

The Growth of the Gender Equality in the Household Participation of Women in Politics in Nigeria: Promote Woman's Decision Making and Employment in Kogi State Perspectives

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Abstract

The exciting development in the gender equity in the household recent political era was the increase in women's political participation Nigeria. Women are becoming more engaged in varieties of institutional decision making and empowerment processes. Since the re-birth of democracy in Nigeria in 1999, women have tried to gain access to decision making positions by contesting at various political levels and the representation of women's organizations on various policy debates has increased at local and national levels. What is problematic is whether the representation of women's organization in democracy and decision making in Nigeria was descriptive or substantive. Therefore, this paper investigated how visible and substantive were the roles played by women's organizations in decision making arena in Nigeria and whether their roles were appreciated. The paper utilized the descriptive survey research design to elicit and describe information. The findings revealed that the roles played by women's organizations in decision making arena was significant but not visible and unappreciated. It was therefore, recommended that women's organizations should do all they could to be more active in governance and encourage more women to be fully involved in decision making process in Nigeria to enhance national development.

Keywords: *Gender Equality, Colonial Period, Decision Making, Political activist and Women Participation, Occasioned by Patriarchy.*

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Background to the Study

Under international standards, both men and women should have equal rights and opportunities to everything worldwide, most especially to participate fully in all aspects and at all levels of political processes. Globally, women constitute over half of the world's population and contribute in vital ways to societal development generally Suleiman, (2022). In most societies, women assume some key roles, which are: mother, producer, home-manager, and community organizer, sociocultural and political activists. In line with global trend, Nigerian women constitute nearly half of the population of the country. But despite the major roles they play with their population, women roles in the society are yet to be given recognition Ajitero, (2021). This is due to some cultural stereotypes, abuse of religion, traditional practices and patriarchal societal structures. In Nigeria the awareness about the role of women in development of a nation came up in 1980s. The International Conference on women in Beijing in 1995 enhanced the effective participation of women in politics in Nigeria Abalaka, (2020).

Nigeria has been recording low participation of women in both elective and appointive positions this is a growing concern to many Nigerians Ajitero, (2021). However, concerted efforts have been made by government and non-governmental organizations to increase the level of participation of women in politics, in line, with the declaration made at the fourth World Conference on women in Beijing, which advocated 30% affirmative action Abalaka, (2020). However, in Nigeria, the extant National Gender Policy (NGP) recommended 35% affirmative action instead and sought for a more inclusive representation of women with at least 35% of both elective political and appointive public service positions respectively Sulaiman, (2022). The under representation of women in political participation gained root due to the patriarchal practice inherent in our society, much of which were obvious from pre-colonial era till date. However, the re-introduction of democratic governance has witnessed once again an increase in women political participation both in elective and appointive offices in Nigeria.

Historical Background Pre-colonial Era

Politically, in the pre-colonial era, Nigerian women were an integral part of the political set up of their communities Ajitero, (2021). For instance, in pre-colonial Bornu, women played active roles in the administration of the state, complementing the roles played by male counterparts Abalaka, (2020). Also, Women also played a very significant role in the political history of ancient Zaria. The modern city of Zaria was founded in the first half of the 16th century by a woman called Queen Bakwa Turuku. She had a daughter called Amina who later succeeded her as Queen. Queen Amina was a great and powerful warrior. She built a high wall around Zaria in order to protect the city from invasion and extended the boundaries of her territory beyond Bauchi and she made Zaria prominent Commercial Centre. The story was not different in ancient Yorubaland, where Oba ruled with the assistance of a number of women referred to as female traditional chiefs. They consisted of eight titled ladies of the highest rank. The significant role played by prominent women such as Moremi of Ife, Emotan of Benin and Omu Okwei of Ossomari, cannot be ignored Suleiman, (2022). Moremi and Emotan were great amazons who displayed wonderful bravery and strength in the politics of

Ife and Benin respectively, while Omu Okwei dominated the commercial scene of Ossomari in present day Delta State.

Furthermore, these restrictive norms ensure women and girls have limited access to opportunities and resources that can foster their empowerment, leaving them vulnerable, and with limited agency and decision-making within their homes, ultimately creating inequitable relationships within the home Ajitero, (2021). For example, only 44 percent of Nigerian women participate in decisions regarding their own healthcare in contrast to 82 percent of men. Gender norms also shape Nigerian women's mobility patterns, which in turn impact their access to education and ability to engage in work outside their communities Suleiman, (2022). Additionally, in Nigeria, gender-based discriminatory practices such as child marriage and teen pregnancy continue to be prevalent.

Historically and presently in Nigeria and Africa, women faced a lot of problems of inequality Ajitero, (2021). Researchers gathered data on 217 countries in 2016 and the study revealed that 23 years of most women's lives were spent cooking, cleaning, child care and elderly parents' care while men were not involved in these family's care duties Abalaka, (2020). Women's organizations have developed their activities in focal areas related to women's concerns Sulaiman, (2022). In view of the various activism by various women's movements and groups, women were represented in political parties, business and public life in Nigeria (Olojede, 2018; Soriola, 2017). Women have contributed meaningfully to the socio-economic and political development in the country. The political movements, activism and various affirmative actions that aimed at ending all forms of discrimination against women, have contributed toward the liberation of women in Nigeria from political exclusion (Oluwole, 2014).

