

# Women/Girl-child Education as a Means of Improving Women Participation in Politics

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**Abstract:** - Educating Women/Girl-child and ensuring that they participate in all facets of national development including politics has become an issue of global concern. For women to play their roles effectively in all sectors of development therefore they need to acquire some knowledge to keep them conversant and abreast with developmental issues. The recognition that women make tremendous contribution to national development just like men has attracted the attention of the world leaders on how best they can be given the right type of education to enable them make an impact on the political situation of a country at whatever level. Politics being one of the developmental sectors in every nation needs the participation and contribution of this significant group of people, yet they are the most neglected group of individuals in the political proceeding of most nations. In view of this therefore the paper will focus and examine the factors that lead to poor participation of women in politics. Necessary recommendations will then be proffer on how to eliminate disparity in access to education and political bias as well as how to strengthen and increase women participation in politics.

**Keywords:** Women/Girl-child Education, Participation, Politics.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Education is an instrument of achieving national objectives (Federal Republic of Nigeria 2004). This is because education is the means of acquiring competence traits, abilities, and skills necessary for effective performance and participation in all areas of life. It is an acceptable fact that the social, Economic, and political advancement of any nation is to a large extent dependent on the level of education of its citizens. Access to education will give innumerable benefits to the individual and greater economic development as well as wider opportunity to participate in politics (Rita, 2015). It is in the realization of this fact that the international community and government all over the world have made enormous commitments for citizens both male and female to have access to education.

Politics on the other hand is defined as the activity link with the relations between class nations and other social groups centered on the seizure, retention and the use of state power. According to Vivian (2017) politics is that part of social science which treats the foundation of the state and the principles of government. The need for political order and control is not limited to states only rather politics is likely to occur in some other social units, stateless societies, trade unions, kinship group etc. However since politics deals with power, authority, and making of authoritative decision, its participation should not only be limited or restricted to men

only, women being the significant group of people that has larger proportion in the population of every country need to be part and parcel of the political process of every nation. Women generally are a force to be reckoned not only in the family but also in politics. The importance of contribution of women in politics cannot be underestimated. Hence the needs to expand educational opportunities to the women/girl-child to enable them participate and give their utmost contribution to the development of their countries.

## *Women/Girl-child education*

Women and Girls in developing world are denied opportunities to Education. The situation has now significantly improved due to so many attempts by both the government and nongovernmental organizations, such as the 1986 blue print on women education, girl child education program gender education and huge of other women/girl child education related programs to harness gender potentials for national development (Mulikat & Zuwaira, 2014). Despite all these efforts more still need to be done on this aspect as there are still several issues with regard to girl child education. The Girl child in Nigeria still faces a lot of disadvantages that militate against her development and ability to meet the future challenges of womanhood. Education is important for the self grooming of the women as it gives her sense of individuality which boosts her confidence. The importance of education in women life must not be under estimated and every possible resource must be provided to make sure she gets the required qualification and tempering important of her well being and the well being of the society. The need to expand access to education is critical because educating women and girls benefits every aspect of the society and fosters the development of all sectors which politics is a part. Only through literacy, knowledge, access to best education, and opportunities to gain competency skills can a woman truly escape living in poverty, fear, humiliation and powerlessness. This will enable them participate in new forms of economic organization and to take part in decision making processes that can better their lives and the entire nation (Nonso & Alexander, 2015).

History has shown that there are a lot of socio-cultural factors that have impeded the education of the girl child. Prominent among them are:

- ✓ Traditional belief/cultural status and perception of the women
- ✓ Gender discrimination
- ✓ Early marriage
- ✓ Poverty
- ✓ Child abuse (abuse from within the home and outside the home )
- ✓ Marginalization of women
- ✓ Lack of proper awareness on the importance of education

These factors listed above hindered women tremendously, and until they are swiftly tackled and addressed the situation of women/girl child will remain unchanged and their participation in politics will remain a mirage.

#### *Politics defined*

Shimelis (2015) conceived politics as the science concerned with the state and of the conditions essential to its existence and development. It involves the struggle to share or distribute power or the struggle to make authoritative policy decisions. Politics thus deal with power relations in social context.

Although politics involve opposition from a group or persons in the determination or exercise of power, it is also a means for organizing the total society and obeying its integrity and boundaries. However since politics remain one of the vital aspect of the national and societal development and democracy has become the goal upon which nations can attain sustainable development, then it processes and participation should not be in any way male dominated. This is because women comprise the majority in terms of population and also play a crucial role as procreators of posterity in the society (Kayode, 2013). Consequently, men continue to dominate women in political, economic and social realms. This situation has necessitated the clarion call that women should be empowered by giving them the needed education to enable them participate actively in decision making process at the political level.

