

Women's Political Empowerment: Using the Client-Centered Therapy to Improve the Self-Concept of Nigerian Women

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Abstract

This paper explored the internal and external factors that prohibit most Nigerian Women from participating in active public political life and suggests the Client Centred Therapy (CCT) as a way of enhancing the self concept of the women and getting them to be involved in local and national policy formulation.

Keywords: Women; Political empowerment; Client-centred Therapy; Nigeria

1. Introduction

Before Independence in Nigeria, Women through the movements spearheaded by great women like Mrs. Funmilayo Ransome Kuti, Margaret Ekpo, Janet. Nwokedi, Queen Amina and others challenged the colonial masters' arbitrary manner of governance and their unfavourable socio-economic policies especially those that bothered on the rights of women. Their protest led to the formation of the National Women Union (NWU) in 1947 which cut across class, region and ethnic groups, this union later became known as the Federation of Nigerian Women Societies (FNWS) and it fought for political participation by women and also demanded that one third of seats in the local councils be allocated to women. It is sad to note however, that the efforts made by these notable women before and during independence have not led to women's political empowerment. In the same vein, women's organizations in some Asian countries also played important role in the democracy movement of their countries. According to Sen and Grown (1987), Corazon Aquino of the Philippines, Benazir Bhutto of Pakistan, Khaleda Zia and Hasina Wazed of Bangladesh fought relentlessly for the independence of their countries. Unfortunately, the bold moves of these women did not make much impact on the general state of women's participation in decision making positions in their countries.

2. Problems of Women in Nigeria

Presently, women are still encountering numerous problems while venturing into politics.

This is as a result of the social, cultural and religious attitude of different Nigerian societies which tend to relegate women to the background. In her view, Gopalkrishna (2006), opined that the new millennium has brought with it new hopes, dreams and aspirations to women in advanced countries of the world but the same cannot be said of women in Nigeria whose rights are routinely violated because of the customs and traditions in existence.

Consequently, men constitute a larger percentage of the party membership and tend to dominate the party hierarchy and in most cases influence the party's internal politics. In the northern part of the country, the Purdah system (that is, house seclusion of women) is a factor inhibiting women's participation in Politics. Another hindrance is lack of adequate education; for a large proportion of females are uneducated and unexposed. According to Afolabi (2003), other factors which act as barrier to women's political emancipation are pre-determined social roles assigned to women and men, male dominance and control, lack of funds, the dual burden of domestic task and professional obligation. He further highlighted poverty, unemployment, women's lack of confidence to run for elections, women's perception of politics as a dirty game and lack of confidence in other women as other obstacles. For the purpose of clarity women's lack of confidence in themselves, lack of confidence in other women and their perception of politics are internal factors while the others are external factors.

On the issue of pre-determined social roles, women in Nigeria are socialized into a culture of female subordination to their husbands and men in their families of orientation as well as the members of their husbands' families. Thus, the kinship system places men at a more advantageous position than the women. In fact, the family and other institutions of the society have deeply perpetrated the subjugation and disempowerment of women in Nigeria.

3. Progress made by Women

To Annan (2006), women had made marked progress over the years in their quest to be relevant considering the fact that there are presently eleven (11) women heads of government in different countries of the world (that of Liberia being the most recent one). On the 16th of January, 2006, Mrs. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf was elected as the President of Liberia after a two-year transitional government that has led the country since the end of the Civil war. She therefore, becomes the first woman to win a Presidential election in Africa. Examples of other women who are currently leading their countries are Michelle Bachelet of Chile, Angela Merkel, the first female Chancellor in Germany.

