

WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN POLITICS: CAN RADIO ENHANCE THE SITUATION?

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Abstract

Politics involves governance which is a channel of serving the masses and providing them with the dividend of democracy. In developing countries like Nigeria the number of women in politics is insignificance compared to their male counterparts. One of the enhancing mechanism in increasing the number of women in politics in Nigeria is through the use of mass media especially radio. The role of radio in achieving behaviour change especially towards women participation in politics cannot be ignored. Radio is a channel of communication that is accessible, affordable and available to Nigerians. The channel of communication used to inform, educate and correct misconceptions people have about women participation in politics can go a long way in influencing the concerned authorities to give women chance to contest some political positions and be voted for. Against this backdrop, this paper examines radio as a channel of communication and relevance of radio in enhancing women participation in politics. The article is anchored on Agenda Setting Theory. The paper concludes that radio programmes are very essential in influencing women to participate in politics. The article recommends that concerned authorities should use multi-channel of communication if more women are to be influenced to go into politics.

Keywords: election, participation, Politics, radio, women.

Introduction

Gender imbalance has been observed in Nigeria politics as Nigeria political terrain is mainly occupied by men. Beijing declaration of 1995 that women should be given 30% opportunity in political positions is still a mirage in Nigeria. Obviously, the representation of Nigeria women in politics is still insignificant compared with other developed countries (Ogbiti & Onusu, 2012). Women are disadvantaged in terms of the opportunity to contest for political position or to be appointed to head a ministry or parastatals. Women marginalisation in Nigeria politics is fuelled by challenges such as gestation period, economic factors, socio-cultural factors, religion, gender stereotyping, education, male resistance to women's participation, etc. Faseke (2004) stated that the world can only witness rapid political progress when women who because of their numerical strength (more than half of the world's population) are brought into political process. In other words, when women are relegated to the background, rapid political progress will continue to be a mirage in Africa and other developing countries.

According to Chukwunwike (2004), without the active participation of women and the incorporation of women's perspectives at the political decision making better life for all cannot be achieved. From the list of governors of 36 states in Nigeria none is a woman. Number of women in the Senate and federal House of Representatives are not above 7 percent and 9 percent. Ogbiti and Onusu (2012) highlighted that Nigeria and other African countries lag behind other world regions in ensuring gender equality in politics. Most African countries have not implemented the 30 percent affirmative action for elective and appointive positions recommended by Beijing Declaration of 1995.

In the words of Yusuf and Olatunji (2020), women's participation in politics and governance is a prerequisite for sustainable development. Promoting increased women's participation in governance is critical to development, human rights and moral obligation in societies. Inclusive parliaments have the capacity to strengthen civic engagement and democratic participation among citizens.

The need for radio to play a vital role in enhancing women's participation in politics is very necessary as provided in Goal No. 5 of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which is emphatic on promoting gender equality and women empowerment. The goal is advocating for human right and at the heart of achieving SDGs. It is a prerequisite to overcoming hunger, poverty and diseases. The goal is of the objective of achieving equality at all aspects of the society such as education, work place, politics etc. The implication of the goal as stated by Ogbiti and Onusu (2012) is that the potentials, talents and abilities of women should no longer be ignored, but harnessed for satisfactory and rapid development. Therefore, there is no gainsaying that women's role is indispensable for development and improved quality living for all citizens. By women's unique nature nurturing role, they care for their husbands and children. Also, through women's representation in politics and public life, their peculiar interests and concerns can be actualized for justice and peace in the world.

Enhancing Women Participation in Politics: Why Radio?

Radio is a system of communication that uses electromagnetic waves through space. Kenechukwu (2014) stresses that radio equally refers to telecommunication by modulation and radiation of electromagnetic waves. Radio is generally applied to sound broadcasting, thus, it is an audio medium. The ubiquity of radio as a medium of communication makes it a powerful force to be reckoned with. Radio signals are carried on the electromagnetic spectrum to almost every nook and cranny of the world. Its penetrating force makes it an easily and readily accessible means of communication as it reaches the remotest part of the world.

