Women and Democratic Stability in Rivers State, Nigeria

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Abstract

Women for long have suffered from various forms of discrimination, inequality, exclusion and violence. But, in recent times empowering women is increasingly being recognized as a pre-condition for and as an indicator of the level of success in the attainment of sustainable development. Therefore, because of their role in building a peaceful and co-ordinated family, they have a lot of offer in democratic stability in Nigeria and Rivers State in particular. Our project is that there is a relationship between the role of women as home builders and democratic stability. Two hypotheses were developed and analyzed using 2 test of mean method. Questionnaire interview and observational methods were used to gather our primary data. Data was collected from sample population of 1000 respondents covering ten Local Government Area from upland and riverine of Rivers State. 800 copies were properly filled and returned. Chiefs elders, women, men and youths were not left out in the distribution of our questionnaire. It is obvious that women engineers economic, social and political development hence the need for democratic stability. Based on the above, it was recommended that women should be given good education as civic right, to enable them educate their children.

Keywords: Democratic, Stability, Politics, Women, Participation. Introduction

Introduction

The issue of democratic stability in Nigeria political history has become of major concern. This no wonder has trailed so many to analyze the roles of various bodies in stability of democracy in Nigeria. Mathew (2003. 163) argued that the story of women participation in Nigeria's national life has been a complicated mosaic fractured but hardly lacking in its beauty and complexity.

However, decried that women for long have suffered from various forms of discrimination inequality, exclusion and violence. But in recent times empowering women is increasing been recognized as a precondition for and as an indicator of the level of success in the attainment of sustainable development, similarly Henry (2002. 43) confirms that the special role of women as peace makers must be recognized. There is no doubt about this special gift of God has given to womanhood, she sees everything as her family because of women's role in building a peaceful and co-ordinated family, they have a lot to offer in democratic stability in Nigeria and Rivers State in particular.

Furthermore, Nigeria has produced some women who have contributed immensely to the social, economic and political stability of Nigeria. Some of such women includes Obi Ezekwesili, Dora Akunyele, Ngozi Okonjo - Eweala, Hajiya Gambo Sawaba, Margaret Ekpo, Salamatu Suleiman and Ransome Kuti. This not doubt portrays the importance of women to stabilize democracy in Nigeria.

In this study, attempts are made to examine the role of women in the democratic stability in Rivers State.

HYPOTHESES

This study was built on the following hypotheses

i   There is a significant relationship between the activities of women in political and democratic stability in Rivers State.

ii.   There is a significant relationship between women's contributions in politics and political empowerment in Rivers State.

RELATED LITERATURE

Henry (2004.171) suggests that experience from across the world where women play paramount roles in public offices have shown that women in politics and decision-making contribute to redefining political priorities, placing new items on the political agenda. If women are given the political space, it will bring to bear their unique perspective.

However, women's participation in political activities at community, state and national levels are still low. Moreover, women have predicaments in political domain of national level. They have been debased and dishonoured due to customs and cultural barriers. In rural communities of Nigeria, according to Held (1993.16), women are considered motherhood as her principal purpose of existence. She supposed to prepare meals, wash clothes, in a nutshell domestic activities. In Nigeria, women are expected to play the role of second riddle and take low status jobs. All these have caused major constraints to women participation in politics.

Oladimeji (2004.707) suggests that the contemporary entailment of women in political leadership is similar to that of many countries. In most parts of the country, women now vote equal members with men, but are generally under presented in politics.

Mathew (2003.162), asserts that the introduction of formal women's organizations and movement in Nigeria in 1953, after the National Women's Union Metamorphosed into the Federation of Nigeria women society (FNWS), came into being as an umbrella body or organization holding all the dreams of the futures of Nigerian women. He also explained that phenomenal increase in the access of many Nigerian women into formal education in the 70s and their consequent mobility within the bureaucratic and political system has gone along way in improving the profile of the Nigerian women.

According to Yasufu (2000.10), there are also new trends in the international movement of women and the affiliation of Nigerian women to such international organizations like the International Federation of Women lawyers, Association of women librarians of Nigerian (AWLN), National Council of Women Societies of Nigeria soroptimist. International, Rotary international (where the women are called inner wheel).

