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TOWARDS ENHANCING NATIONAL ECONOMY AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA: AN INVESTIGATION OF THE POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN GOVERNANCE IN EDO STATE.

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Abstract

This study investigated the political participation of women in governance in Edo State, Nigeria. The study adopted the survey design method and random sampling technique. Two research questions were raised and two hypothesis formulated to guide the study. A structured researcher-made questionnaire was used as instrument for data collection. The data collected were analysed using the service statistical techniques such as tables, frequency, percentages and chi-square statistics. Findings of the study indicated that women are not given more opportunities in traditional and religious leadership positions. It was also revealed that women create more empowerment skills when in governance their representation in governance more confined to areas that are relatively feminine. The study recommends that: Government should commit themselves to establishing the goal of gender balance in governmental bodies and committees, as well as in public administrative positions; Government should take measures, including where appropriate, in electoral system that encourage parties to integrate women in elective and non-elective public positions in the same proportion and at this same level as men; Government should promote equal rights of women and men to engage in political activities and to freedom of association, including membership in political parties and trade unions.

Keywords: National Economy; Sustainable Development; Political Participation of Women in Governance.

Introduction

In line with global trends, the development frame work of Nigeria is evolving in the context of governance and administrative reforms. Since 1980s a wide range of governance reforms have been introduced in the country in the form of liberalization democratization and decentralization to achieve objectives of economic growth, poverty reduction, participation, transparency and accountability. (Adeyemo & Ihemeje, 2018) This new wave of governance reforms reflects the gradual shift in development thinking over time on political, social and economic roles of state and society. The governments under the new mode of governance have the responsibility to steer, facilitate and guide for effective governance as opposed to their traditional roles of command and control and sole provider of public services (Schulze, 2019). Both civil society and private sector organizations are recognized as potential partners in the process of governance. Since all development is people related their participation and involvement irrespective of gender is considered crucial in the nation's development.

Women participation in politic is crucial for economic development, as it brings diverse perspectives, skills, and experiences to decision-making processes. It stimulates economic growth,

creates jobs, innovates industries and lead to more effective allocation of Resources, prioritizing education, healthcare, and social welfare. It also ensures representation of their interests, needs, and perspectives. It leads to reduced inequality and helps to address gender-based disparities in education. Women leadership fosters stronger community engagement, social cohesion, and collective wellbeing. They benefit economically, Socially and politically.

In Edo state domain, men have been dominating over the affairs of the executive, Legislative and Judicial Arms of government despite the fact that the women constitute half (50%) of the total population of the area and majority of these women are of franchise age (NPC,2006). In order words, women continue to suffer inequality in political participation or governance and as a result cannot have access to social rewards such as money, power and prestige' unless women are fully involved in the decision making and policy formulation processes at all levels of the state, changes expected in women's political participation and to some extent, in their social and economic status will remain a mirage.

The United Nation in one of its report maintained that the issue of women's political participation first and foremost is a question of democracy, equality and citizenship rights. It has been argued that in view of the population strength of women, their under representation in politics and governance can undermine the nation's development process. Edo state has implemented programs to promote women's economic empowerment, with high rates of educational attainment (91.6%)and employment (71.7%) among women. The state has also mainstreamed gender in global politic advancing the course of women in contemporary political economy. The consequences of political apathy among women as reported by Steans, (2017) includes, under representation in politic, which means their interests and concerns are not adequately addressed, the lack of diverse perspectives in policy making, and it can lead to disenfranchisement further marginalizing already vulnerable group.

In the bid to addressing the negative political situation in Edo State, Idemudia, and Ojo.(2020) pointed out that It's essential to tackle the root causes of political apathy among women. They recommended that some of the measures that can be taken to ameliorate the situation includes, amongst others: implementing programs that empower women such as leadership training economic empowerment initiatives, advocating for policy reforms that promote women's participation in politics, and organizing awareness campaigns to educate women about their rights and the importance of political participation. They explained that, addressing these challenges and promoting women participation in politic, can work towards a more inclusive and representative political system in Edo state

Looking at the progress made so far, the Edo state Government has made efforts to promote women's participation in politic, with over 40% of positions in the Governor Obaseki-led administration held by women. The state has also implemented initiatives such as the Edo women Conference and Edo jobs to empower women and provide opportunities for them to contribute to the state's development. It's worth noting that while there has been progress, women are still underrepresented in politics in Edo state and Nigeria as a whole. However, the efforts made by the Edo State Government and women leaders are steps in the right direction towards achieving greater gender equality.(Edo State Government Reports 2018-2020)..

Some women in Edo state are recognised by Iyayi, (2019) to have made considerable contributions to politics in Edo State. These Prominent Female Politicians includes; Betsy Obaseki who was the First Lady of Edo State 2016 to 2024, and had been a strong advocate for women's empowerment and participation in politics, Marie Edeko who was the Deputy Speaker, state House of Assembly 2016 to 2024, Isoken Omo was the chairperson, Hospitality, Logistics, Protocol and security sub-committee for 2023 Alaghodaro. Historically, women in Edo state have been involved in government, with women participating in governance not as a privilege, but as a right. Although

women's representation in politics has been relatively low, there seems to be some efforts towards increasing their participation.