According to Okunna and Omenugha (2012) radio is an audio mass medium which has the capacity to cut through the barriers of illiteracy and poor infrastructural facilities which could limit the ability of the print media to reach large audiences. In addition, according to the authors, radio has other peculiarities which make it the true mass medium, in terms of reaching a mass audience in the developing world. Radio is relatively cheap and can operate without electricity; it is therefore, more within the reach of developing countries population than television which can also transcend such barriers as illiteracy and infrastructural facilities. Radio is portable, and transistor radio sets are widely owned all over the developing countries even in the remote rural areas. In developing countries like Nigeria, radio is by far the most widely-used mass medium.

Okeke and Nwosu (2020) explains that radio has become established as not only one of the most popular means of disseminating information but also the preferred means of political expression among citizens especially in developing countries. Radio by its character is an outstanding means of instant communication through the conveying of information that concerns politics and persuasion in form of political programmes" (Okeke & Nwosu, 2020 p. 306).

Asema, Nkwam-Uwaoma and Tseggy (2017) posit that radio is the most expedient means to transmit political information immediately to the widest possible audience; although the internet enabled devices currently challenges radio as the primary source of political news. Many people especially in developing countries like Nigeria, Gambia, Congo depend on radio for political news.

In Nigeria for instance, research evidence shows that the use of radio as a medium of information is truly widespread, even among rural population. In their words, Okeke and Nwosu (2020) assert that this is still the case today, as radio has, therefore, been identified as the best mass medium at the country's level of development for promotion of political programmes, etc. Radio is a veritable tool for behaviour change especially in influencing the concerned male politicians to give women the opportunity to contest for certain positions.

The clamour for women participation in politics cannot be achieved without the contribution of radio. Radio has the potentials to provide an opportunity for public debate and comments. Radio has the ability of promoting gender equality in political participation. Onusu (2009) posits that radio mainly use news to

encourage women participation in politics. The author went further to explain that in order to enhance women participation in Nigeria politics other programmes such as drama, studio discussion, phone-in programme and commentary equally have to be used to achieve the objective. Radio can set agenda towards the enforcement of gender equality and empowerment in political participation. Radio has assisted in the constant promotion of gender equality and women empowerment by mounting sustainable enlightenment campaigns for general awareness about potential leadership qualities of women.

Nigeria women are mainly perceived as self depreciating, dependent, irrational, housewives whose interest are limited to domestic issues, husband snatchers and gullible people. Radio can be used to change this perception as well as enhancing women participation in politics by constantly mobilizing, sensitizing and advocating for equal rights of women in politics.

Factors Militating against Women Participation in Politics

There are many factors militating against women participation in politics but the major ones are discussed below.

1. Gestation Period: Women at the child-bearing age find it difficult to contest for elective positions. When a woman is pregnant for nine months she is to avoid anything stressful till some months after given birth. By the time she weans her child she might be pregnant again. This situation in most cases affects women as no pregnant woman or woman breastfeeding a child will be moving from one political rally to another with her pregnancy or breastfeeding child.

2. Economic Factors: Women do not have opportunity of owning industries and businesses. Financial institutions have limitations to loans they give to women to start businesses that can flourish. This made many women to engage in micro businesses that only give them money for taking care of their family. Though the Supreme Court of Nigeria has ruled that women just like men are entitled to family inheritance but some cultures especially in Igbo Land of Nigeria do not allow that. Men are those that mainly inherit family property, assets and factors of production. Women do not have the economic foundation for upward financial mobility. It limits their income level to the extent that they cannot afford the amount for obtaining ticket for any elective position.

3. Socio-cultural Factors: Cultural norms affect women participation in politics. Ogbiti and Onosu (2012) opined that women politicians are still perceived as loose women, undisciplined and unethical by cultural standards and more often than not, tagged dubious in character. The authors further explained that there is a wrong and negative perception of women who aspire into politics and public life. Some people see female politicians as those who have deliberately abandoned their marital and family responsibilities while others see them as prostitutes. Till date greater percentage of Nigerians still have such negative perception and this has resulted to many husbands and parents refuse their wives and children to venture into politics. Even women who have the resources to contest for elective positions still want to maintain their good socio-cultural reputation thereby shying away from politics in order not to be perceived negatively. African culture and tradition directly or indirectly is against women contesting for elective positions.

