

Challenges of Women in Positions of Public Authority in Nigeria

Nwakoby Nkiru Peace, Ihediwa Augustina Anekperchi, Chukwurah Daniel Chi Junior

Abstract— Women have not ceased to clamour for gender parity in the schemes of public affairs within the national frontiers and across the globe. This notwithstanding, literature is still replete with statistical proof that women are still few in positions of public authority in Nigeria. The study empirically identified some challenges of women in positions of public authority in Nigeria. Employing content analysis and survey as its research designs, the dissertation selected a sample size of 400 for its study. The data were sourced through primary and secondary sources and were statistically analyzed with the aid of Statistical Product and Service Solution (SPSS), using chi-square as its test statistic. The study found out that there is significant relationship between political appointments and women's entry into public positions in Nigeria. It also found out that there is significant relationship between indigenous culture and women's opportunities in Public Sector in Nigeria. Furthermore, it found out that there is significant relationship between merit consideration and women's employment into executive positions in Public Sector in Nigeria. The study also ascertained that gender stereotypes, discrimination, lack of/limited resources, limited political experience, low literacy level, difference in the couple's state of origin, systemic corruption, prejudice, career-family balance, poor co-operation and patriarchal structure militate against women's opportunity of entry into positions of public authority and prominence in Nigeria as well as their performance while in those positions. Sequel to these findings, the study recommends that there should be an intensified effort by the government concerned Civil Society Organizations/Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and individuals to re-orient the value system of the citizenry with respect to fair treatment of both gender in order to remove whatever institutional bottleneck that impinges on one's entry into public positions in Nigeria. To reduce or eliminate discriminatory indigenous cultural practices, besides orientation/enlightenment programme, the study recommends that the National Assembly enact a bill prohibiting any form of gender discrimination in indigenous cultural practices. In addition, it recommends that the principle of meritocracy, honesty/transparency be highly upheld in the public service. Generally, the study also recommends that the National Assembly should enact a bill prohibiting gender discrimination in employment, leadership and executive positions, while women liberation movements should monitor the implementation of prescribed policies and alert the relevant authority whenever there is a breach.

Index Terms— Challenges, executive positions, Political appointments, Positions of public authority.

Nwakoby Nkiru Peace PhD, Department of Entrepreneurship Studies, Faculty of Management Sciences, Nnamdi Azikiwe, University, Awka

Ihediwa Augustina Anekperchi, Department of Entrepreneurship Studies, Faculty of Management Sciences, Nnamdi Azikiwe, University, Awka

Chukwurah Daniel Chi Junior PhD, Dept. of Public Administration, Faculty of Social Sciences, Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu, University, Igbaram

I. INTRODUCTION

One of the interesting phenomena in recent times, according to Faboyinde (2000), has been the increasing proportion of women in the labour force, as well as their disproportionate rise to positions of Public Authority, notwithstanding whatever challenge may be along their career paths. Those who ascend to the positions of Public

Authority in Nigeria appear to be faced with some peculiar challenges associated with such offices. According to United Nations (2005) Statistics, globally, women constitute about 50% of the world's population, they perform two-thirds of the world's work but receive one tenth of the world's income. This suggests that women make up a significant proportion of the world's workforce. At the national scene, this reflects the reality in Nigeria. The 2006 National Census put the country's population at about 150 million, out of which female constitutes about 50%. The greater percentages of the women who dominate the world workforce are concentrated in the informal labour sector (majorly the agricultural sector). The National Report, as seen in the 2004 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development indicates that at least 40% of the agricultural production activities and 85% of agricultural produce, processing and marketing are performed by women. In this twenty-first century, there is relative improvement in the educational pursuit of women and comparative development in the socio-cultural institutions, despite whatever constraint that face the womenfolk. As a result, many women now feature in the political and bureaucratic space in Nigeria, but at the same time, not on equal footing or a level playing field with their male counterparts. Only an insignificant number, when compared to their male counterparts, struggle to ascend the ladder of Public Authority and get to the top of the hierarchical structure in public service, political office and even private establishments, Olowe (2002). The struggle seems to be cyclic as the few women who struggle to get to the positions of Public Authority still strive to withstand whatever m U * general and peculiar challenges associated with such offices and status.