Realizing the importance of gender concerns around the globe, it has received greater attention in recent decades of the 21st century resulting in an expanded role for women in the economy and changing their traditional roles and relationships to work and family. This phenomenon said to be occurring around the globe is also occurring here in Nigeria where women are being given greater representation in different sphere of the economy. In politics alone women are noted to have been given 30% representation at federal government level through a new system of devolution of powers plan 2010, has enhanced their political participation (Adeyemo & Ihemeje, 20018). Successive governments have made sure they include female representative as minister, parliamentarians and commissioner.

Many factors have continued to militate against women in governance and politics, even though the effort to empower women has continued to gather momentum. Nigeria government statistical report shows that from 1999 to 2015, only 6% of local government councillors were women, 24% of judges in the federal court were women, and an average of 7% of each type of high-level government officials and senior administrators were women (Nigeria National Bureau of statistics, 2018). There was no female central bank governor between 1999 and 2015, and the role with the highest percentage of women at 28% was a special assistant (Nigeria National Bureau of statistics.2018; Kelly, 2019).). Similarly, in the 2019 elections, women comprised 7.3% of the Nigeria senate and 3.1% of the House of representatives, and no state governors were women (NWTF,2019) According to the report of the inter parliamentary Union(IPU,2024), Nigeria had only 6.5% of seats held by women in parliament as at 31st March 2024 .It is important to note that of the 1.494 positions won in the 2023 general elections in Nigeria, only 445 women representing 30% were elected to various positions. This figure is below the 35% women representation enshrined in the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria as amended. Therefore, gender disproportionate representation in power structures in Nigeria evident in the underrepresentation of women in politics offices and appointments, restricts women's ability to influence policy and legislation that impacts their opportunities. This discourages women from engaging in political activities and participating in the democratic process, ultimately undermining the legitimacy and representativeness of governance institutions in Nigeria.

Empowering women is good for governance. Equality between men and women is now a leading global political principle. Though the constitution provides women the right to be elected in political; and public representative institutions, such as parliament and local government bodies (Husain 2020) gender inequality, as a collection of interlinked problems, is manifested in the political arena too. Politics is male dominated and androcentric. There is usually slim possibility for the integration and reflection of women's perceptions and needs in state politics that are determined, directed and controlled by men. Since women are not adequately represented in political decisions making issues of public policy relating to women's equality and empowerment remain under the control of men, who may not give these issues the attention they deserve. Inspire of the recognition of the principle of gender equality in the constitution states policies seems to reinforce women's sub-ordination and have failed to prescribe bold steps for the removed of gender disparity, especially as it relates to politics.

In Edo state domain, men have been dominating over the affairs of the executive, legislative and judicial arms of government despite the fact that the women constitute half (50%) of the total population of these women are franchise age (NPC, 2006). In order words, women continue to suffer inequality in political participation or governance and as a result cannot have access to social rewards such as money, power and prestige. Unless women are fully involved in the decision making and policy formulation processes at all levels of the state, changes expected in women's political participation and, to some extent, in their social and economic status will remain a mirage.

The United Nations in one of its report maintained that the issue of women's political participation first and foremost is a question of democracy, equality and citizenship rights. It has been argued and or chested in several form that in view of the population strength of women, their under representation in politics and governance can undermine the nation's development process. Gender participation in Nigerian politics at the grass-root level is an issue of great concern because women development needs women as well as women need development. For a very long time women were relegated to the background. This made it difficult for them to take their rightful place in governance. This situation has been largely responsible for the construed social power structure, low women status and lack of access to income and basic development opportunities including education. Studies have shown that women constitute more than half of the world population as well as their enormous contribution to societal development (Afolbi & Lanre, 20013: Anifowose, 20014]. According to the 1991 census in Nigeria, women account for about 50% of the population yet they are underdeveloped and under- represented in politics (Population Reference Bureau, 2018). In order words, women participation is extremely important for an even human resource development, poverty alleviation and good governance. The roles of women in the past was under-priced and have relegate even when they were known to account for about 50% of the population. However, recently concerted and collaborated efforts have been made in this regard by providing women 30% representation in governance .Nevertheless, some factors have been identified in governance or politics including social and political relationships in a given society (Burns, Scholzman & Verba, 20013). It is against this background that this study attempts to explore or bring to the fore women's political participation in local governments governance with a view to ascertaining their level of participation and factors hindering their involvement .

Research Questions

The following research questions were used to guide this study:

1. What is the attitude of women towards governance in Edo State?
2. To what extent are women involved in governance?

Research Hypothesis

The following hypotheses were formulated and tested in the course of the investigation.

1. Economic status will not have any significant influence on the involvement of women in governance
2. Gender discrimination will not influence women's participation in governance in Edo State.