Amezi et al (1998.181), opines that the issue of gender inequality in Nigerian politics in particular and African in general has been debated since the introduction of formal education during the colonial era. Right from late 1950s and early 1960s when many African countries acquired their independence, this debate has taken a new dimension in local and international forms. Henry (2004.10), argues that the diversity of tribes in Nigeria has made women prone to the most predicaments they are facing today.

Ugal (1991), suggests that Nigerians are busy thinking about where they come from rather man what they can offer to their country. In a similar view, Anifowoss et al (1999.226) confirms that constitutes half of the world's population and have

contributed significantly to the well-being of the human race, Nigerian women have always played five (5) key roles - mother, producer, manager, community organizer and social, cultural and political activities.

Aaron (2004.8), suggests that despite the large number and crucial functions of women, the division of roles between male and female sexes as prescribed by most cultures, assign the subordinate position to the women, today, there are series of contributions by feminists in the field on the ways in which women's issues, concerns and participations are excluded from the public area due to the division.

EXPANDING WOMEN POLITICAL OPPORTUNITIES

Inyang (2001.48), asserts that women are pool of resources. The distinct developments during the military rule began to change the traditional image and orientations towards politics of women. There was the expansion of educational and occupational opportunities for women. According to William (1993.16), women who worked outside the home and who were well educated were much more likely to express an interest in politics, want to vote, watch electoral campaign/ identify with a political party.

Held (1993.16), opines that the attitudes also extends into the suitability of women for political office. According to Ama (2004.12) scholars during the colonial history contended that women lost most of their economy under colonialism because British custom at that time gave women less control of their own affairs than the African culture which world have given them the right to participated in politics.

A famous case in point, according to Ama (2004.12) was the Aba riots in which Igbo women used traditional means to protest against taxation and were harshly repressed by the colonial government In the North, Ogbonne (2000.10), asserts that Islamic custom greatly restricts women role in the society. Although, the Hausa women are considerably more free than their counterparts in the Middle East including significant roles in local production and trade. They are generally not allowed in an active political role.

Ogundipe (1994.245), suggests that consensus democracy should endeavour to pre-eminently project women as an important integral aspect of its process. We should not continue to play lip service to women empowerment. At a time the international community wondered how a talented woman like Marian Abacha could have been locked up in the barracks all these years as intelligent as she is. She could only emerge when the status of her husband made her a public figure. Mow, with the demise of her husband, she has returned to the culture of silence which is the woman's domain.

Igwe (2008.20), opines that through the obnoxious widowhood practices, the society tends to bury the better part of a widow with her husband. These simply prove that Nigeria is unable to guarantee the woman, her rightful place in the society in which she can freely develop her God given talents so as to achieve her bodily, spiritual and moral perfection and become richer in external and internal recognition through her services to the community and nation in general.

Inyang (2001.29), asserts that Nigerian women need to get actively involved in politics and policy making processes. They have to be in Government to protect women's interests by taking part in decision making, addressing the issues of gender inequalities, fighting for social justice, for gender blind laws, for equal citizenship rights and for the abolition of women inferior status.

Mathew (2003.162), suggests that restricting women's participation in politics have thus meant suppressing some good talents. African states, therefore, need to formulate the right policies to do away with women's inferior status because African societies will make no substantial progress as long as women are kept out of main-stream of economic discourse.

Abam (2000.28), Uzor (2008.264) and Igwe and Odike (2009.180) several countries have revised their constitutions to gender equality, Southern African countries have attained a

higher representation of women in decision - making processes in America and Europe.

METHODOLOGY

Given the above theoretical framework, an attempt is made to examine the role of women in the democratic stability of the country. This is with a view to determining their relevance in politics especially in River State. In achieving the objectives of this study, a survey design techniques was adopted. Questionnaire and interview methods were used for the collection of relevant data. The target population of 1000 respondents covering ten Local Government Area out of 23 at the rate of 100 per Local Government Area. The rational for the sampling techniques adopted is that it allowed the inclusion of any category of the population of a particular interest to this study. Also, it ensures the representation of women especially those that are already in politics. On the whole, 1000 copies of questionnaire were dispensed across the sampled Local Government Areas in Rivers State, 800 copies were properly filled and returned. The likert scales rating was used to elicit information from the respondents, whereby they were required to score their opinion using the scale of strongly agreed (SA) Agreed (A), undecided (UD) strongly disagreed (SD) and disagreed (D). Z test of mean was Z test formula:

Zt = ZRanks X Frequency Total Responses (n)

HYPOTHESIS I

There is a significant relationship between the activities of women in politics and Democratic stability in Rivers State.

