Gender Mainstreaming and Political Representation: The Nigerian Experience

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Abstract

This work "gender mainstreaming and political representation attempts to find out the relationship between gender mainstreaming and political representation. Using feminism as a tool of analysis we found that there has been a greater improvement in gender mainstreaming in Nigeria from 1999 to 2015. This was largely due to general awareness created on the condition of women through gender mainstreaming activities at the global state. The result has been the emergence of women NGOs and other state holders pressing for better conditions for women in socio-economic and political development of the country. This study however, found out that inspite of gains madel in this area, there still exist a wide disparity between men and women in the country in terms of access to socio-economic opportunities including participation in politics and decision making. In other words, although there has been an effective gender mainstreaming in Nigeria, this has not brought a proportional increase to women political representation in the country. This study further identified certain intributions that were responsible for this ugly scenario. These include: the dominant patriarchal system in Nigeria, negative attitude of Nigeria women towards the political process and their lack of support for fellow women aspirant, among other inhibitions. In the light of the above, the study recommends among other things that fermal politicians must cultivate the habit of supporting themselves in order to create a democratic space for themselves.

Introduction

The issue of women's representation in political decisions and policy making centres has been a topical discourse in Nigeria since her independence. From independence in 1960 to 1999 when Nigeria returned back to a democratic government from a protracted military interregnum, the performance of Nigerian women in terms of their political representation in elective and appointive

offices were quite dismal. They were at best marginalized and reduced to a second fiddle. For instance, it is significant to note that before 1999, the proportion of seats women occupied in the National Assembly never exceeded 3.1% and 5% for federal executive council membership (Luka, 2012). According to Ochanja and Terwase (2013), this largely accounted for the exclusion of their interests in government and policy making.

The present democratic experiment which was ushered in (in 19991), after the military handed over power to a civilian government, marked the beginning of a new era for Nigeria. During this period, women political representation and participation in politics tremendously improved when compared to the previous era. Luka (201229) recorded that President Obasanjo on assumption of office kick started the process of awakening the women from their political slumber by 4 out of the 29 senior ministers which represented 13.7% and 3 out of 18 junior ministers representing 16.6%. He went further to appoint 2 women advisors and 2 senior special assistants and 6 special assistant to the Vice President as well as 8 permanent secretaries. According to Kolawola et al (2012) some state governors also appointed women as commissioners in their-states thus-making them to be members of the state executive council.

It is worthy of note that although the number of women in political positions increased between 1999 and 2011, the positions were mostly appointive and in the executive arm rather than elective. Within this period (1999 - 2011), for instance, no woman was voted into the office of the president, or governor in any of the 36 states. In 1999, however, out of a total of 469 national assembly seats, there were only 15 women representing 3.19%; in 2003, this increased to 25 representing 5.33%.

The year 2007 witnessed another increase to 34 representing 7.24% and a slight decline was observed in 2011 to 33 representing 7.03%. In addition, from 2003 to 2015 2 to 6 women were elected as deputy governors. Despite these improvements in women political representation and decision making in Nigeria, the country still lags behind the global benchmark of 35% affirmative action. But this is in spite of gender mainstreaming efforts in Nigeria that sometimes results in the rising number of educated women and professionals, the growth and increased political activism and advocacy for women's rights by many women groups, the rising recognition and acknowledgement of the role of women in politics and governance. It is in this context that this paper tends to examine how gender mainstreaming has helped in solving the problem of women political representation in Nigeria's current republic.

Conceptual Clarification

Political Representation: This could be said to be a process in which one person or group has the capacity, usually formally established, to speak and act on behalf of a larger number of other persons or groups, e.g. in a legislature, at a party convention, in negotiation with a committee. Here we are more interested in parliamentary representation and representation in the national executive council. Individuals or groups may be represented by reference to any of their aspects or attributes; geographical location gender; occupation; party affiliation; etc (Roberts and Edwards (1991).

The method of selecting representatives and their relation to those they represent may vary considerably. However, a common method is election. Also, in Nigeria, since the constitution requires the president or governors of the state to at least appoint a minister from each state, such minister is seen as representing primarily his/her state in the national executive council. Political representation is an important aspect of democracy and the democratic process.