4. Religion: This is another factor that inhibits women's participation in politics. Different religious doctrine portrays women as weaker vessels that should respect and obey their husband in everything. Some religion relegates women to the background when it comes to their activities. To buttress this, in the Holy Bible (Matthew 10: 2-4) when Jesus Christ was choosing his Apostles, he never chose a woman. More so, the book of I Corinthians 14:34-35 states, "Let your women keep silence in the churches, for they are not permitted to to speak; but they are to be submissive, as the law also says." These biblical injunctions have been used by many Christians to conclude that it is against the will of God for women to participate in politics. On a similar not, some religions in many African States forbids women from sitting and interacting with men in the public but this is what politics is all about. Matthew 14:13-21 gave an account of how Jesus Christ fed the multitude with five loaves of bread and two fish. "... Now those who had eaten were about five thousand men, besides women and children", (Matt 14:21). All religions including African Traditional religion has made the society to see women as those who are not very important in the society. Therefore should not participate in politics.

5. Gender Stereotyping: African culture promotes male dominance. Women and men do not have equal status in the African society. Women are perceived to perform their roles only in the matrimonial home. Such perceived roles include child bearing, taking care of children, cooking for the family, providing support for their husband. As many women grew up especially in countries like Nigeria where role differentiation is obvious, it make them to shy away from other roles such as politics they can comfortable fit into. Olufemi and Akinola (2006) explain that gender roles of both sexes have left women essentially disadvantaged in African society. In the words of Koenig (2018), some of the gender stereotype issues in the society are a network of relationships sustained through socialization, a process through which forms of relationships are reproduced by conscious molding (Koenig, 2018).

6. Education: There is this believe that woman's education ends in kitchen. The President Muhammadu Buhari buttressed this when interacting with German Chancellor, Angela Merkel. He made a statement that his wife belongs to the kitchen and other room. Others believe that a girl is "someone else's property". These issues made some parents not to train their daughter in tertiary institution so as to better their life. The perception is that if one spends so much training his/her daughter in the university she might forget her maiden family the moment she gets married leaving her brothers to take care of their parents. Usua and Osuagwu (2010) reaffirm that women start from a disadvantaged position in education due to preference for the male child, compounded by the fewer number of girls schools. The participation of women in politics is encumbered by their prolonged denial of educational opportunity or the difficulty they experience in acquiring education. Obviously in the contemporary world, only those with sound education are truly fit to hold leadership positions (Ogbiti & Onosu, 2012). So lack of tertiary education is an impediment to their access to political power.

7. Male Resistance to Women's Participation: Many men believe that politics is meant for men while role of women is to ensure continuity of the lineage. The issue of political thuggery, god-fatherism and violence Nigeria political terrain is known for prevent many women indirectly from participating in politics. Despite the fact that god-fatherism has engulfed Nigeria politics women cannot benefit from it because god-fathers who provide financial strength to their political god-son in return for favours will not want to invest in women. Men in Nigeria politics sometimes use threat and intimidation to nudge women who are their opponent out of the race. Women candidates are often subjected to gender related electoral violence, threats and hate speech from their male counterpart because of the perception that women want to get what is traditionally men's. Some women can't afford to buy party forms and when payment for forms is waived for women, they are often made to step down for the man who has paid. Political parties have been known to tell a woman to step down for a man during electoral process (Agbalajobi, 2021).

Theoretical Framework

This paper was anchored on Agenda Setting Theory. McQuail (2010) states that agenda-setting theory was developed by Maxwell Mccombs and Donald Shaw in 1972, based on their study on the role of the media in the 1968 presidential elections. The theory is of the view that the media do not tell people what to think, but what to think about.

The media help to put pictures in the heads of the audience-members. This explains the power of the mass media to set agenda and raise issues upon which public opinion is expressed (Lippman, 1922 cited in McQuail, 2010). Agenda-setting theory has an important function in the media as it helps to shape public opinion and perception towards various issues. McCombs (2005) explains that the media indirectly have become a mould to the public mind and the public perceive the news based on what the media provide them. So setting the agenda for the public is important in order to sway public apprehension and awareness regarding those issues. Apart from influencing public apprehension and awareness, agenda-setting also affects personal behaviours and actions (Wu & Coleman 2009).

According to Edegoh and Nze (2017) agenda-setting theory holds that most of the things we discuss or worry about in our society are based on what we read from newspaper/magazine or social media or what we listened to the radio or watched in the television/film. The media make us to think about certain issues; they make us to feel that certain issues are more important than others in our society.