The table below shows the statistics of women traditional rulers in the Pre-colonial days in Nigeria.

Table 1: Statistics of Women Traditional Rulers in Pre-colonial days.

S/N	Name	Town/Village	LGA	State	Type of Rule	Date
1	Luwo Gbadiaya	Ife	Ife Central L.G.	Osun	Ooni of Ife	Pre-colonial days
2	Iyayun	Oyo	Oyo L.G.	Oyo	Alaafin	Pre-colonial days
3	Orompoto	Oyo	Oyo L.G.	Oyo	Alaafin	Pre-colonial days
4	Jomijomi	Oyo	Oyo L.G.	Oyo	Alaafin	Pre-colonial days
5	Jepojepo	Oyo	Oyo L.G.	Oyo	Alaafin	Pre-colonial days
6	Queen Amina	Zauzau		Kaduna	Emir	Pre-colonial days
7	Daura	Daura	Daura Emirate	Katsina	Queen	Pre-colonial days
8	Kofono	Daura	Daura Emirate	Katsina	Queen	Pre-colonial days
9	Eye-moi	Akure	Akure	Ondo	Regent-Monarch	Pre-colonial days 1705-1735 AD
10	Ayo-Ero	Akure	Akure	Ondo	Regent-Monarch	Pre-colonial days 1850-51 AD
11	Gulfano	Daura	Daura Emirate	Katsina	Queen	Pre-colonial days
12	Yawano	Daura	Daura Emirate	Katsina	Queen	Pre-colonial days
13	Yakania	Daura	Daura Emirate	Katsina	Queen	Pre-colonial days
14	Walsam	Daura	Daura Emirate	Katsina	Queen	Pre-colonial days
15	Cadar	Daura	Daura Emirate	Katsina	Queen	Pre-colonial days
16	Agagri	Daura	Daura Emirate	Katsina	Queen	Pre-colonial days
17	Queen Kanbasa	Bony	Bony L.G.	Rivers	Queen	Pre-colonial days

Source: Kolawale, Adeigbe, Adebayo and Abubakar (2013)

Colonial Period

Colonialism affected Nigerian women adversely as they were denied the franchise Sulaiman, (2022). It was also only in the 1950s that women in Southern Nigeria were given the franchise Abalaka, (2020). Three women were appointed into the House of Chiefs, namely Chief (Mrs) Olufunmilayo Ransome Kuti (appointed into the Western Nigeria House of Chiefs); Chiefs (Mrs) Margaret Ekpo and Janet Mokelu (both appointed into the Eastern Nigeria House of Chiefs). The women's wings of political parties possessed very little functional relevance. (Kolawale et al, 2013).

The Post-Colonial Period

During this period, Nigerian women began to play very active roles. In 1960, Mrs. Wuraola Esan from Western Nigeria became the first female member of the Federal Parliament. In 1961, Chief (Mrs) Margaret Ekpo contested and won the election, becoming a member of the Eastern Nigeria House of Assembly till 1966, Mrs. Janet N. Mokelu and Miss Ekpo A. Young also contested elections and won, they became members of the Eastern House of Assembly Ajitero, (2021). In northern Nigeria, however, women were still denied the franchise even after independence until 1979 that is, the return of civilian government. As a result of this denial,

prominent female politicians like Hajia Gambo Sawaba in the North could not vote and be voted for Abalaka, (2020).

Second Republic (1979-1983), saw a little more participation of women in politics. A few Nigerian women won elections into the House of Representatives at the national level and also few women won elections into the State Houses of Assembly respectively Ajitero, (2021). However, During the same period, only two women were appointed Federal Ministers Suleiman, (2022). They were Chief (Mrs) Janet Akinrinade and Mrs Adenike Egun Oyagbola, Minister for Internal Affairs and Minister for National Planning respectively. Mrs. Francesca Yetunde Emmanuel was the only female Permanent Secretary (first in the Federal Ministry of Establishment and later Federal Ministry of Health). A number of women were appointed Commissioners in the states also.

However, evidence suggests that change is on the horizon and the status of women is on the rise, particularly in urban areas. Nigeria is slowly making progress towards narrowing gender gaps in education, labor force participation and health outcomes. More women in Nigeria are entering the workforce, achieving economic freedom and gaining increased control over their lives Ajitero, (2021). For example, women's employment has been steadily increasing from 57 percent in 2011 to 65 percent in 2018. Delayed marriage and family formation are also contributing positively to women's transition into productive work. The average age at first marriage among women ages 20-49 has gone up slightly from 18.3 years in 2013 to 19.1 years in 2018. Within the same age group, the increase in age at first marriage is more pronounced among urban women versus their rural counterparts Abalaka, (2020). A similar positive trend has been observed regarding childbearing during of Nigerian women participate in decisions regarding their own healthcare in contrast to 82 percent of men Suleiman, (2022).