Gender Mainstreaming

According to Corner (1991), the first official use of gender "mainstreaming" occurred at the preparatory papers for the Beijing platform of Action (PFA). She thus stated that;

> *The UN system both through the global women's conferences and the work of its agencies, has been an important avenue though which mainstreaming gained general currency and acquired specific meanings (Corner 1999.-i in Thomas 1999 (ed).*

Gender mainstreaming was officially endorsed at the fourth World Conference on women as the acceptable approach that governments, the UN, and other stakeholders should take in the implementation of the platform for Action (PFA)(UN 1995a).

However, it was the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) which resolved the lack of consensus and understanding by defining the concept of mainstreaming. The council defines mainstreaming as:

> The process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, polities or programmes in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetrated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality (ECOSOC, 1997 in Thomas 1999 (eds).

Jahan (1995:13) identifies two major mainstreaming approaches which are, the 'integrationist' and the agenda-setting transformative approach. While the former involves broadening the dominant paradigm to fit women 'in' without challenging the existing power structure the later approach challenges masculine's power structure not only because mainstreaming promotes women as decision makers, but also because it supports women collective action in redefining development agendas.

Under these approaches new tools such as; gender analysis, gender statistics, gender awareness and gender sensitivity training were developed with a view to closing the gap or inequality between men and women. Again, as the mainstreaming continues to gather momentum women's rights and women's political representation became part and parcel of the mainstreaming. For instance the Beijing conference emphasized the importance of women participation in all areas of decision making and particularly in politics. In line with this Riley (2003) described gender mainstreaming as a political process that alter the balance of power.

The implicit objective of all mainstreaming was for the "masculine" mainstream to give way to a new mainstream that will equally accommodate the roles, needs and experiences of men and women.

An Analisis of Women Political Representation (1999 - 2015)

Nigeria became an independent state on first October 1960. However, its first democratic experience was cut short as the military took over the realms of government in 1966. In 1979, General Olusegun Obasanjo returned the political baton seized again in 1983 by General Buhari. Hopes for General Ibrahim Babangida (who held sway in the mid 1980s- early 1990s) to hand over power to civilian government in 1993 was truncated as he annulled the June 12, 1993 election, believed to have been won by M.K.O. Abiola. The aftermath was civil protests in most regions of Nigeria, especially in

western Nigeria. The protests which were spearheaded by the National Democratic Coalition (NADECO) threatened the very life of the Nigerian State and forced the dictator to "Step aside". Consequently, in May 1999, power was returned again to a civilian government headed by General Olusegun Obasanjo by the military. This was the beginning of the current democratic experience. It is thus within this period that we will limit our analysis of women participation and representation in politics to.

The United Nations declaration of the International Women Year (1975) and the decade that followed (The UN Decade for women, 1976- 1985) as well as subsequent UN conference, not only created awareness and set new agenda, but also produced a blue print for sustainable role of women in socio-economic and political development (Luka, 2012 in Ochanja and Terwase, 2013). Resultantly, the last three decades saw women's role in national development, and politics assumed a centre stage in public discourse in Nigeria. Nevertheless, opinion still varied on whether the role of women is best suited in the domestic sphere or they can also engage in national economic and political activities like their male counterparts (Luka 2012 ibid).

According to Okoromkwo, the reemergence of democracy in Nigeria in 1999 has imposed new demand on government to foster a more open society and promote a greater role for women in public decision making (Okoronkwo in Ochanja and Tarwase, 2013). Thus in 1999, women participation and representation pin politics and decision making experience an improvement over previous experience, but generally, the scorecard remained poor. For instance, the 1999 general elections saw only 181 position won by women out of the 11,881 available positions throughout the country (Samuel and Segun 2012, in Ochanja and Terwas, 2013). Also 2003, no woman was elected into the House of Assembly of 12 of the 36 Houses of Assembly in the country. In states where they were elected into the House of Assembly, they were very few (Agbalajobi, 2010, Olojede, 1999). Asaju and Adagba (2013) recorded that at the April 2007 elections, there were total of 1200 women aspirants to 1,532 offices. Although 660 of these aspirants won their primaries, -only 93 of them finally emerged as winners and these include six deputy governors. In 2011, only 32 women made it to the national assembly out of 469 members, representing only 8%. Out of 109 senators who became successful at the 2011 election, only 7 (6.4%) were women. Thus the parliamentary representation of Nigeria women which hitherto had a 2% increase in each new election from 1999 - 2007 suddenly dropped in 2011. This decrease became disturbing given the increase in the number of women who contested and the figure dropped remarkably when compared with the 2007 election. The 2007 general elections had 9 women who won their senatorial seats.