Baran and Davis (2012) observe that modern agenda-setting notions derive more or less directly from mass society perspective. The media may not be very successful in telling us what opinions to hold, they are often quite effective in telling us what to have opinions and what not to think about (Weimann & Brosius, 2017). The media set agenda which people share and discuss. Wimmer and Dominick (2014) reason that the media use agenda-setting concept to make themes and issues to be useful. For the media to frame a particular topic and set agenda it portrays how important the subject is. To Asema, Usifo-Kurex and Verengkat (2017), as media are the tools for the public to gain access to the news in local context and international context, the public tends to rely and depend on the media to help them get updated with majority of the events around them. In this context, the media not only provide the public with the news and reports about local and world events, but the media also play a role to lay emphasis on which news and events are important and should be the centre of attention, this can be adopted through vivid illustrations and explanations in radio about issues that are important at a given time.

The relevance of the theory to the study is that radio stations can give importance to women participation in politics. Radio can use series of programmes such as straight news, drama, commentary, studio discussion, phone-in programme to set agenda for what the electorates discuss or think about in any election process. More so, radio can be used to influence women to contest for some political position, be voted for and equally influence the male folk who dominated Nigeria politics to give women chance.

Table 1: Contestants of 2019 General Election in Nigeria Based on Gender

| S/N | ELECTORAL POSITIONS | MALE | FEMALE |
|-----|---------------------|-------|--------|
| 1 | President | 92% | 8% |
| 2 | Vice President | 67% | 33% |
| 3 | Senate | 91% | 9% |
| 4 | House of Reprs | 57% | 43% |
| 5 | Governor | 90% | 10% |
| 6 | Deputy Governor | 90% | 10% |
| 7 | State Assemble | 87.2% | 12.8 |

Source: Source: Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) Report (2019)

Table 1 shows that only 8% percent of women contested for the office of the president, 33 percent contested for Vice president. For the Senate Chamber 9 percent of women contested for the seat, while 43 percent of women contested for House of Representatives. At the state level 10 percent of women contested for Governorship position, 5 percent of women contested for Deputy Governor while 12.8 contested for State Assemble.

Table 2: Elected Candidates during 2019 General Election in Nigeria Based on Gender

| S/N | ELECTORAL POSITIONS | MALE | FEMALE |
|-----|---------------------|-------|--------|
| 1 | President | 100% | 0% |
| 2 | Vice President | 100% | 0% |
| 3 | Senate | 94% | 6% |
| 4 | House of Reprs | 97% | 3% |
| 5 | Governor | 100% | 0% |
| 6 | Deputy Governor | 89% | 11% |
| 7 | State Assemble | 97.8% | 2.2% |

Source: Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) Report (2019)

In the above table the number of women that won the elected position is still low compared to their men counterpart. Women did not win the seat of the president, Vice president and Governor. Though women won seats in the Senate, House of Representatives, Deputy Governor and State House of Assemble but that is insignificant compared to the men that won the seats.

Conclusion

Nigeria political terrain is mainly patriarch. Political system in Nigeria does not give women opportunity to participate in politics just like their male folk. Some factors such as education, culture, religion, finance, gestation period are militating against women participation in politics. Even the few women that are in Nigeria politics were labeled with bad names; such women aspirants are seen as shameless and promiscuous. This contributed in making many men not to allow their wives to participate in politics. Based on this, radio because of its strengths over other mass media channels is a veritable tool in educating, informing, mobilizing and setting agenda for the masses especially on the importance of giving women chances to participate in politics.

Recommendation

Women have been relegated to the background in issue of Nigeria politics. In order to enhance women participation in politics this paper recommended that:

- i. Government should provide appropriate laws and electoral system that would enhance women's participation in politics.
- ii. From federal down to local government level should put into practice the Beijing Declaration of 1995 which is giving women 30 percent position in every government.
- iii. Though radio because of its ubiquity is veritable tool for political participation and mobilization but multi-media should be used in enhancing women participation in politics because no single channel of communication can achieve maximum result.
- iv. Radio should help educate people of the dangers of cultural norms and gender stereotypes, then project women in ways that are relevant to leadership, politics and election.

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