Figure 1: Inequitable Gender Relations Within Households — Causal Pathway

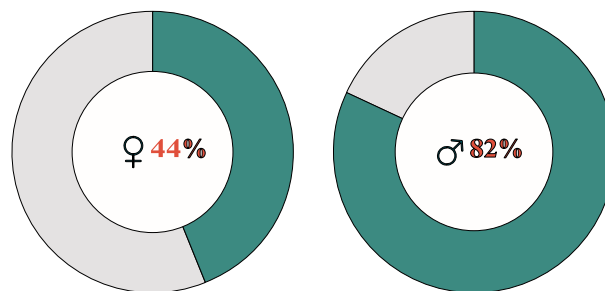
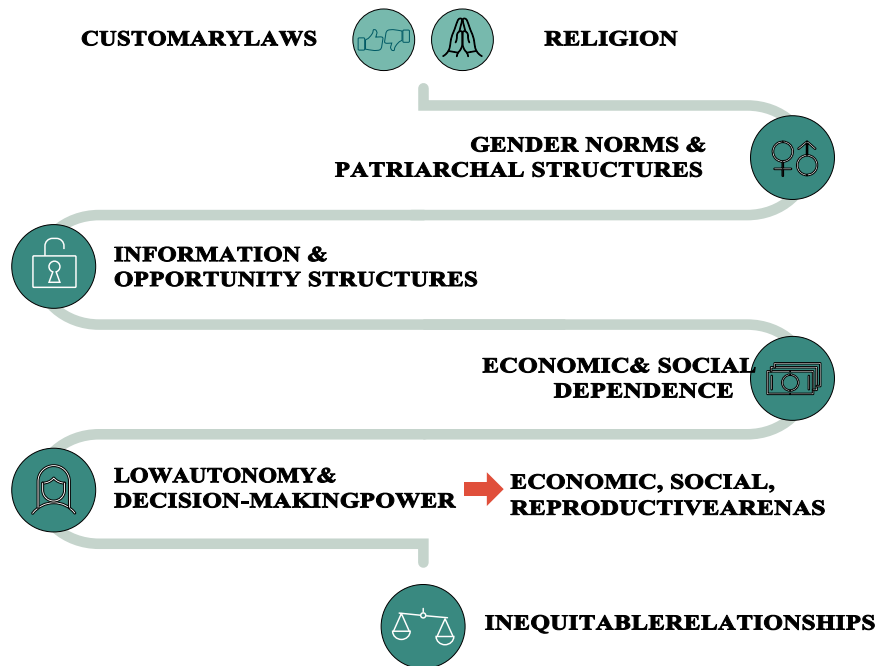


Figure 2.



Adolescence, which has declined from 28 percent in 1990 to 19 percent in 2018, with urban women delaying childbearing later than their peers in rural areas Ajitero, (2021).

Gender Equality and Women Empowerment in Nigeria

In Nigeria, some laudable efforts have been made to put in place the necessary mechanisms required for the elimination of gender discrimination so as to ensure gender parity and human dignity Ajitero, (2021). The National Gender Policy, which replaced and reinforced the previous National Policy on Women, is particularly targeted at the gender inequality problematic in Nigeria. In the face of the above, the history of development policies in Nigeria has somewhat been that of lackadaisical attitude to the gender variable Suleiman, (2022). The first two decades of development planning in Nigeria from 1963 when it became a Republic, for instance, was largely characterized by gender-blind and gender-insensitive development policies. In the same vein, Nigeria, particularly since the wake of the 1980s, embraced gender-biased economic policies where women's interests were subsumed within the national interest and gender sensitivity was almost inconsequential, infinitesimal and a non-issue Abalaka, (2020).

With the adoption of the Millennium Development Goals by the United Nations in September 2000 more interest has been generated and a better attention paid to the pursuit of gender sensitive policies at both global and national levels Ajitero, (2021). This is essentially because the United Nations Millennium Declaration maintains that if women are granted their pride of place in history, the gesture and development will assist the process of effectively combating poverty, hunger, disease and stimulating sustainable development Suleiman,

(2022). At least, until equal numbers of girls and boys are in school at all levels of education it will be impossible to build the knowledge necessary to eradicate poverty and hunger, combat disease and ensure environmental sustainability. The benchmark for assessing the level of attainment of gender equality and women empowerment includes enrolment in education at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels, employment as well as political decision-making Abalaka, (2020). The gender parity or equality question in Nigeria will therefore be analyzed in the context of the under listed indicators.

