

Trends and Policies affecting Women's Participation in Leadership and Governance in Nigeria: Special Reference to Akure North and Akure South Local Government Area of Ondo State, Nigeria

^[1] Allen, Abimbola Adebimpe, ^[2] Aribigbola Afolabi

^{[1][2]} Department of Geography and Planning Sciences, Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba Akoko, Ondo State, Nigeria
Email: ^[1]bimbomowo@gmail.com

Abstract---This paper examines women participation in leadership and local governance drawing from the study of Akure North and Akure South Local Government Areas of Ondo state. This paper discusses roles and challenges associated with women in leadership at local government level and suggest how women leadership role can be enhanced in Nigeria. The data used in the study were derived from in-depth interviews with key stakeholders in local government affairs as well as Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with representatives of major groups in the two local governments. This was complimented by data from secondary sources including government publications. The research reveals patriarchy settings of African societies as one of the factors responsible for the low levels of women participation in local governance and touting associated with elective offices. It therefore recommends reform election process to reduce expenses and encourage women to be involved in politics

Key word---Women, leadership, politic, governance and participation

I. INTRODUCTION

Good governance has been identified as indispensable or necessary to achieve sustainable development in contemporary times particularly in developing world context such as Nigeria. Good governance assures that political, social and economic priorities are based on broad consensus in society and that the voices of the poorest and the most vulnerable are heard in decision-making over the allocation of development resources. This was why the UN-HABITAT in collaboration with the Government of Nigeria launched the Good Urban Governance (GUG) campaign in Nigeria in April 2001 as part of its advocacy role to promote the Habitat Agenda and in particular, the goal of achieving sustainable human settlements development and management in a rapidly urbanizing world. Therefore, developing capacity for good governance in a society has been identified as *sine qua non* to achieving sustainable development through the elimination of poverty and creation of enabling environment in which every member of the society can enjoy good health and creative lives.

In Nigeria, in a bid to ensure good governance, the 1999 Nigerian constitution in section 16(1) a,b,c and d and section 16(2) entrenched some of the principles of good

governance in the country. In spite of this constitutional provision, role of good governance in ensuring welfare of citizenry as well as global efforts at promoting and enhancing good governance especially in less developed societies including Nigeria, good governance continue to be elusive in Nigeria.

Extant literature indicated that Women have participated in the political dispensation even though not many women emerged at the end of the day. Marked progress is evident, but vestiges of masculine domination of political leadership weigh on iterations of change, which also vary by context. It is therefore clear that political leadership in Nigeria are stratified on the basis of gender distinction, thereby calling to question the assertion of gender neutrality in the political arena. Evidence points to the fact that political parties in Nigeria have always been, and are still dominated by men, and there is also an unwillingness to place women high on the electoral list during elections, or to make women issues high on their list of priorities, or even include them in decision-making positions within the party. In a bid to improve the participation of women in politics and governance at all levels of administration in Nigeria by encouraging more women to participate most political parties when attaching nominates fee for men to obtain

nomination forms make such nomination form free for women. Despite this development, women representation in government and leadership is still very low.

One of the major problems facing Nigeria today is lack of good governance and what has been termed leadership failure. In most part of Nigeria, the role of woman is still restricted to home keep and are not allowed to function visible in the public domain. However, recent development indicated that there is in need to involve every member of a society in decision making process and this emphasis is now on improving women participation in government in Nigeria. In support of this, the UN recommended 35 percent of position to women in the Affirmative Action document. Despite this Affirmation Action and free nomination forms for women contestants by political parties in the country, available record revealed that women are not adequately represented in government in Nigeria. This paper is therefore designed to explore women participation in local leadership and governance in Nigeria drawing from the experience of Akure North and South Local Government of Ondo State. The overall essence is to ascertain their level of participation in leadership and governance at local level, identify factors responsible for their low levels of participation and recommend how the prevailing low level and be improved to promote sustainable development in the area.

II. STATEMENT OF PROBLEM:

Most human societies around the world are toward patriarchy which puts the control of the world and greater percentage of its resources and power in the hand of the male gender (Aruna 2005). In other words the natural order of things has been for men to control most human social formation and political institution. However with the growth and development of modern society the need to correct these anomalies became unavoidable. The end product of patriarchy is gender inequality which places men in domineering status over women and this scenario has silent women for a very long time. Also some men find it difficult to empower women to leadership position, having the mindset that it may lead to neglect of their role as mother and caregivers at home. Women on the other hand do not support their fellow women in governance/leadership position because of the long time sociological believe that leadership position is for men.