Though there is a remarkable accomplishment, a good percentage of females still face stiff barriers to their participation even when they are qualified. Richardson (2002), opined that despite decades of progress in the United States and around the world, women fill only about 16 percent of seats in national parliament. He went further to say that there is nowhere in the world that women hold up to 50 percent of the seats of government, that the highest number of seats women have held is 30% (the minimum threshold that government have agreed to strive for at the 1995 United Nations Conference for women in Beijing) in less than 20 countries. Africa has some success stories and Rwanda is a case in point. After the '1994 genocide women were included in rebuilding the nation and framing the new constitution and also in deciding the percentage of parliamentary seats for women. Presently, the females are in key leadership positions such as Minister of Justice on the Supreme Court. As a matter of fact, women hold almost 49% of seats in the lower parliament in Rwanda and this is the highest in the world over.

In South Africa, the participation of women in politics is encouraging. Attoe (2006) reported that women hold about 33% of the parliamentary seats in South Africa and, some important leadership positions such as Deputy President. Other countries where women were Vice-Presidents are Uganda and Senegal. Wandera Specioza Kabiwe was appointed as the first women Vice-President by President Museveni. In 2001, Senegal had a first woman Vice-President. Sylvie Kinigi served as Prime Minister of Rwanda until she was assassinated. It is refreshing to note that in the United States of America, Madeline Albright was appointed by President William Clinton in 1997 as the first female Secretary of State. "Tripp (2001) pointed out that Ethiopia, Lesotho and South Africa had female speakers of the house while Uganda and Zimbabwe have had female deputy speakers.

In 1999, there were 100 Women Groups in Nigeria and they elected a third of all the 145 female candidates they supported for elective positions. And during the 2003-2007 transition periods, a handful of women have been appointed into various posts and these are as follows:

- Mrs Esther Oyero Special -Assistant to the Director-General of Budget Office of the Federal Government.
- Mrs. Modupe Sasore -Special Assistant to the President on export Programmes
- Lady Olalade Oki Member -Presidential Commission on Youth Development.
- Dr. (Mrs) Grace Ogwuche -Minister of State for Education.
- Prof (Mrs) Dora Akunyili -Director of National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC).
- Dr. (Mrs) Veronica Ogbuagu -Delta State Commissioner for Primary and Secondary Education.
- Mrs. Toru Ofili -Rivers State Commissioner for Women Affairs.
- Dr. (Mrs) Okonji-Iweala - Minister of Foreign Affairs.
- Mrs. Chinwe Obaji -Former Minister for Education.
- Mrs. Obada was elected as Deputy Governor of Osun State.

Despite the fact that Nigerian Women have fought like their counterparts in various countries, the Impact is still minimal. This is why the writer is suggesting a new approach; the Client Centred Therapy to enhance the self-concept of the women and make them be more politically inclined.

4. The Client-Centered Therapy (CCT)

The Client-Centred Therapy (CCT) was propounded by Carl Roger and it is a branch of the humanistic Counselling theories. It is a "self theory" because its main focus is the features of an individual which include self-concept, self-regard, congruence of self and experience.

Commenting on this approach, Bavelas (1978) noted that the Important issue of Roger's theory is the self-concept which she defined as a collection of attitudes, values and Judgments that an individual holds of himself with regards to his behaviour, appearance, ability and worth as a person. An individual's perception of himself can influence every aspect of his life. The proponent of this theory sees human beings as socialized and forward-

moving and striving to become fully functional. He further asserted that people are cooperative and constructive and

should be trusted. In fact, there is much reliance on the client's capability to lead the way in the therapy. In this therapy, the counsellor or therapist plays role of a facilitator of personal growth by assisting the client to discover his/her capabilities for resolving problems. Thus, the relationship becomes an avenue for the counselee to increase his awareness and ability to realize his potentials, which would then be employed in transforming his life styles. The theory stresses that any badness in man is caused by his society and environment.