Appointive position

In 1999 and 2003 out of 130 federal boards of public corporations only 7 (5.6 per cent) were women. During the period, out of 47 cabinet ministers appointed only 7 were women which represent 14.89 per cent Ajitero, (2021). One woman was appointed as Director-General of a government regulatory agency. Special Advisers and Senior Special Assistance were 2 women respectively. Six (6) women were appointed as Special Assistant, 8 women as permanent secretaries and one woman as special assistant to the Vice President. In 2011 more women were given political appointment, 12 women were appointed as Ministers out of 42 which represent 30 per cent and 4 women out of 20 as Special Advisers. In this present regime only 6 women were appointed as Ministers out of 30 ministerial appointees

Challenges Affecting Women Participation in Politics in Nigeria

The challenges facing women are enormous, however, researchers have shown that the under listed are likely responsible for the huge marginalization of Nigerian women in politics.

1. **Patriarchy:** It refers to a society ruled and dominated by men over women, which in turn has given rise to women being looked upon as mere household wives and non-partisans in decision making process in households not to talk of coming out to vie for political positions.

2. **Stigmatization:** following the way politics in Nigeria is played, it is being perceived that it is for individuals that have no regards for human right and are quick at compromising their virtue for indecent gains. Therefore, women aspirants who ventured into politics are looked upon as shameless and promiscuous.

3. **Low level of education:** The low participation of women in education is also part of the shortcomings. The National Adult Literacy Survey, 2010 published by National Bureau of Statistics revealed that the adult literacy rate in English in Nigeria is 50.6 per cent while literacy in any other language is 63.7 per cent (female adult age 15 and above). This explains why most women are least qualified for political offices due to low educational attainment. This is also an effect of colonialism, where men were more favoured than women.

4. **Meeting Schedules:** The time scheduled for caucus meetings to strategize and map out political plans either for the pre or post- election periods are odd and is not conducive for responsible and family women. The slated time are often time which women are expected to take care of their children and family. This method of schedules is viewed as an attempt to side-lining women from engaging in political process.

5. **Financing:** Competing for political positions in Nigerian requires huge financial backup. Most Nigerian women who seek these positions could not afford meeting the financial obligations therein, despite the wavers giving to women aspirants by some of the political parties. And so, they could do little or nothing to outweigh their male counterparts.

6. **Political Violence:** Nigerian elections have always been characterized by one form of violence or another since the return of democracy. Female aspirants of various political parties cannot withstand political violence; therefore, women participation in politics is drastically reduced.

7. **Religious and Cultural barriers:** Both Christianity and Islam do not accord women much role in public life, and same is obtainable in most cultural values, where women are seen culturally as quite submissive and image of virtue. However, they are not to be seen in public domain. And so it is a challenge to women participation in politics, more so, women found in the corridor of politics are not often religious in practice.

Research Objective

It is important to state explicitly that gender-based prejudices have been deeply rooted in all cultures, hence, analyzing the gender-based prejudices in Nigeria, Africa's most populous nation, through the feminist lenses do not signify it only occurs in Nigeria Ajitero, (2021). The objective of this thesis is to mount evidence to impact and motivate more women especially the Nigerian women to go into governance and promote active participation and in turn drive the economic growth Suleiman, (2022). Also, by stressing the underrepresentation of the Nigerian women, the paper aims to spur the government to engage the 49.33 percent of Nigerian women (World Population Review) by promoting gender equality in private and public spaces by putting in place policies and social institutions that protect women's right and encourages proactive and active participation Abalaka, (2020).

Additionally, the findings in this thesis will contribute to the benefit of the society considering that gender inclusion, the main concept in this research, plays an important role in cultivating an environment that supports women's economic empowerment, drives economic growth and social development. Hence, state authorities and private institutions that adopt the recommended gender inclusion approach derived from the result of this thesis will be able to identify how gender biases, discrimination and domination affect their economic development objectives and how to formulate policies or institutional goals to address them Suleiman, (2022).

Feminist Theory

The two key terms that are central to the feminist discussion have been 'gender' and 'patriarchy'. In the feminist context, gender is not a replacement word for sex or the biological difference between a man and a woman Ajitero, (2021). Instead, it refers merely to the power relations between men and women, how the relations have been socially and habitually implemented, and how the power is deployed (Ruiz, 2012). Patriarchy, on the other hand, refers to the system where the female is subordinate to the male (in power and status terms)

Abalaka, (2020). The theory adopted for this research is the feminist theory, which is one of the major arm within sociology. The term feminism was coined by a French socialist named Charles Fourier in 1837, and was first used in 1872 in France and in the United States in 1910 (Offen, 1988, 126), and it includes a wide range of subjects from political, economic, social, cultural and social, but its central message remains the equality among the sexes, equal opportunities for women and the dissolution of the oppressive practices associated with patriarchy, while also seeking increased access to education, better health care and improved life choices for women Suleiman, (2022).

The feminist theory was originally designed to explain and address the growing rate of oppression faced by women globally, without recourse to tribe, nationality, status, and age. Feminism as a theory has evolved over the years and has developed into two major shift which includes the particularizing and contextualizing the different experiences as they affect women, rather than the previous approach which universalized the struggle, losing elements in the way. The second dimension involves the shift from seeing and women as categories to be focused on, to getting into such categorization, while exploring what makes up oppressive gender practices (Carlson and Ray, 2001).