Table 1 Women in politics and Democratic Stability

Items	SA	A	UD	SD	D	Total Responses
	5	4	3	2	1	
Item 4	50	60	130	360	200	800
Item5	45	45	110	190	410	800
Item 6	15	25	60	320	380	800
Item 7	40	60	125	210	380	800
Item8	20	40	50	340	365	800
Frequency	170	230	475	1420	1735	4000
Eranks X frequency	850	920	1425	2840	1733	7770

Source; field work, 2012,

Zt = ERanks X Frequency Total Responses (n) 7770 = 1.94

Decision: Accept the hypothesis, if the computed value is greater than the critical value (table value), otherwise reject it. Based on the above analysis, we accept the hypothesis which states that there is significant relationship between the activities of women in politics and democratic stability in River State. This supports the work of Inyang (2001.29) who asserts that:

> ...Nigerian women need to get actively involved
> in politics and policy - making processes. The have to be in
> Government to protect women's interests by taking part in
> decision - marking, address the issues of gender inequalities,
> fighting for social justice, for gender blind laws, for equal
> citizenship rights and for the abolition of women inferior
> status.

This was supported by Mathew (2003.162) that:

> ...Restricting women's participation in politics

have thus meant suppressing some good talents. African State, therefore, to formulate the right policies to do away with women's inferior status, because African societies *will make no substantial as women are kept out of the main-stream of economic discourse.*

Based on the above analyses and the subsequent literature which also corroborates with the views of those who were interviewed, it is clear that the activities of women in politics makes for democratic stability in Rivers State because of adequacy in representation and more so, being opportune to make contribution in the governance of their state.

Hypothesis II

There is a significant relationship between women contributions in politics and political empowerment in Rivers State.

Table II: Women and Political empowerment

Items	SA 5	A 4	UD 3	SD 2	D 1	Total Responses
Item 9	20	40	50	340	350	800
Item 10	10	50	40	300	400	800
Item 11	60	20	60	320	340	800
Item 12	30	70	55	225	420	800
Frequency	120	180	205	1185	1510	2300
EranksX frequency	600	720	615	2379	1510	5824

Source: field work, 2012.

Zt   =   ERanks X Frequency

Total Responses (n) $\frac{5824}{3200}$ = 1.82

Decision: Accept the hypothesis, if the computer value is greater than the table value, otherwise reject it. Based on the analysis, we accept the hypothesis which states that there is a significant relationship between women contribution in politics and political empowerment in Rivers State, This supports the work of Ama (2004.10) and Uzor (2008.300) who asserts that:

...Women's participation in politics is a serious element of empowerment. In America and Europe, women are empowered through adequate representation in governance. After all several countries have revised their constitutions to enshrine gender equality.

Qgundipe (1994.246), supports this view that:

...Democracy should include women as integral aspect of its process. After all, the political empowerment of women guarantees democratic stability in the country and the world over...

Some of the respondents who were interviewed supported Ogundipe (1994.246) especially the Chiefs, traditional rulers and other heavy weight politicians as they emphasized on the importance of women political empowerment as a bedrock of democratic stability.

Based on the above analyses, and the subsequent literature, it is clear that women contributions in politics are a form of political empowerment in Rivers State. The researcher, as a woman, is optimistic on the importance of political empowerment of women as a form of peace - building initiatives for democratic stability.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The researcher, in view of this study, made the following recommendations:

  i.   More women should be politically empowered to liberate the teaming unemployed and illiterate women especially in the rural area.

  ii.   Women should be given good education as civic right to enable them educates their children. There

is a saying that if you educate a woman, you have educated the nation,

iii.   Women to fully put their best in all ramification, women education should be priority to parents in Rivers State and Nigeria at large,

iv.   Women should not be discriminated in the society. All laws guiding the human rights of women should fully be implemented to safeguard the right of women in Rivers State.

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