5. Practical Application of the CCT

• A large proportion of womenfolk in Nigeria have not developed realistic and healthy self-concepts and this has adverse effects on them in the political scene. The reasons one may advance for the poor self-concept, could be the socialization process that boys and girls are exposed to. Right from the infancy period, social expectations, ethics, norms and standards are set for the child to adhere to. The upbringing differs for both sexes; while boys are motivated and taught to be brave and develop strength to be physically sound, girls are taught characteristics that make them to be truly feminine and these include cooking, generosity and great concern for others. Again, while parents and significant others encourage initiative and independence in males, the-females are made to be dependent. The long-term effect of this training on the girls is a feeling of inferiority that pervades every aspect of their lives. The tradition of male dominance or superiority has made women not to be responsive politically;

this poor perception of self according to Schaefer (1981) is as a result of unquestioned submission to the immediate commands of authorities. Consequently, a good percentage of the women are passive, incompetent and lack confidence in them. Some women have been heard asking self-defeating questions when it comes to the issue of politics and these include the followings.

- "How can a mere woman like me participate in politics?"
- "What have I to offer as a woman?"
- "Do I have the courage to argue with or confront men even when voted in?"
- "Is politics not a game for men?"

The client-centred therapy is very appropriate because it will assist the women to discover themselves and explore their innate abilities to the fullest. Some of the goals of the therapy include'

- a. Making the Client to become more realistic in his/her self-concept
- b. Assisting the counselee to be confident and self-directive
- c. Making the client to recognize his/her personal qualities and viewing himself/herself as different from others
- d. Ensuring flexibility in client's perception of self and the society

Therefore the onerous task before the counsellor is to provide a conducive atmosphere or climate, which will enable the Nigerian woman to know herself and utilize such knowledge to discover more appropriate behaviour. There are certain characteristics the client is expected to imbibe as therapy progresses and these are openness to experience, trust in one's organism, an internal locus of evaluation and willingness to be a process. By way of explanation, "openness to experience" means flexibility of thoughts and beliefs and receptiveness to further knowledge and growth. The counselee is assisted to establish a sense of trust in him. Admittedly, when individuals seek advice and answers outside themselves, it is a clear indication of lack of confidence in themselves and failure to direct their own lives. This is the lot of many Nigerian women who depend on their husbands to think for them and also take decisions for them.

Exposure to this therapeutic measure will make the womenfolk to develop self-trust and this will be accompanied by an internal locus of evaluation. This means looking inward for the answers to the problems of existence (political issues inclusive). Put in another way, the counselee more than ever before seeks self-approval instead of approval of others. To Corey (1977), "Willingness to be a process", which is the last feature entails the realization by clients that they are not fixed entity rather they are in a fluid process of questioning their perceptions and beliefs and accepting new experiences and beliefs. By creating an atmosphere of warmth, respect, acceptance and understanding, the therapist helps the client to loosen her defence and rigid perceptions and move to a higher level of personal functional.

Techniques the therapists should employ are interpreting, summarizing the situation, concreteness and self-disclosing his personal experience.

The client centred therapy has been used by other researchers and it has yielded positive results. Otta and Odoemelam (1999) used the CCT and other techniques in improving the self-concept of physically handicapped adolescents in Ebonyi State. Also Carmody (1978) and Neely (1982) used the CCT, the Rational

Emotive Therapy (RET) with other therapeutic approaches to manage unassertiveness and emotionally disturbed students.

Clinton (2003), daughter of the former American President asserted that the biographies of some of the most powerful women the world over have confirmed that the family has a critical role in the development of the still small voice in women at a very young age, She further opined that these women were encouraged to listen to themselves from a very tender age.

6. Conclusion

Conclusively, parents should encourage their female children to think for themselves learn to trust themselves and thus grow up to become women with a positive concept of self and can courageously venture into Partisan politics.

7. Recommendation

- Adequate personal-social guidance programmes that will focus, on activities geared towards enhancing the self-concept of female students should be designed and implemented in secondary schools.
- Through family counselling, parents should be given adequate orientation on. Proper definition of sex roles of their children. This is essential as it will enable children to have a good knowledge of them from a very tender age.
- There is the need for counsellors to organize seminars for women to re-orientate them to develop self-trust and a good perception of self.

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