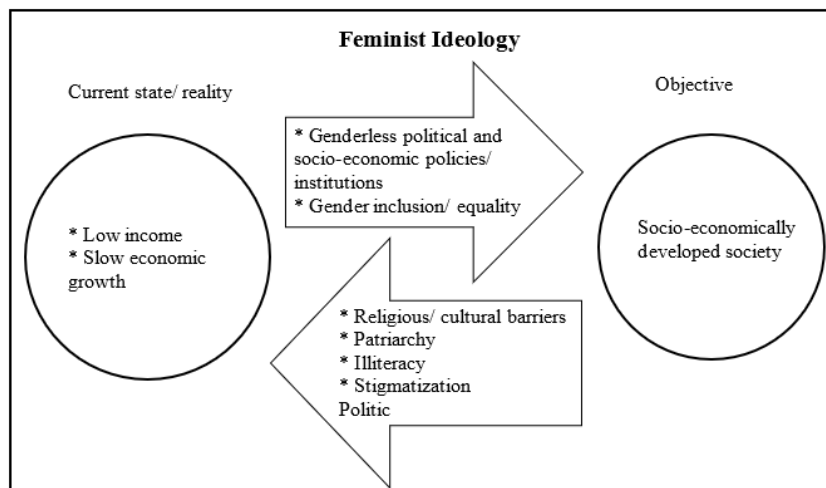
The feminist theory although being an old theory began to gain momentum following the speech by Susan Anthony following her arrest after illegally voting in 1872 which challenged the but which gained more momentum in early 1900, and a period was characterized by the increased clamour for the protection of the women's suffrage and protection of women's right Ajitero, (2021). Feminist campaigns have recorded remarkable success over the years, and has been identified as a major force in the process that has recorded historical changes in the establishment of women's rights especially in the west where issues that affect the wellbeing of women, for example, women's suffrage, freedom to make decisions as it affects her reproductive rights, education, equal employment and pay, and freedom to enter into contracts without the approval of the men in her lives. The next section moves on to discuss feminism in Africa Suleiman, (2022).

Gender Inequality Occasioned by Patriarchy

The patriarchal society sets restrictive parameters on the women's activities, creating a social structure that promotes and condones domestic and sexual violence on women, sexual objectification of women. Radical feminists support this argument and the abolishment of patriarchy (Firestone, 2003). In a 1970 publication, *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution*, Firestone stated that the aim of the radical feminists is to overthrow the ancient and most rigid caste and class system Ajitero, (2021). A system, she argued, is based on gender and has been sustained for thousands of years by relegating the female societal roles through an unwarranted legitimacy and superficial permanence (2018). Broadly, most feminists consider patriarchy as an oppressive social construct that has over the decades justified the marginalization of women in the political, education, professional, inheritance and family spheres of life (Salaam, 2018).

In addition, Adams (2015) contributed to the discussion, adding that the term patriarchy is synonymous to "the rule of the father". According to him, there is the societal correlation between patriarchy and domination, the term phrased as Patriarchal domination, and societies have naturalized this gender-based domination of women by men for centuries (Adams, 2005, 3). A large and growing body of literature has investigated how patriarchy impacts economic development (Dollar and Gatti, 1999; Knowles et al., 2022), by outlining the interrelation between gender exclusion and economic development. Today, there are different types of feminist groups and although they disagree on many societal issues, however, regardless of whether they are liberal, radical, Marxist or postmodern feminists, they mostly agree that gender inequality still pervasively persists in today's society and must be addressed. In the literature, patriarchy amongst other societal vices has been associated with gender discrimination.

Figure 3: Thesis Theoretical argument



Research Methodology

This research aims to examine the consequences of marginalizing the 49.33 percent female population (World Population Review), its economic and social-political implication on sustainable governance. The research analyses the principal factors that contributed to the passive participation of the Nigerian women Abalaka, (2020). This study is important not as a policy proposal document for policymakers but to promote and motivate active participation amongst women. The research methodology adopted for this research is the qualitative research method to analyse the information sourced from online portals Suleiman, (2022). This information is then examined through the international relations theory of feminism to test the claim held in this research. The sourced data was representative with respect to gender-based discrimination and inequality as experienced within the Nigerian society. Also, the textual and observational qualitative method was used for identifying and characterizing the core concepts of the paper, that is, the data collection was centred on the causes of gender-based exclusion and the advantages of inclusion on the overall economy.

Research Findings

This research paper aims to examine to what extent does the marginalization of women play in increasing poverty in Nigeria and if the elimination of gender-inequality and patriarchy within the Nigerian society will help in alleviating poverty and growing the Nigerian economy. In this section, the causes of the drawbacks for women active participation will be examined. A considerable amount of literature has been published on the challenges that are affecting women participation in Nigerian politics. These studies list six major factors below and will be discussed in this chapter: Patriarchy, Religious and cultural barriers, Stigmatization, Low level education, Financing, and Political violence.