#### *Women and Political Participation*

Participation is a development approach which recognizes the need to involve disadvantaged segment of the population in the design and implementation of policies concerning their well being. Political participation on the other hand can be seen as the active involvement and engagement by individuals both women and men with political process that affect their lives. The act of active engagements includes voting, standing for office, joining political party or exercising public power by holding public office at different levels of administration i.e Local, regional, national and even at the international levels (Comfort, 2007). The political participation is understood as a prerequisite for political development, without the active participation of women and incorporating them at all levels of decision making, the goals of equality, development, and peace cannot be achieved. The possibility for all citizens to participate in the management of public

affairs is at the very heart of democracy. At the same time full and equal participation of both women and men in political decision making provides a balance that more accurately reflects the composition of the society. It may also enhance the legitimacy of the political processes by making them more democratic and responsive to the concerns and perspectives of all segments of the society. Despite these facts in the majority of countries of the world the political arena remains largely dominated by men and the women that constitute fifty percent of global populations are under-represented in decision making processes at all governance levels (Abubakar & Maimuna, 2007). However it is very important to know that political participation allow women to address their basic problems and needs, and ensure openness real fight against rent seeking, accountability, political commitment, political leadership, and the political responsiveness of the existing national, regional, districts and local levels. Women equal participation in politics therefore is not only a demand for justice or democracy, but a necessary precondition for women's interest to be taken into account by any legitimate government or nation.

## II. THE IMPORTANCE OF EDUCATION IN ENHANCING WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN POLITICS

Education according to Fafunwa as cited by Comfort (2007) refers to the sum total of experiences that a person acquire to partake in everyday activities and how his experiences have served to make the individual a better person. He also observed that it is through Education whether formal or informal that the average citizen will be helped to cope adequately with the problems of meeting his basic needs, to maintain good health, to learn how to manage his economic affairs and to play his role as a citizen of his country. Going along this line the education of women and girls will not be different from what has been obtained in the definition of education and the importance attached to education in the general context, as it is the only effective way to meaningfully contribute to the development of women in every society. Improving educational opportunities for girls and women will help them develop the skills and knowledge that allow them to make decisions and influence community and societal change.

Education is strongly associated with women political participation. Education is a powerful predictor of political participation. Range of direct and indirect effects that formal education has upon political participation (Rita, 2015). The direct effects include the acquisition of knowledge and communication skills useful for public debate, and direct training in political analysis through courses with current events contents. The indirect include but not limited to providing the young people with an early apprenticeship for politics where they can exercise leadership, develop civic skills and acquire bureaucratic and organizational skills necessary for political activity.

In spite of the notable importance the education has towards developing a woman to the extent of making her actively

participate and contribute to the development of her society there is still a grievous problem of preventing girls from attending schools in Nigerian communities. Another problem that prevents women from attending school lies with the women themselves because many of them believe that the life of a successful woman revolves around her children, her husband and domestic chores. This lack of personal ambition prevents them from thinking about pursuing other educational goals which may have great influence on their lives. Research reveals that education is the most potent instrument for emancipation of any group of people (Abubakar & Maimuna, 2007, Kayode, 2007). However the issue of educational attainment of girls and women considering their low level of education in Nigeria is at a negative variance to attaining women position and participation in politics since, certain educational attainments are required to make them function effectively in the various available organs. To ensure full participation of women in politics therefore education is inevitable and must be identified as necessary and effective tool for that to happen.

### III. THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN POLITICS

Politics refers to as the activities involved in getting and using power in public life and being able to influence decisions that affect a country or society. The importance of the contribution of women in politics cannot therefore be overemphasized. They have unique qualities in their specific endeavors which when given the opportunity will help in promoting stable democratic dividends. This is to say in order to have a stable democracy; gender equality has to be promoted and maintained.

Historical evidences have proved that Nigerian women have for long been playing crucial role in the political life of the country and this has contributed in no small measure in shaping the political system of the nation. In 1957 during pre independence era of Nigeria a couple of women political activists such as Mrs Margret Ekpo, Mrs Mokelu, Young, Hajiya Gambo Sawaba and the rest of the prominent women of the political history of the nation had played a significant role in Nigerian politics and waged a fierce battle for the political and cultural emancipation of women in Nigeria. Today women are participating more actively in political issues than ever before as a result of political reawakening and awareness. More often than not they still face serious challenges of which discrimination is rife. Despite all the difficulties faced by women in politics women over the years have recorded some political achievements meeting their political objective with the limited support and resources at their disposal (Mulikat & Zuwaira, 2014).

Ensuring women political participation is essential to bring legitimacy to government and establish democracy in its real and practical manner as democracy is questionable if females who are 50% of the population stay marginalized or segregated from the political and public institutions of the society. Therefore increasing women representation and

participation in the political and public decision making positions to make them more assertive of their roles in social activities like politics and take initiatives for themselves rather than waiting for others to take decision on their behalf should be a question of democracy.

