children population suffering end. This can be substantiated by Eagly and Johnson assertion that women were found to have more interpersonal styles in experimental and assessment studies where men were more likely to use autocratic, direct controlling styles and show egoistic characters.¹³

Women leadership has also been relegated by Wackman and Owen who gave the following perception of women leadership:

Women tend to place family demands above work considerations, they work for supplemental income; as a result, they lack the necessary drive to succeed in leadership. Women tend to mix their personal and professional beliefs and feelings, and for this reason, they are accepted as emotional not professional. Women are unsuitable for top managerial positions because they are too emotional and lack some qualities necessary for managerial positions such as aggressiveness, risk-taking and decisiveness and self-confidence problems.¹⁴

If examined critically, all these qualities may be correct for women, yet the assertions are wrong because the qualities mentioned of women are factors that aid the integrity of women in leadership positions especially when saddled with higher responsibilities. To corroborate this, Caldwell observed that allowing women to participate fully in the leadership process would increase the likelihood that a society's policies will reflect the needs of all its citizens. He added that when women are well represented in governing bodies, the overall quality of governance tends to rise and levels of corruption sink. History reveals that in comparison, women tend to show more zero tolerance to corruption than men, and this fact translates well in leadership.¹⁵

Women Leadership in the Biblical Context

The fact that women are potential leaders can be seen from women as part of God's creation and the mandate to dominate the earth was given to both the male and the female in Genesis 1: 28. This same Bible verse has also been used to give credence to masculine domination. Oderinde corroborated that men occupy a position of authority not because of their ability to occupy such roles but because such roles are unquestionably and authoritatively reserved for them.¹⁶ Masenya affirms that the Bible is a powerful book that emerged from patriarchal cultures,¹⁷ Yet, the Bible is full of passive mention of women of greater exploits. The Bible is filled with numerous women who demonstrated integrity in leadership both in the Old Testament and New Testament.

In the Old Testament, women were mostly regarded as minor, this might be based on the assumption of Titre that all priests were male and are from Aaron's family.¹⁸ Public leadership in the Old Testament was largely given to men while women are regarded as minor under the leadership of the men. The roles they played were major as mothers and wives. However, few women that are privileged to become leaders then were doggedly outstanding. Miriam is a good example of a female prophetess in the Bible. She led the children of Israel to sing unto God for the victory received and the chorus she composed is still being sung in the church to date. Prophetess Huldah also played a great role in the reformation made during King Josiah's reign. Tanu asserts that King Josiah's reform which was an epoch-making event was propelled by the Oracle of Prophetess Huldah.¹⁹ Female leadership in the Bible will not be complete without mentioning Deborah, a woman of valour, a prophet and a judge. She led the Israelites' to battle and won. She was a woman of courage and very conscious of God's presence in the place of Victory. Sosu admired her courage and explains that Deborah's success benefitted all the people because she leapt to the next level.²⁰ Esther also demonstrated some level of leadership by leading the Jews to God's presence and representing the whole nation before the king. She was an instrument of salvage to her generation.

Women were not mentioned directly as a prophetess or pastor in the New Testament but this does not negate the fact that women demonstrated a huge level of a leadership role in the New Testament. Paul wrote to the Galatians saying 'In Christ, there are no distinctions' Galatians 3:28 even though many have misinterpreted Paul's instruction on women's silence in 1Corinthian 14: 34 – 35. To clarify this, Barnes posits on the position of this silence is based on commandment but still influenced by culture and maintaining the status quo.²¹ Jesus relationship with the women in the New Testament also shows that He understood and corrected female relegation.

Women Leadership in Nigeria 21st Century

Traditionally in Nigerian cultures, men have been in the custodian of power and leadership position while women are regarded as mere or

second class citizens. But in the last few decades, the reverse has been the case. Also, the lack of women in leadership positions has been a global phenomenon until recently that women are up to fight for female freedom. The 21st century Nigeria has witnessed a tremendous increase of women in leadership positions. Even more and more women are involved in political decision making and even in the leadership of states. Few out of numerous women that have demonstrated outstanding leadership roles in Nigeria will be discussed below;

Catalogues of Nigerian women who have contributed to Nigeria development in the recent time include Fidelia Njezie, former Minister of Aviation who in a short while resuscitated the aviation sector from its collapsing state. Ruqayya A. Ruffai, once a Minister of Education, has given education a new dimension; Farida Waziri, the boss of Economic Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) up until 2011, also brought some levels of sanity to the polity of the nation by exposing some corrupt leaders to justice. Dora Akunyili, former Director-General of National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC), made sure that the proliferation of illicit and expired drugs were curtailed, thereby saving lives and health of innocent citizens; she championed the arrest and detention of many fake drug peddlers and manufacturers as well as confiscated and destroyed detected fake and dangerous drugs wherever they were found in the country. She was also the Minister for Information in the 2007-2010 dispensation when she initiated her "Re-branding Nigeria Campaign."