The plight of women with respect to their number in positions of Public Authority (which may be suggestive of some factors working against women's rise to those positions) is not limited to a particular political entity or geographical space. According to literature, it is a global phenomenon, CIDA Nig, GSAA (2006). In Japan, for instance, Toshiko (1982) in Akanbi and Salami (2002) reported that most working women in large corporations are office ladies or clerical workers who serve tea to businessmen or

welcome visitors. Complementing this report, Sato (1990) in Akanbi and Salami (2002) reported that only 5% of all managers and professionals in Japan are women. Recent statistics show relative marginal improvement in that country: the figure increased to 7% in 2013, according to Grant Thornton International Report (2013). Okafor et al, (2011) discovered that a significant number of the women in America have not reached the height of their careers, though they are actively involved in management positions. Reporting about United Kingdom (UK), the same source also noted that in instances where women make up about 40% of the total workforce, 26% of them are said to be in managerial-type jobs. There seem to be some barriers which still hinder them from reaching the top managerial echelon.

Justifying these statistics, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in 2013, observed that "Women represent over 40% of the world's labour force, yet their share of management positions remain unacceptably low." Along this line, Grant Thornton International Report (2013) estimated the global percentage of women in management position to be 24%. Fapohunda (2012), in a bid to show that the situation is worse in developing countries, cited the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) report which observed that women constitute less than one-seventh (1/7) of administrators and managers, and they occupy only 10% of parliamentary seats and 6% of cabinet positions in developing countries.

An overview of the historical subjugation of women or chronicles of the gender composition of leadership in Nigeria corroborate the international report as it also lends credence to the marginal representation of women in the political and bureaucratic realm, Agina-Ude (2003). The preceding source observed that during the First Republic (1960- 1966), there was no female minister, while there was a very small representation of female in the legislature; only two female legislators (Mrs. Wuraola Escn and Mrs. Bernice Keny) and two others (Mrs. Margaret Ekpo and Mrs. Janet Muokelu) were in the Eastern House of Assembly. In the Second Republic (1979-1984), it was not much better as the ratio of female Senators to the male Senators was 1:570 (there was only one female senator and as much as five hundred and seventy (570) male senators). At the House of Representatives, the ratio was eleven to four hundred and thirty-four; 11:434. In other words, there were eleven (11) females and four hundred and thirty-four (434) males as Honourable Members of the House of Representatives.

During the regime of General Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida (1985 - 1993), the disparity was very glaring. During this period, there were two women out of the 19 members that constituted the Political Bureau in 1986. In the 1990 Local Government Elections, out of the 591 elective positions, women won only three. In the State Houses of Assembly, there were just twenty seven (27) females out of one thousand, one hundred and seventy-two (1,172) Honourable members. At the Federal level, women made up about 2.4% in the House of Representatives. Put differently, there were fourteen (14) women out of the five hundred and eighty-nine (589) Honourable members of the House.

It was worse at the upper chamber (Senate) as only one (1) woman was among the ninety-one (91) senators. Agina-Ude (2003) further noted that in the succeeding year,

1991, the plan to hand over to civilian government witnessed the emergence of three thousand (3,000) presidential aspirants out of whom were only eight (8) females.

The political party structure in Nigeria also reflects under-representation of females. In the defunct Social Democratic Party (SDP), for instance, men occupied 96%

of the executive positions; leaving just 4% to the women. In detail, there were 23,020 men in the said positions, whereas the women were 958 at both the Federal and State

levels. The leadership composition of the second party, the defunct National Republican Convention (NRC) was also biased in favour of men. Women accounted for a very

marginal proportion of 0.43% (equivalent to 85 women) of the executive positions, while men accounted for 99.57% (equivalent to 19,464 men) of the executive positions (Adereti, 2005).