Patriarchy: Still a Major Drawback to Women Participation

In recent years, women's participation in politics and decision-making has received significant attention across the world. Hence, in 1995, a declaration was made for a 30 percent increased affirmative action of women representation globally at the fourth World Conference on women in Beijing, China (The United Nations, 2015). This declaration is built on the argument that women's political participation, as recognized globally, is an essential determinant of the status of women in any particular country (The United Nations, 2015). However, women remain severely underrepresented in the decision-making process and positions in Nigeria (Ette, 2017). Despite women making up about 49 percent of the Nigerian population, Nigeria still records the lowest number of women in active politics with a measly 4 percent in politics and ranking 133rd in the world survey of female political representatives (LSE Review, 2016). One criticism of much prevalence of the passive participation of women in the Nigerian political sphere can be linked to patriarchy Suleiman, (2022).

Figure 4: Member of Senate by Gender (1999-2022)

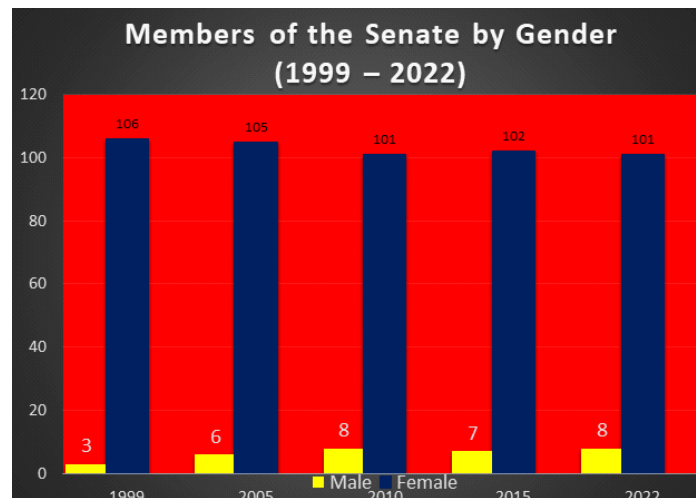
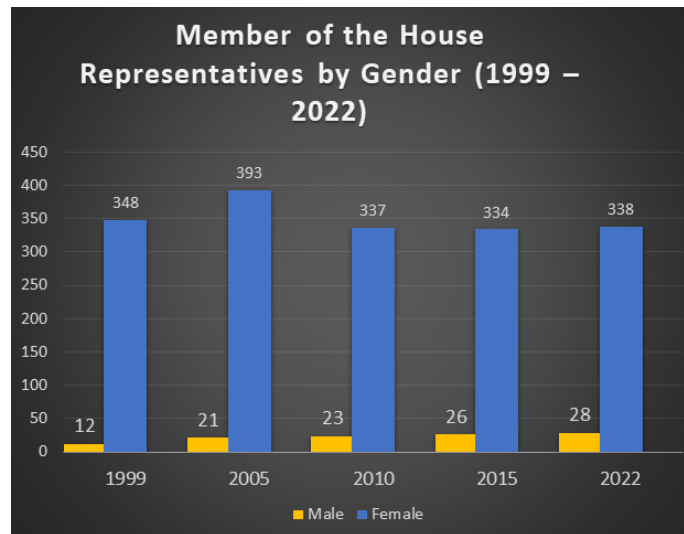


Figure 5: Member of House of Representatives by gender (1999 - 2022)



According to Ette (2017, 1), the increasing interest of women in Nigerian politics has not improve their visibility and this is normatively problematic owing that it reinforces the patriarchal formation within the Nigerian political space Ajitero, (2021). As mentioned in the literature review, there are many societal obstacles that hinder the active participation of women in the political process, but gender roles significantly fuelled by patriarchy stands out. Patriarchy has been identified as a critical feature of the traditional Nigerian society (Aina, 2018) where emphasis is unduly placed on gender as a criterion for choosing both political and religious roles, automatically excluding women into the followership status Suleiman, (2022). Albeit, patriarchy is prevalent in a vast number of African and third world countries, and continues to ascribe to men a higher social and authoritative status, this pervasive persistent of patriarchal domination is also replicated in the Nigerian political space (Bvukutwa, 2014).

On the contrary, a society where all the adult population, particularly those above the minimum age for employment are engaged irrespective of their gender is unarguably a productive society. In a research by Dollar and Gatti (2019), gender inequality in education and health in any society that underinvest in women is not an efficient economic decision, and the society will have to deal with the consequences of slower growth and lower income Suleiman, (2022). According to Dollar and Gatti, social observers have for centuries proved the status of women and the overall socio-economic development are mutually inclusive (1999). It is therefore likely that such connections exist between gender inequality and economic growth and development of any nation.