Conceptual Building Block and Relevant Literature:

Moreover, oftentimes leadership as a concept in itself is not well understood. Public and/or political leadership is assumed to exist when someone holds appointive or elective office and acts in a formal capacity. Leadership is often

studied as the behaviour and outcomes of those holding formal positions, while gender as a category is not seriously considered. Emphasis has primarily been on dominance-masculinist forms of power or patriarchy, instead of democracy, liberalism and socialism.

Admittedly, affirmative action may help to improve the situation of women in politics. Yet, it presents some dilemmas in its implementation, effectiveness and the irony of the fact that it is hardly supported by reality, especially in the Third World. From comparative experience, while affirmative action measures can improve women's representation in public offices, they have some internal contradictions that tend to ambush and neutralize their intended benefits. A worrisome dimension is that the real agenda of such measures can be concealed, touting only the good reason to the public, particularly women, learning from the Ugandan experience. In a more recent exposition on legislative quotas for women in Africa, Tripp (2005) noted that although women became very vocal and active in parliamentary debates, they had more difficulty pushing through legislation that would provide key supports to women.

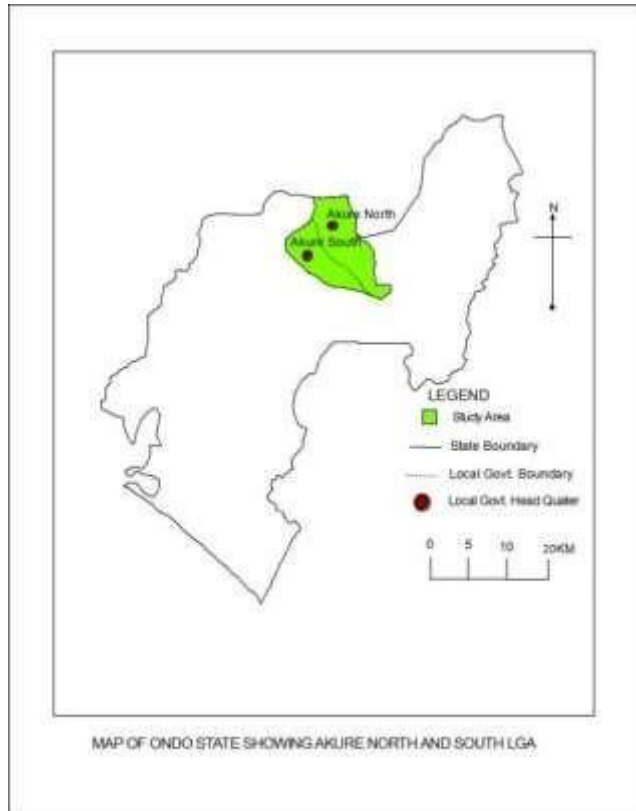
Women's Political Participation: A Global Outlook Women constitute slightly more than half of the world population. Their contribution to the social and economic development of societies is also more than half as compared to that of men by virtue of their dual roles in the productive and reproductive spheres. Yet their participation in formal political structures and processes, where decisions regarding the use of societal resources generated by both men and women are made, remains insignificant (Aluko). Presently, women's representation in legislatures around the world is 18percent (International Women's Democracy Centre (IWDC), 2008)

Participation as an element of good governance as enunciated by Unhabitat (Unhabitat, 2012), entails the involvement of all and sundry in local decision-making process. This is because effective participation is based on freedom of speech and association and requires developing the capacity to constructively engaged political office holders and institutions on issues relating to the welfare of citizens (Unhabitat, 2012)

III. THE STUDY AREA AND METHODS:

The setting for this study is Akure North and Akure South Local Government Areas of Ondo State of Nigeria. Ondo is one of the 36 states of Nigeria; Ondo state is located in the south-western part of Nigeria. There are 18 local government Areas in Ondo state from which two, that is Akure North and Akure South LGAs were selected for the

study. The two local government areas are located in Ondo central senatorial district of the state. The state lies



between longitudes 4°30' and 6° East of the Greenwich Meridian, 5° 45' and 8° 15' North of the Equator. This means that the state lies entirely in the tropics. Ondo State is bounded in the North by Ekiti/Kogi States; in the East by Edo State; in the West by Oyo and Ogun States and in the South by the Atlantic Ocean. Adebayo (1982). The population of the state according to the 2006 population census is 3,441,024 comprising 1,761,263 Males and 1,679,761 Females NPC (2006). According to Ekanade (2000) 48.2% of the population is males while 52.8% are female. He mentioned that the structure and distribution of population in the state have been affected by high incidence of migration.