The return to democratic dispensation in 1999 witnessed the amelioration of the situation. In 2000, the proportion of seats held by women at the National Assembly was 3.1%. It increased to 7.5% in 2008. Statistics from National Centre for Women Development (2007) show that there were four (4) female senators in 2003, and nine (9)

in 2007. Furthermore, there were 23 female Honourable Members of the House of Representatives in 2003 and 26 in 2007. At the judicial arm of government, there was a breakthrough, though negligible; 2 female lawyers were appointed Judges of Supreme Court's between 2006 and 2009. At the executive arm of government, the number of female deputy governors increased from 2 in 2003 to 6 in 2007.

Irrespective of this improvement, the leadership inequality gap between the male and female remained distant. There is significant level of female marginalization in the Nigerian political terrain. According to report credited to the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), out of the 7,160 candidates that contested in the 2007 general elections, only a handful of women (628 women) participated in the political race. Only one woman out of 25 candidates vied for the office of the president. At the end of the exercise, only 9 women emerged as Senators out of the 109 Senators and 25 women out of the 360 Honourable members of the House of Representatives, while none of them won the presidential election.

The representation of the females was not better at the legislative arm in 2011 as the proportion of their representation at both chambers (the Senate and the House of

Representatives) dropped from 7% in 2007 to 4% in 2011. It was, however, better at the executive arm because for the first time in the political history of Nigeria, 13 women were appointed ministers alongside 28 men by President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, although the number later dropped to 11 in 2014 following the removal of the ministers of education and that of aviation. The Women Advocate Research and Documentation Centre (2011), in its summary, reported that women's participation in Nigerian politics was about 2% in

1999 and increased to 8% in 2011 In the general bureaucratic domain; outside politics, there is equally a spate of this marginalization. In Fatile (2012), it was observed through a survey conducted in 2000 on the profile of gender composition of leadership at the Federal and State Governments in Nigeria and discovered that there were nine (9) male assistant directors and five (5) female assistant directors; twenty-four (24) male managers and eight (8) female managers; fourteen (14) male assistant managers and five (5) female counterparts. While shedding more light on this, Faboyinde (2006), cited a publication in 1999 which

observed that out of a total of sixty Nigerian top managers, only two were women. In the legal field, Olowe (2002) noted that of the one hundred and eighty Senior Advocates of Nigeria (SAN), only five were women. Recent statistics reveals that, in 2013, there were 13 female Senior Advocates of Nigeria (SAN) out of a total of about three hundred and

seventy (370), according to Funke Adekoya (SAN) in The Sun (2013). The Vanguard Newspaper updated these statistics when it reported in June 2014 that the total number had increased by seventeen (17) males. This implies that the total number of female Senior Advocates of Nigeria is still thirteen (13) as at the time of sourcing this data.

It can be deduced from the foregoing, that women suffer high subordination and marginalization the world over, and Nigeria has her share of the ugly experience especially in the public service. There are constitutional provisions promoting equal rights. For instance, section 17 (1) (2) of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of

Nigeria as amended states, 'That every citizen shall have the equality of rights, obligations, and opportunity before the law.' Article 18 (2) of the West African Charter also guarantees the right to freedom from discriminations. Notwithstanding these provisions, women do not still seem to fully enjoy their constitutional rights and privileges, given some challenges they seem to face in their public life.

The statistics of women in public offices is reviewed to examine gender parity and find out if it is suggestive of any challenge confronting women with respect to entry

into positions of authority in Nigeria and their performance in those positions. Aside from the gender disparity of leadership within the public domain, historical antecedents also appear to portray some peculiar unfavourable experiences that confronted women prior to

their assumption of offices and while occupying those positions.