This represents 8.25%. In 2003 elections, there were only 4 female senators which represented 3.67%. In the federal House of Representatives only 19 women won elections. This made up only 5.27% of the 360 member house. After the 2011 elections, women in Nigeria experienced remarkable improvement in their political participation. President Jonathan appointed 33% of cabinet positions to women (up from at least 10% in the last government). These include sensitive positions like that of finance and education ministries. This success was only noticeable at the appointive offices as the 2011 also witnessed a decline in the elective positions occupied by women, especially in the national assembly. In the 2015 election lesser women made it to the national assembly. Only 27 women won elections to the national assembly. Eight (8) out of this number were senators and 19 were members of the house of representative.

The tables below show some of the trends of women participation in politics since from 1999 to 2015.

Table I: Comparism of Female representation in the 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011 and 2015 Elections.

	1999		2003		2007		2011		2015	
Office	Seat available	Women	Seat Available	Women	Seat available	Women	Seat Available	women	Seat Available	Women
President	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0
Senate	109	3 (2.8%)	109	4 (.7%)	109	9 (8.3%)	109	7 (6.4%)	109	8 (7.3%)
House of Reps	360	12 (3.3%)	360	21 (5.8%)	360	25 (6.9%)	360	26 (7.2%)	360	19 (5.2%)
Governors	36	0	3	0	36	0	36	0	36	0
State House of Assembly (SHA)	990	24 (2.4%)	990	40 (3.9%)	990	57 (5.8%)	990	68	990	Not Available
SHA committee chairperson	829	18 (2.2%)	881	32 (3.6%)	887	52 (5.9%)	887	Not available	887	Not available
LGA chairperson	710	13 (1.8%)	774	15 (1.9%)	740	27 (3.6%)	740	Unable to secure	740	Unable to secure
Councilors	6,368	69 (1.1%)	6,368	267 (4.2%)	6,368	235 (3.7%)	6368	Unable to secure	6368	Unable to secure
Deputy Governors	36	1	36	2	36	6	36	1	36	Unable to secure

Source: Derived from data compiled from the following sources: Ochanja and Terwase (2013), Olojede (1999) Punch (April, 2018).

Table H: Global Comparism of Percentage of Women in National Parliament.

	Both Hoses	Lower House	Upper House
World Average	19.5%	19.7%	18.7%
Sub-Saharan Africa	20.4%	19.4%	20.2%
Nigeria's Percentage	5.5%	5.3%	6.4%

Source: Ogunyankin (2012) in Ochanja and Terwase (2013)

From the figures on the tables, it is obvious that although women have made some progress in political representation within the period under study, their present status in political participation and representation in Nigeria is still a far cry when compared to global averages, particularly Sub-Saharan African regional average.

Gender Mainstreaming and Women Political
Representation in Nigeria

From the analysis of women political participation and representation in Nigeria, from 1999 to 2015, it has become manifest that women have not made much progress. This is more so if we compare their performance with the Sub-Saharan average. The question to ask at this juncture is, is this present status of women in political representation a true reflection of the degree of gender mainstreaming and its related activities in Nigeria? This is the question that we will focus on in this section.