Akure South Local Government council was created in 1976 and has as its headquarters Akure which also double as the capital city of Ondo state. The population of the local government according to the 2006 population census figures is 353,211. The council is divided into 11 political wards and 302 polling booths (Facts and figures on Ondo State, 2010). Major cities in the local government include Akure, Oda and Aponmu. The LGA covers an area of 3,180 square kilometres

Akure North Local Government council was created in 1996 and has its headquarters at Iju/Itaogbolu. The headquarters of the LGA is 18 kilometre to Akure the capital city of Ondo state (Digest of Local Government Statistics, 2009). The population of the local government according to the 2006 population census figures is 130,765. The council is divided into 12 political wards and 103 polling units (Facts and figures on Ondo State, 2010). Some of the major settlements in the local government are Iju, Itaogbolu, Oba-Ile, Ayede Ogbese, Ilu Abo, Ogele and Imafo.

The methods utilized in the study embrace in-depth interviews of key officials of the Local government. The following key staffers of the council were interviewed to elicit information from them: The Chairman, Director of Local Government Administration, Head of Personnel Management (HPM), Internal Auditor and Treasurer among others. Other people knowledge in local government administration including the Permanent Secretary Local Government Service Commission was interviewed to throw more light on Local administration in the area.

In addition, to face-to-face interview, data were also obtained through focus Group Discussions (FGDs). Thus, two FGDs were conducted for the study. The first in the secretariat of Akure North Local Government in Iju Itaogbolu and the second in the secretariat of Akure South Local Government in Akure. The qualitative data were generated through in-depth interviews with key stakeholders in city affairs in the study area. NGOs, Civil Society Organizations, Community Development organizations, organized groups and societies including market women, Drivers' unions etc; were also consulted as key informants to provide information on women participation in governance in the area. Secondary data sources embraces extraction of essential data from published sources including publications of Research and statistics Department of Ministry of Finance and Planning, Local Government Service Commission, Ministry of Physical Planning and Urban Development; National Population Commission (NPC); Independent Electoral Commission of Nigeria (INEC); State Independent Electoral Commission, Akure.

In summary, the methodology adopted includes structured interviews and consultations with policy officers and Planners at Federal, State, and local government on the one hand and residents of the city on the other.

Women in Leadership and Governance:

One of the indices used in this study to evaluate women participation in leadership and governance in the study area is to examine the number of women in both the executive and legislative arms of the two local governments selected for the study. Thus, in the next section, the percentages of

women in leadership positions were identified and discussed vis a vis their role in the traditional set up of the area as follows:

In Akure South Local Government Council (ASLGC), in the local government election that took place in the area, the chairman, his vice and all the eleven Councilors elected were all men. No single woman was elected thereby excluding women from direct decision making for the local council. However, the situation improved when the council was dissolved and caretaker appointed in 2009. Out of the seven (7) supervisory councilors appointed for the council in 2009, three (3) were women, thus accounting for about 43 percent of all decision makers for the council. In another election that took place in April 2016, all the elected officials including the Chairman, his Vice and all the eleven (11) Councilors were men thereby again excluding women from leadership and governance of the area. After the dissolution of the council in March 2017, a caretaker committee of 5 persons was constituted. This time a woman was appointed as Chairperson and another woman as a member. This was an improvement on the previous composition of the council. The implication of these findings was that women fare better in appointment than election. Thus it is obvious that women have found it difficult to stand for and win election to the local council. This has contributed in limiting women participation in leadership and governance in the area. During the FGD, it was discovered that there are no special ways of involving women in decision making in the local government. Efforts to retrieve and analyze records of women participation in the last two local government elections in the council was not possible. The State Independent Electoral Commission that conducted the election could not make the record available. Therefore, it becomes difficult to determine women participation in election in the area. However, participants at the FGD agreed that they participated in the election.

In Akure North Local Government Council (ANLGC) like its ASLGC in the local government elections of 2007, all elective council officials were men, no woman was elected. Following the dissolution of the council executives in 2009, women were appointed into the council. Out of six (6) the supervisors appointed, two were women (about 33.3 percent). And four of the Head of Departments in the council were women. Like in the 2007 local government elections, in April 2016, the Chairman, Vice Chairman and all the Councilors elected were men. This also excluded women in decision making and governance in the area.