Cultural disposition of the Nigerian woman

Another possible explanation for this gender-based exclusion can be traced to the Nigerian cultural norms that women are incapable of ruling, a sexual objectification of women, and this has had an adverse consequence on the economic productivity of the nation Ajitero, (2021).

Also, gender biases occasioned by the cultural norms are responsible for the meagre number of women's active participation in politics in Nigeria. The gender roles are taught to children at their tender age and it encourage these gender biases which in turn has become the societal norm Abalaka, (2020). The United Nations convention to eliminate discrimination against women has been vocal against the discrimination of women globally. Nigeria is a signatory to this United Nations convention, yet, the continued domination by men in the political space and in other spheres has pervasively persisted unabated. This cultural gender biases still dominates and dictates social patterns of behaviour, limiting the active participation of women in governance and has adversely animated the poor economic growth Suleiman, (2022).

The meaning of culture and its definition remains ambiguous and vague. One notable definition of culture, describes it as the fundamental fabric that determines the behavioural pattern of people within a geographical location, culture is the determining factor that explains why things should be done the way they are, and the rationalization behind such acts Ajitero, (2021). The definition adopted by the World Conference on Cultural Policies in Mexico (UNESCO, 2017) is all-encompassing, and it defines culture as the sum total of complex of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features that characterize a society or a social group. It includes not only arts and letters but also modes of life, the fundamental rights of the human being, value systems, traditions and beliefs (UNESCO, 2017).

The Cultural and Religious disposition towards the Nigerian woman has been one based on oppressive gender roles fueled by patriarchy designed to keep women subjugated by the male counterparts who attempt to relegate women to the background, creating a societal accepted norm that places women at the bottom echelon of the social ladder Ajitero, (2021). Many Nigerians have been taught the gender roles from childhood and it has promoted these gender biases which in turn has become the societal norm. Oftentimes, the gender bias permeates the society as an emphatic importance placed on the male child and the hurdles a woman is made to endure through in the absence of a male child. This gender bias only proves that although in theory both sexes are equal, there is far greater importance on the boy child as against the girl child Suleiman, (2022).

These harmful cultural practices as seen in most African and Arab societies often portrays the woman as an object that is to be acquired by a man at marriage, thereby stripping her of the right to choose and make decisions and opening her to domestic violence and psychological abuse which makes the women in this cultural set up appear invisible and subservient to their male counterparts. Despite the growing global clamour for increased women empowerment ventures especially in patriarchal societies like Nigeria, there still exist a vacuum created by culture and Religion which has also been identified as one of the reasons responsible for low participation of women in both political and economic activities which in turn perpetuates a vicious cycle of poverty and a clog on the wheel in the quest for a woman's desire to live a productive life (Metcalf, 2021).

Religion, Illiteracy and the Nigerian woman

The Nigerian societal set up is multi-religious in nature and is made up of Christianity, Islam and the traditional religious practices Suleiman, (2022). Although all three religions have contributed to the demeaning of Nigerian women through their dogmas and axioms, it is essential to note that the Islamic religion have done the more damage in the highly patriarchal north-Eastern Nigeria where there still exists the highest number of child brides, forced marriages, poverty, and the low education of the children (and more specifically the girl child). Nasir (2019) remarked that women are often the targets of oppressive religious laws like Sharia and Purdah, a law that secludes women from actively participating in the society and restricts the rights of women to the barest minimum, thus causing her to live in isolation, in the shadows of their partners. According to him, a plain example of the ills of religion towards women is the 1960 northern penal code, which was an inspiration of the Sudanese penal model that approves violence against a woman “for the purpose of correcting (the) wife” (Nasir, 2019). In the typical traditional religious settings, women are not allowed to inherit houses and lands, as it is seen as the exclusive right of the men to own land properties and houses in the North Ajitero, (2021).

This gender imbalance between men and women, the child-bride marriages, and the religious dogmas, has created a seemingly lower socio-economic status for women and girls, stigma that has been domesticated Suleiman, (2022). More so, some researchers have outlined the child marriage as the stimulant for the lowest education level in the northern Nigeria adversely impacting on the literacy level of the girl child in Nigeria. Although the Nigerian constitution clearly states the legal age of marriage at 18 years, most of the northern Nigerian states have refused to sign into law the Child Right that sets the 18 years as the legal age for marriage, thereby frustrating the implementation in the region. Rather, the region has adopted the Islamic sharia law that allows the marriage of young adolescent with the consent of her parents (ICG, 2016).

The social ills created by religion towards Nigerian women are not restricted to the Islamic groups as the Christian biblical principles that promote patriarchy have also instilled gender dominance of men over the women. The biblical doctrines elevate the male status as the head of the household and have been literally interpreted to subordinating the women to the receiving end of abuse, mediocrity and disrespect because it is assumed that a woman should follow the leads without questions asked, stifling her voice and stripping of her personality. Although the religious abuse of Christianity is not as severe as the Islamic salient child marriages, both religions seeks to annihilate the rights of the women, stigmatizing her to a state of perpetual vulnerability Abalaka, (2020). This stigmatization in turn sustains the reoccurring cycle of poverty and isolation and ultimately stalling the economic growth and the national developmental of the country Ajitero, (2021).