Describing the experience of Mrs Sarah Jubril, the first female presidential candidate in Nigeria, Odeh (2014) posited that her case illustrated "a metaphor of the plight of Nigerian women." Her political career became a cynosure of all eyes in 1991 when she contested to be the presidential standard bearer of the defunct Social Democratic Party (SDP) during its primary election. She emerged fourth in the election and had since remained in politics. In 2011, she vied again for the presidential candidacy in the keenly contested Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) primary election. It was a record loss for Mrs. Sarah as she got only one vote vis-a-vis Atiku Abubakar who got 805 votes and Goodluck Ebele Jonathan who won two thousand, seven hundred and thirty-six

(2,736) votes of the three thousand, five hundred and forty-two (3542) total vote cast.

The single vote garnered at the poll was the one she cast for herself. The nature of the loss seems to raise inquiry into challenges that confront women's rise to positions of authority as well as their performances while in those positions.

In her description of the plight of women in Nigerian politics, Kemi (2010) averred that any woman radically involved in the male-dominated politics is perceived to be sexually loose. This seems to be an over-generalization of a flaw. It was reported by Jide (2012) and Chidi (2012) that the swearing-in of Justice Jumbo Ofo as Judge of Abia State Court of Appeal was almost scuttled, but for much legal tussle. The problem emanated from the difference in her state of origin from her husband's. Still in the Judiciary, Jide, (2012) and Chidi (2012) also reported that Justice Muktar Aloma was denied the post of the Kano State Chief Judge in the 1980s, on the premise that it was contrary to the Islamic religion for a woman to head the Judiciary. In recent past, history has recorded a good number of women (besides men) who were either sacked or made to resign their positions.

Considering the report of the House of Representatives in 2010 on the alleged financial misappropriation by its Speaker, Hon. Doris Udoh argued that the same due process that was emphasized to be duly followed in handling the case when it involved the former speaker (Hon. Patricia Etteh) was scuttled when a similar case involved a male Speaker of the House (Hon. Dimeji Bankole), Oliver (2014). The study does not mean to justify corruption by citing these cases, the alleged uneven treatment meted out to both gender elicit inquiry into the challenges that confront women in positions of authority in Nigeria. Furthermore, the uneven ratio of men to women in the public offices, especially in politics, was also claimed to "intimidate" women in public offices (Kemi, 2010). The validity of this claim is subject to empirical test.

Generally, the major concern here is the cyclic nature of challenges. After overcoming challenges along the managerial ascendancy ladder, the few who make it to those lofty positions of authority may still struggle to withstand general and peculiar challenges associated with such offices and status.

II. HYPOTHESES

These hypotheses will the guided the study:

In the course of the study, three hypotheses were stated which are as follows:

Hypothesis I

Ho - There is no significant relationship between political appointments and women's entry into Public Positions in Nigeria.

Hi - There is significant relationship between political appointments and women's entry into Public Positions in Nigeria.

Hypothesis II

Ho- There is no significant relationship between indigenous culture and women's opportunities in Public Sector in Nigeria.

Hi - There is significant relationship between indigenous

culture and women's

opportunities in Public Sector in Nigeria.

Hypothesis III

Ho - There is no significant relationship between merit consideration and

women's employment in executive positions in Public Sector in Nigeria.

Hi - There is significant relationship between merit consideration and women's employment in executive positions in Public Sector in Nigeria.

III. DISCUSSIONS

The following logical inferences were conclusively drawn from the findings of the dissertation that have been discussed. According to the findings, the public service could serve as a veritable 'labour market' from where there can be a pool of experienced manpower or technocrats who could serve the government in a greater capacity as political appointees. So women in the public service, especially those who have been reputed to be meritorious and efficient in the Service, or had achieved record success in a given career could become the cynosure of the government, following the commendations and recommendations such persons earn. The study however identified some factors working against women into and in positions of Public Authority in Nigeria, even within the Ministry, Department and Agencies (MDAs), but in spite of this, some women in those positions do not regret occupying such posts.