During the FGD organized in the LGC, participants indicated that there was no special ways of involving women in decision making in the council. Besides, attempt

to retrieve records of women participation in the two last local government elections and national elections in the area were not possible. What we are able to receive was aggregate data on all voters, disaggregate data showing number of men and women voters were not available. Thus, it becomes difficult to determine the level of women participation in chosen their leaders in the study local government areas,

Besides, field investigations revealed the two local councils like other councils in Ondo State are yet to adopt the Affirmative Action. The people are aware of the affirmative action on women in public position. They believe women are given free hands to participate in politics. The ruling party in the state (All Progressive Party) give nomination forms to women who are interested in contesting for any post free of charge, while the men have to pay for theirs. Women participation has not been institutionalized in the LG to conform with the global affirmation that seeks to allocate 35 percent position to women. In the last LG election that took place in the area in 2007, all the elected eleven councilors were men, no single woman councilor was elected. However, situation improved in 2010, out of the seven appointed caretaker members of the council in 2010, three of them (43percent) are women.

In the recent local government election that took place in Ondo State in April 2016, the elected Executive Chairman and his deputy were male. In addition, all the elected Councilors are men thereby excluding women from the law-making arm of the local government and governance at this very important level. However, there was better representation of women in the executive, out of seven supervisors, two are women. In the area of appointment women fare better than in election.

An examination of traditional system of governance as constituted in the area revealed a similar pattern of low women representation in governance as they are dominated by males. In this context the traditional rulers of all the major cities are males. All the quarter heads in the major towns are men. Of more importance is the traditional councils in the local governments. The traditional councils consists all major traditional rulers in each of the council. However, investigations revealed that some chieftaincy title and roles are given to women in the two local government areas. Such include Iyaloja (Head of Market women).

In Akure, Erelu was the first woman to be installed a Chief. Erelu is the King of market as well as the Queen of the market. As the head of the women, she is responsible for anything that has to do with the market including administration of the market. The Deji of Akure (king) is supported by six high chiefs in his domain. Similar pattern exists in all the major towns and cities in the local

government. The implication of this is that women leadership and governance are restricted to marketing and commerce. In sum in the traditional system of governance in the two local government's women's role in leadership and governance is still very restricted to leading women groups in the area.

One area in which women have been making impacts in leadership and governance in the studied local government areas is in their special programme termed 'Gbebiro' (family support) as put in place by the office of Her Excellency, the wife of Ondo State Governor. It is a monthly programme anchored by the Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development. It was created and designed towards women empowerment, educating women on their health related matters, strengthening and promoting family values, emphasizing the importance of every woman to a family and hitherto stabilizing the family among others. The programme for designed and implemented to improve and enhance the capacities of wives of government functionaries and women in leadership positions and government at different levels in the state. One of the focus of the monthly meeting was to campaign to help attain 35 percent affirmative Action before 2030. This was hinged on the fact that the patriarchal nature of the Nigerian society had long place women as second fiddle to men and subjected them to unequal opportunities. Participants at the FGDs agreed that it has helped to reposition the women folk to be more proactive and get more involved in politics and leadership

IV. CHALLENGES WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN LEADERSHIP GOVERNANCE

An examination of leadership and governance structure and activities in the study area revealed that a number of factors limit or inhibit women participation in leadership and governance.

Non Adoption Affirmative Action

Limited access to education: one of the objectives of the Millennium Development Goals is education for all. The component of the MDGs aims at eradicating illiteracy from the globe Adekeye. S & Salawu. B (2005). The aim for education for all is a laudable one which everyone subscribed to but its achievement is being threatened by many factors varying from finance to human resources. It is also impeded by some cultural practices such as early marriage that comes in different guises

Social and cultural practices: these practices prevent women from being educated. Parents see the female child education as a waste of money because on the long run they will leave for their husband house. Thereby restricting the

girl child to carrying household and domestic chores, marketing and family affairs.

Patriarchal settings of African societies: the patriarchal ideology which stresses male assertiveness and domination over female has led to the debasement of women status and eroded their freedom. Olufemi (1993) mentioned the role of women in traditional Nigerian societies has been taken for granted. She is expected to nurture the children and take care of the home. Such traditional views had consequences, which did not augur well for social and economic development.