### IV. BARRIERS TO WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN POLITICS

Although women have made great strides forward in obtaining a vote and right to be elected in political offices in many countries, available literature shows that women still constitute a disproportionately small percentage of those participating in political decision making and leadership (Shimelis, 2015). Many global conferences have recognized that despite the progress made globally in improving status of women, gender disparities still exist especially in regard to electoral politics. In regard to this a number of factors have been found individually and collectively to have influenced women participation in politics. These factors can be summarized as follows:

- *Personal Factor:* These factors include the psychosocial attributes such as the women personality, attitudes, behavioral skills, level of education and awareness etc. other attributes include low self esteem and self confidence, lack of motivation and ambition to accept challenges, morale for leadership, being less assertive, less emotionally stable and lacking ability to handle crises (Vivian, 2017).
- *Socio-Cultural/Religious Factors:* In many countries traditions continue to emphasize women's primary roles as mothers and house wives and restrict them to those positions. Most societies of the world are dominated by an "ideology of a woman place" the ideology emphasize that women should only play the role of working mother which is generally low paid and a political in nature. The cultural ideas about women affect women level of representation throughout the political process. Hence women face prejudice as leaders because people tend to believe that leadership is a masculine trait that is more suitable to men only and this seriously reduce their decision making power at both local and national level. Kayode (2007) notes that since men dominate decision making processes, their values are reflected in the decision making bodies.
- *Intimidation and Discrimination against Women:* There is a large scale of discrimination from men folk in voting for candidates and in allocation of political offices. Women are not adequately elected or appointed to offices of responsibilities and even if they seek the office, they may fail to attract sufficient party and electoral support to win as they are considered in the society as people who are suppose to be led not to lead. No wonder in many countries they comprise less than 15 per cent (15%) of the members of the parliament and less than 5 percent of

head of heads of state worldwide. In the Nigerian situation however, women have not reached 10% representation in the elective position since 1999 to date, and no woman have ever been president, vice president or even a state governor throughout the history of Nigeria. This is an indication that women are marginalized, intimidated and dominated by the male folks in the Nigerian governance process. Arguments about women inferiority to men are present across all dominant religion. In most religion power and authority is believed to divinely belong to men and the women are encouraged to play a subsidiary roles as care takers of the house. Traditionally religion has long been used to exclude women from aspects of social and political life around the world (Malikat & Zuwaira, 2014).

- *Lack of Adequate Education:* Women lack the requisite knowledge to actively and effectively participate in politics, where you have the educated ones they are not properly trained and exposed on the political knowhow that can make them have an impact on the political activities of their societies. In some instances they cannot cope with the pressures of politics because in some developing nations politics is not carried out in a quite decent manner. Education and political awareness therefore are paramount in boosting the participation and contribution of women in politics.
- *Economic/Financial Factors:* Socio economic status of women has a strong relationship with their participation in politics. In this regard Sani (2001) argues that social and economic status of women in the society has a direct influence on their participation in political institutions and elected bodies. In other words lack of economic resources can be a greatest obstacle that prevents women in participating in politics. In politics one has to be financially buoyant to sponsor a lot of things e.g trips for campaign and other strategies. Making it easier for women to access economic resources therefore are the key in expanding women's presence in the political realm.
- *Societal View of Women Politicians:* Many societies sees women politicians as indecent that lack manners. They are called with so many names like free women, prostitutes, ward women etc. this fear of blackmail, dirty reputation and negative comments trawn to them highly discourage them in participating in politics. It has been established notion that women that participate in politic are not well mannered so even the women that have good intention step aside in fear of these negative comments.
- *Family Work and Time Constraints:* Women are traditionally in charge of domestic chores, they take care of the house, children, medical care of

pregnancy, breast feeding. These family responsibilities make it very difficult for a woman to have a sphere of time to participate in politics. This is caused as a result of uneven distribution of family care as women spend far more time than men at home and child care and they continue this way until the children grow up.

## V. CONCLUSION

Women's political participation has been recognized as crucial to national development, hence their representation seem to be very low in decision making process making it virtually impossible for them to contribute meaningfully to the development of their societies. It has also been observed that so many factors are behind the poor participation of women in politics prominent among which are lack of Education and political awareness, personal constraints, intimidation, discrimination, socio-cultural, religious ,socio economic and family work which have great influence in women's participating in politics. However in order to make women actively and effectively participate in politics therefore all these factors must be looked in to and address squarely. Education which is a tool to all forms of development should be given emphasis by both the women and the society at large. The women should have access to modern education because that's the only way they will be fully equipped with the needed knowledge, skills and political awareness that can make them confident and competent in discharging what is expected of them not only mere participation.

## VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

For the women to achieved their full potentials in life and contributed meaningfully and immensely to the development of the society and the nation as the whole the following recommendations are proffered:-

- Nigeria as nation should lay more emphasis to women and child education by providing more schools that will cater for the needs of girls and ensuring that the schools atmosphere are conducive for learning.
- There should also be an equal treatment of boys and girls in schools there by making the schools gender balanced and inclusive in nature.
- The mothers themselves should be more committed and make sure both their male and female children attend school without any preference.
- Awareness campaigns should be launched by government bodies at all level as regard women participation in politics, so as to alert the women across the nation on the need for them to contribute their quota in the development of their societies and the entire nation.
- Women should encourage their fellow women who has the ambition and intention to contribute towards the development of their societies, this can be done

by supporting and giving them their votes to make sure they scale up to certain political offices

- There should be a greater awareness in the communities that women are equal to men in terms of political participation to wipe away the prejudice women are facing in the society.

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