This study is on the challenges of women into positions of Public Authority in Nigeria. In the light of the findings of this dissertation, the following recommendations are proffered.

Given the first main finding that there is significant relationship between political appointments and women's entry into Public Positions in Nigeria, and the ascertainment that gender stereotypes, discrimination, lack of/limited resources, limited political experience, low literacy level, difference in the couple's state of origin, systemic corruption, prejudice, career-family balance, poor co-operation and patriarchal structure heavily militate against women's opportunity of entry into positions of Public Authority and prominence in Nigeria as well as their performance while in those positions, it can be logically deduced that if some women can still thrive to get into public positions and excel amidst these factors and challenges working against them, they can do much better under an atmosphere devoid of such factors. Sequel to this, the study recommends that a holistic approach be adopted in order to address the fundamental factors and their attendant challenges against women. In the first place, government, organized private sector, and literate individuals should intensify effort to re-orient and upscale the value system of people with respect to fair treatment of both gender, particularly in the traditional/rural settings, that have been bedeviled by age-long traditions/cultures which have relegated the women to the background, as inferior or weaker vessels.

This, on the part of the government, could be achieved, besides other means, by entrenching a core gender-based subject in the entire educational curriculum - primary, secondary and tertiary education, and recruiting/deploying

capable manpower to teach such subjects. Moreover, such orientation programmes could be relayed via the electronic and print media to the public. Artistic works in the form of social satire could also be used as a means of correcting the erroneous/misleading beliefs.

On the part of feminist advocacy groups, concerned Civil Society Organizations/Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), they can contribute to the actualization of this recommendation by directing their advocacy/ sensitization programme to focus more on the quality of women that should participate in public decision-making positions rather than just on numerical gender balance. In other words, those factors that negatively impact upon their quality of service delivery should be tackled in their advocacies, seminars, workshops, conferences, etcetera.

At home, individual families could contribute to the realization of the above recommendation by effectively maximizing the socialization period of the girl-child to inculcate in her, the right value system that is anchored on gender-parity, self esteem cum self-worth. This would, in no small measure, result in boundless achievement pattern and good occupational orientation as she grows and goes into the wider society. The aforementioned means of orientation could help to address the challenges of gender stereotype, prejudice, discrimination and poor co-operation, to a large extent.

Sequel to the next major finding (arising from the second hypothesis) that there is a significant relationship between indigenous culture and women's opportunities in Public Sector in Nigeria, Besides cultural re-orientation programme recommended above, a legal approach could fast-track the desired result. Along this line the study recommends that the National Assembly should enact a bill that repeals such discriminatory cultural practices. Generally, the study also recommends that the National Assembly should enact a bill prohibiting gender discrimination in employment, leadership and executive positions. It is hoped that this would checkmate the gender bias against women, if adopted, would subsequently, create equal opportunity for all to have a fulfilled career.

This could be realistic through an effective monitoring mechanism. Women liberation movements could therefore monitor the implementation of prescribed policies and alert the relevant authority whenever there is a breach.

Given the third major finding (emanating from the third hypothesis) that there is significant relationship between merit consideration and women's employment into executive positions in Public Sector in Nigeria, the study recommends that the principle of honesty/transparency be highly upheld in the public service. The selection of recruited candidates as well as the entry examination/interview for the shortlisted candidates into the Service should always be done with utmost transparency. Furthermore, promotion examination/interview should also be characterized with integrity and transparency.

Favoritism, tribalism, gender bias or discrimination should be avoided. This implies upholding the tenet of meritocracy in public service. Furthermore, this can be achieved by ensuring strict adherence to rules and regulations as stipulated

by the Public Service Rules (PSR). Appropriate disciplinary measure should also be meted out to any public officer who flouts the Rules.

In this era of growing economic and political challenges, there is the need to put off sentimental nuances and create a conducive environment for a pool of fine brains across gender divide, to effectively manage the economic and political challenges of the country for enhanced and greater benefits among the citizenry.

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