Thuggery and touting associated with elective offices: election in developing countries is still characterized by some form of thuggery, touting and malpractices which tend to scare women away. Some of these practices include: god-fatherism, male dominated party executives, labeling, violence, money politics as well as other social and cultural factors. Since men are usually in the majority in the political party setup, they tend to dominate the party hierarchy and are therefore at an advantage in influencing the party's internal politics. For instance, in Nara in Nkanu East Local Government (LG) of Enugu State, a female candidate, Mrs. Grace Ani, was reported to have contested for councillorship position in the last LG elections and won. To her greatest consternation, the position was given to a male candidate who lost in the elections on the basis of gender discrimination. The women in the community protested to no avail; rather Mrs Ani was compensated with a political appointment in the LG. Also a well-known columnist and editor of the leading newspaper, *The Guardian*, Reuben Abati, in supporting this view laced his position with the story of Mrs. Lami Sadu, who was divorced by her husband in 1999 for having the effrontery to vote for the All People's Party against her husband's wish. In January 2011, Hajia Halima Tijjani (ACN, Kaduna Central) was battered and her elbow broken for daring to contest. Abati concluded that "the real problem is with the hypocrisy of the backward male elite in Nigerian politics which considers every woman seeking a role in public life, a "busybody" (Nwankwo, 2011).

The failure to remove these barriers will further perpetuate underrepresentation of women in governance. Democracy is about fair representation of all interest groups in the society; the low representation of women is a violation of the principle of democracy. Poor representation denies women mass participation in governance, which is another hallmark of democracy. The participation of women in the electoral process is important to any democracy. The inclusion of gender sensitive provisions in party constitutions and manifestoes can be an important tool for encouraging women to participate actively in political parties and holding

the party accountable when it comes to affirmative action. Historical analysis of constitutions, electoral laws and processes in Nigeria are incontrovertibly gender insensitive Oke (2015). Beginning from 1922, when the first constitution in Nigeria was made to the 1999 constitution, which purportedly gave legitimacy to the Fourth Republic, aspirations and concerns of women, who represent at least one-half of the Nigerian population, have been undisputedly discarded Ityavyar (2007). Since the return of civilian rule in 1999, the socio-political realities suggest the need for constitutional and electoral reforms in Nigeria. This development has also challenged the women groups, lending their voices to the electoral and constitutional reform discourse (Akiyode-Afolabi, 2010). As of today, in Nigeria, women marginally participate in governance; women have almost remained invisible in the party system. While the parties claim to encourage women participation in elective positions through free nomination, yet they are discriminated against in practice. Although one cannot deny that the Nigerian governments have scored well on adopting and or formulating measures to address gender justice, they have however failed to allocate resources critical to the implementation and ensure proper functioning of these measures (Umeha, 2010).

Women have participated in the political dispensation even though not many women emerged at the end of the day. Marked progress is evident, but vestiges of masculine domination of political leadership weigh on iterations of change, which also vary by context. It is therefore clear that political leadership in Nigeria are stratified on the basis of gender distinction, thereby calling to question the assertion of gender neutrality in the political arena. Evidence points to the fact that political parties in Nigeria have always been, and are still dominated by men, and there is also an unwillingness to place women high on the electoral list during elections, or to make women issues high on their list of priorities, or even include them in decision-making positions within the party. Party manifestos and activities are yet to fully reflect women's issues; instead, they remain confined to the women's wing of the various parties, where they are treated as subordinates and mere supporters instead of equal partners.

V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The study investigated women participation in Akure North and Akure South Local Government Areas of Ondo State and found low levels of participation in leadership positions and governance by women. This does not promote sustainable development and therefore make the following recommendations to improve the precarious situations and to ensure more women participation in leadership and

governance.

Adoption and Domestication of the Affirmative Action

Improved access to girl child education: education of the female child will reduce early marriage and contribute to societal development. The government and women right organization should sensitize the society the more on the need to educate female child and not see one gender as superior to the other and remove practices that promote inequity between men and women. Therefore, aggressive education of the girl-child must be pursued with all the vigour and political will it requires.

Women empowerment: women empowerment subverts cultural norms and it is a precondition to social development. Women should be accorded opportunities to develop their individual talents and contribute more meaningfully to societal development. The possible effects include accelerated social development which also has positive effect on their children in area of their education, health and improved welfare. More so, empowerment is seen as the power to do things one could not have been able to do or that which one is incapable of exercising authority on before. Oke (2015)

Reform election process to reduce expenses: over the years there have been some waivers for women seeking electoral position such as exemption in the payment of nomination fee among others. Government can do more by leaving some position vacant for female gender only so as to encourage more women participation in Politics. Election should be free and fair election. This must be guaranteed to ensure that the process is not only transparent but to ensure that leadership desire of the people becomes a reality. This process should abhor thuggery, do-or-die posture and should not be made too scary for the women.

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