Factors hindering active participation of women in Nigerian political scene

According to Okafor, Fagbemi and Hassan (2021), one of the factors militating against the active participation of women in politics is the Stereotypical constraints against women who strive to attain political and organizational leadership roles Suleiman, (2022). These

stereotypes range from the traditional gender roles that relegates the woman and the girl-child domestic and household duties and chores, often leaving these women mentally isolated to the point where their sense of career ambitions is replaced with societies expectations of them, which is often limited to household chores and reproduction, while the critical issues like governance and protecting of their rights should be left to the men.

Other factors that hinder the active participation of Nigerian women includes the abhorrent and oppressive socio-cultural practices, harmful widowhood practices, female genital mutilation (FGM), child marriages, and the purdah system. The Purdah system is practiced predominantly in the Muslim dominated Northern Nigeria, requiring that women are physical segregated and cover their bodies to conceal their skin and form. It is a religious and social practice of female seclusion. Many of these practices create socio-cultural barriers to the campaigns for women empowerment and stigmatization. Thus, the socio-cultural realities place a burden on women, which distracts her from the getting basic education or acquiring a professional career Ajitero, (2021).

Crime and corruption have also been identified as a limiting factor to the effective participation of women in politics, the superiority mentality exhibited by men in the elite class has exposed women to many injustices perpetrated on them just for the singular reason of being women. Gender-based corruption is also a limiting factor as women are forced to sleep with men as a form of payment or appreciation for things that a man would be handed to a man Abalaka, (2020). This alters the balance of the political playing field, which eliminates all traces of neutrality and places the woman in a disadvantaged position Suleiman, (2022).

Discussion

The first set of analyses examined the impact of gender exclusion perpetuated by the Nigerian society through the socio-cultural vices, and then the correlation between the gender exclusion and slow economic growth was tested using the qualitative research method by analyzing resource data available online.

Women Marginalization leads to Conflict

Conflict is ubiquitous when marginalization becomes perpetual Ajitero, (2021). When the issues surrounding marginalization are allowed to fester, the resultant effect is always tension and conflict, as the aggrieved parties will find ways to ensure that their issues are given adequate attention or resolved. The marginalization of women has over the years gained attention in international discourse, as it has been established that the fastest way to ensure development is to empower the woman. Despite the growing level of acceptance and appreciation of the significant role played by women in the global development process, there still exists a barrage of salient barriers which takes both social, economic and political forms Sueiman, (2022).

Although the Boko Haram insurgents get their women mainly through forceful means which includes kidnapping and raids, there has been recorded cases of women who voluntarily seek to join the group out of prejudice and poverty (Guilbert, 2016). Using this woman as bait for

the recruitment of young men into the sect. Rinaldo Depagne, the West Africa project director for the ICG, affirmed this is largely the resultant effect of the generational cycle of patriarchy that has hitherto robbed women of the luxury of choice, education, and marginalized the them of their dignity Ajitero, (2021). According to Depagne, the social environment has helped to create a fertile ground for radicalization by the Boko Haram insurgents who promise these women some form of protection and hope and a means of escape from the insensitive and impassive Nigerian government (Guilbert, 2016).

The results in this chapter indicate that 1) it is a fair generalization to postulate that the exclusion of the 49 percent of women population from the labour force is detrimental to the national development and 2) the perpetual marginalization is a major influencer of tension and conflict within the society Suleiman, (2022). The next chapter, therefore, proceeds to sum up the research arguments to reach the logical antithesis that an inclusive, genderless Nigerian political and socio-economic society will be beneficial to the general wellbeing of the global economy Abalaka, (2020).

Conclusion

This academic enquiry aimed at answering the questions on what extent does the marginalization of women play in increasing poverty in Nigeria, whether or not the elimination of gender inequality and patriarchy within the Nigerian society can help in alleviating poverty and improving the Nigerian economy. The Nigerian woman makes up for more than 48 percent of the general population and the constant marginalization of the Nigerian woman through the deep-rooted patriarchy in-depth in the Nigerian social system, lack of education and early marriages have continuously dealt a grave blow to the government's development initiatives.

In addition, this thesis has identified that gender inclusion, the main concept in this research, plays a crucial role in fostering an environment that supports women's economic empowerment, drives economic growth and social development. The findings of this research provide insights on how gender biases, gender discrimination and gender domination can adversely affect both private and public economic development objectives. By focusing on Nigerian women, the study neglects the insights that the international or regional comparison of the socio-economic realities of women from other nationalities or regions would have provided to the research. There is, therefore, a definite need for further research into the subject of gender inclusivity and broadly, research focused on examining the benefits of genderless society. As this thesis has shown, unless governments of the developing countries adopt gender inclusive policy approaches, socio-economic development may not be attained.

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