Other women of influence include Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, the former minister of finance during President Obasanjo's regime, who helped to turn around the debt regime of Nigeria by negotiating the cancellation of debt which Nigeria owed the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and Paris Club. She has been the Managing Director of World Bank and later was appointed by President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan as Nigeria's Minister of Finance and Coordinating Minister for the Federal Republic of Nigeria in 2011. Obiageli Ezekwesili popularized the due process office of the presidency in Nigeria during President Olusegun Obasanjo's regime. Obiageli Ezekwesili was the World Bank Vice President for Africa Region whose tenure ended in 2012. It was also on record that Justice Aloma Mukhtar in 2012 was appointed Nigeria's first female Chief Justice of the Federation by President Goodluck Ebele

Jonathan's administration. The appointment was based on her credible track record in the judiciary.²²

Women Leadership in the Christian Religious Settings

Women leadership discrimination has been an age-long tussle not only in the secular but also in the religious settings. The scope of this paper mainly focuses Christian religion. Although God of the Bible is regarded as androcentric, yet the fact remains that God is still God of both male and the female. With regards to this fact, Mepaiyeda agrees with the fact that "Imago Dei that is, the image or likeness of God. Man – Adam – Adama is a general term that connotes male and female."²³ This opinion implies that God created both males and females in His image and the image of God does not only signify masculinity as erroneously believed by many. For Butler; the division of mankind into men and women is merely a relic of a traditionally established metaphysical idea and a product of a patriarchic ruling system that lasted for centuries and that used precisely this differentiation of the sexes to legitimate the repression of women.²⁴ Religion has also played a vital role in the relegation of women in place of leadership. Women leadership especially in the ministry and churches has suffered rejection in the past until in recent years that women started the fight to be freed from female domestication.

Earlier before the 21st century, religious leadership especially pastoral ministry is a masculine world except for some African indigenous churches that allow for female leadership in some area but not with utmost authority. This is in line with Collins Assertion that women were regarded as an inferior species to be owned like cattle, incapable of participating in the mysteries of the worship of Yahweh.²⁵ This is a replica of the practice of the Jews who have little or no recognition for women and this assertion agrees with Oderinde's opinion that men and women are having different but complementary roles and obligations. The society was male-dominated, where men administered the courts and schools; manipulate the theology and rituals while women were being treated as second class citizens.²⁶

Despite the gender restriction and relegation women have suffered, some women still struggle with a doggedness to soar high in place of leadership. Christianity has witnessed a great deal of development due to the committed services of women in the Christian

leadership position. Apart from being a church pastor, some women like Ayandokun Esther became the first female professor in Nigeria Baptist Convention Theological institutions which is indeed a great achievement. Also, some of the orthodox churches who had rejected women leadership in the church are now ordaining women as church pastors and into key posts in the ministries in this 21st century. Women have also constituted some mission society in the churches and are doing great in the work of evangelism. It is on this note that Olumakaye reiterated women organizations entrenched in some Nigerian churches; Women Missionary of the Nigerian Baptist Convention, The Dorcas Band of the Seventh Day Adventist church, The Good Women Association of Christ Apostolic Church; Methodist's Women's Fellowship of the Methodist Church; The Ladies Praying Union of the Aladura Church of the Lord to mention but few.²⁷

This was corroborated by Stein that females are more sensitive concerning religion and fitting for the role of educator and facilitator in the field of religion.²⁸ Also, the Pentecostal churches have broken the barrier of women leadership by ordaining the pastors' wives to assist the husbands in ministry. Some of these women have gotten to the height of having personal ministry and are doing very great. They include Pastor Folu Adeboye of the Redeemed Christian Church of God, Pastor Faith Oyedepo of Winners' Chapel, Pastor Helen Oritsejafor of the Word of Life Bible Church, Pastor Ifeyinwa Adefarasin of the House on the Rock, Pastor Ibidun Ighodalo, Pastor Nike Adeyemi of Daystar Christian Centre, Pastor Nkoyo Rapu, Rev. Funke Felix Adeyemo, Pastor Rosemary Odukoya of the Fountain of Life Ministry and Pastor Evelyn Temitope Joshua of the Synagogue Church of All Nations.²⁹ Some of these women also run other organizations like NGO's and other corporate organizations related to their hubby's ministry.³⁰ Some of these female pastors in Nigeria have gotten to the zenith height of the ministry where they run their churches as the overall head. A very good example is Apostle Helen Akpabio who runs 250 branches of her church as its General Overseer.³¹

Recommendations

This paper examines the relationship between women, leadership and integrity in the Biblical context, secular and religious settings of 21st

century Nigeria being guided by liberal feminism and thus recommends that;

1. Women marginalization, subordination, relegation, discrimination and dehumanization of all types should be discarded in 21st century Nigeria.
2. Women should be given leadership roles at all levels be it political roles, public offices and full participation in the governance of Nigeria.
3. Women should be given full authority to lead in the religious society especially a church.
4. In addition to this, lecturing in the theology schools, heading a Christian ministry and other important leadership roles in Christian folds should be accorded women. Women are vessels of honour made by God and for a specific role just like men and should be treated as such.
5. In 21st century Nigeria, women are to do away with the subsisting cultural and traditional norms that women are only meant for domestic chores.

Conclusion

An increase in knowledge and invasion of the 21st century has revealed that women are the epitome of integrity when it comes to leadership and can perform excellently even better than men if allowed to lead. There is enough evidence showing that women are major stakeholders in the development of every society including Nigeria. It is also evident in the religious setting especially in Christianity that women had and are still doing great in the ministry when used by the same God who is addressed as 'androcentric. It also reveals that women are intelligent beings capable of leading at all levels.

Hence, making the right choice in leadership whether male or female is as important as the kind of leadership therein. In the same vein, the choice of the right leader helps in determining integrity in leadership; the type of post also determines the behavioural tendencies of the same leader. It has therefore reached a point in life where women are to be treated naturally as being with an inborn trait of integrity and accorded equal responsibilities with men in all spheres of life as advocated by liberal feminism.

ENDNOTES

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¹⁷ Madipoane Masenya, "The Place of the Bible in the Quest for women's Emancipation in Africa." *A Publication of the Nigerian Association for Biblical Studies*, (2012): 1–20.

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¹⁹ Abigail Tanu, "Prophetess Huldah as a Principal Strategist of King Josiah's Reform (2Kings 22: 15 – 20): Lessons for women on Political and Religious Leadership in Africa." *Nigerian Association for Biblical Studies*. (2012): 212 – 228.

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