The women delegates in the 2014 political restructuring national conference setup by then President Goodluck Jonathan perhaps saw a link between gender mainstreaming and political representation when they decried the wide gender gap in political representation and strongly suggested that serious gender mainstreaming be embarked upon to address the anomaly

The general awareness created on the condition of women through gender mainstreaming activities at the global state that resulted in the International Women's Year of 1975, the UN Decade for Women (1976-1985) and the subsequent UN conferences like the 1992 Rio conference on Environment and Development, the 1993 Vienna Human Rights Conference, the Copenhagen summit on social development

1995 and the Beijing World conference (Nigeria not only effectively participated but also signed its legal instruments) did not only set new priorities, but also produced a blueprint for sustainable role of women in socio-economic and political development (Ama 1993, Desai and Potter, 2008).

Thus this mainstreaming has brought the Nigerian women condition to the front burner in public discourse and brought in many women NGOs and other stake holders to press on for better conditions for women in socio-Economic development of the country including their representation in political and other decision making centres. It is believed that it is the pressure mounted by gender mainstreaming and related activities on successive governments that led to the establishment of: the federal ministry of women affairs and its parastatals, the National Council of Women's Societies (NCWS) which provided additional and statutory avenues for the promotion and facilitation of women related issues and the enhancement of their role in National development, including political representation. Also, wives of successive Nigerian past presidents had run pet projects which among other things raised women political consciousness. Such projects include: the "Better life for the Rural Women", "Family support Initiative", the recent Mrs. Jonathan's "Women in Politics" pet project. Through' these avenues, women are mobilized, sensitized and the awareness of their role in National development increased. Thus, the period 1999-2015 witnessed an upsurge in women participation in politics such as joining political parties, voting at elections, contesting of political offices etc. It has also encouraged the increased appointment of women into executive offices as ministers and permanent secretaries. This was more so under the Jonathan regime. Despite this tfemend6us feat achieved by the women gender mainstreaming, there is still wide disparity between men and women in the country in terms of access to socio-economic opportunities including participation in politics and decision making (Ochanja and Terwase, 2013). In other words, although there has been an effective gender mainstreaming in Nigeria, this has not brought a proportional increase to women political representation in the country due to certain inhibitions. These barriers include:

i.   The dominant patriarchal system in Nigeria enables men practice discriminatory socio-cultural practice against women. In this system gender inequality in politics is determined by the patriarchal division between private and public life (Pateman 1988).

ii.   Negative attitudes of Nigeria women towards political process and their lack of support for fellow women aspirant. For instance, in the 2011 PDP presidential primary, even with all the campaign for women political representation by Mrs. Jonathan's (First lady) NGO, none of the women Delegates voted for Sarah Jubril who contested for the PDP presidential ticket.

iii.   Again, Momoh (1995), identified the monetization of the Nigeria political process by the state and the elite class as a major impediment to women political representation. The high cost of nomination forms in the main political parties is a great disincentive to women participation in contesting for elective position.

iv.   Another obstacle is the violent nature Nigerian politics. Nigerian politics which is characterized by thurggery, arson, assassination etc. has been a major hindrance to women participation in politics.

v.   Others are women's marginalization in political Party leadership, low level of education etc.

Recommendations

To enhance women political representation, politically inclined women associations must assist in providing a conducive cultural environment for women participation in democratic governance. This can be done through well coordinated campaigns in rural and urban centres to soften gender stereotypes of public roles. Secondly, alliance must also be forged with civil associations that strive to re-engineer political values free from thuggery violence and election malpractice (Olojede, 1999). Furthermore, female politicians must cultivate the habit of supporting themselves in order to create a democratic space for women folk. Finally, women and feminists must not only press for public policy formulation in favour of women but also mount constant feminist's pressure and vigilance needed to ensure their effective implementation.

Conclusion

Gender mainstreaming has helped to create the needed awareness and encouragement for increased political representation in Nigeria. However, it is apparent that the increase in women political representation within the period under consideration is not commensurate with the efforts of the mainstreaming. This was due to the barriers against women participation in politics such as patriarchy, lack of fund and a violent political culture among other barriers. Thus, governments both at the rational and state levels, feminists, women organizations and gender sensitive men should all contribute their quota in dosing the inequality gap between men and women, especially in political representation. This could partly be achieved by a more determined gender mainstreaming strategies and approaches.

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