Methodology

The study adopted the survey design method which consists of the use of primary and secondary data. The research method was adopted because it will enable one to investigate and gather data from a selected sample from the population and be able to generalize with the findings made. The population of the study consists of the entire women representative at ward level in the 192 political wards in all the 18 Local Government Councils of Edo State. The random sampling technique was used to select a total sample of 42 respondents. Those selected for the study are women from five local government areas out of the 18 Local Government Areas in Edo State. They include: Oredo, Ovia North East, Egor,Ikpobaokha and Uhunwode local government areas. The instrument for data collection is a structured questionnaire which

was designed by the researcher titled “political participation of women in governance” The questionnaire was divided into two major parts. The first part sought the demographic information of the respondents under study, while the second segment consists of items which seek to provide information to address the research questions raised for the study.

The items on the research instrument was based on four-point like scale format of SA- strongly agreed = 4 points, A- agreed =3 points, disagreed = 2 points and strongly disagreed- SD = 1 point

For the purpose of validity, copies of the questionnaire were given to two professors in the department of adult & non formal education, university of Benin, Benin City to scrutinize. After making modification and ascertaining the suitability of the items, their suggestions were incorporated while the final version of the instrument was developed to enhance the content validity of the instrument. To establish the reliability of the instrument, test-retest was used. Copies of the instrument were administered to a randomly drawn sample of 20 respondents. After two weeks intervals, the same were recollected and correlated using person product moment correlation statistic to determine the correlation coefficient. A correlation of index of 0.68 was obtained; this shows that the instrument is reliable. The data collected were analysed using descriptive statistical techniques such as tables, diagrams, frequencies, and percentages to answer the research questions. While the statistical tool used to analyses the hypotheses was chi-square statistic.

Presentation of Findings

This deals with the presentation of findings from the analysis of data obtained and discussion of results. The result are carefully interpreted and presented in tables as shown here under.

Research Question One: what is the attitude of women towards local government governance in Edo state?

Table 1.

Distribution Of Responses On The Attitude Of Women Towards Political Participation In Edo State.

VARIABLES	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)
Women are not involved in public life in Edo State	Nil (0)	50 (23.8)	90 (42.9)	70 (33)
Women are not given more opportunities in traditional and religious leadership positions.	100 (47)	110 (52)	Nil (0)	Nil (0)
Women have low recognition of power within the community	60 (28)	150 (71)	Nil (0)	Nil (0)
Women could hardly be influenced to participate in governance	Nil (0)	Nil (0)	100 (47)	110 (52)
Women are more accountable in governance than men	Nil (0)	50 (23.8)	110 (52)	50 (23.8)

Women have low participation in governance.	Nil (0)	Nil (0)	90 (42)	120 (57)
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A cursory look at the data in table 1 revealed that 90(42.9%) and 70(33%) of the respondent disagreed and strongly disagreed that women are not involved in public life in Edo state. While 50(23.8) of the respondent agreed on the issues. However, none of the respondents strongly agreed on this variable under consideration.

Similarly, it was also revealed that 100(47%) and 119(52%) of the respondents agreed and strongly agreed that women are not given more opportunities in traditional and religious leadership positions. However, there was no respondent that disagreed on these issues.

Again, the researcher was also interested in finding out if women have low recognition of power within the community. And form the response gathered, it was revealed the ay 60(28%) and 50(71%) of the respondent agreed and strongly agreed on this issue under consideration; while there was no respondents who responded otherwise.

In the same vein, 100(47%) and 110(52%) of the respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed respectively that women could hardly be influenced to participate in local governance. But, none of them responded in the affirmative.

In ascertaining whether women could hardly be influenced to participate in local government it was observed that 110(52%) and 50(23%) of the respondent disagreed and strongly disagreed respectively on this issue. While, 50(23.8) of the respectively agreed. However, none of the respondent strongly agreed on this variable under consideration.

The last variable in the research question one was meant to find out if women have low participation in governance. The results from the analysis revealed that, 90(42%) and 120(57%) of the respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed on this issue. However, none of the respondents responded otherwise on this issue under consideration.

On the basis of the analysis, it can therefore be easily concluded that women are not given more opportunities in traditional and religious leadership positions. Also, women have low recognition of power within the community.

Research Question Two: this question states: to what extent are women involved to participate in governance?

Table 2:

Distribution of responses on the extent which women are involved or participate in governance.

Variables	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)
Women create more empowerment schemes when a local governance	120 (57)	90 (42)	Nil (0)	Nil (0)
Women representation in governance are more confined to areas that are relatively famine e.g. social welfare	100 (47)	110 (52)	Nil (0)	Nil (0)
Women tend to gain more political experience in local governance\politics	60 (28)	150 (71)	Nil (0)	Nil (0)
Women are adequately not represented in politics in edo state.	100 (47)	110 (52)	Nil (0)	Nil (0)
Most women in this state do not see themselves capable enough to hold political office.	Nil (0)	50 (23.8)	110 (52)	50 (23.8)
Political activities in this state are dominated by men and this discourages women from participating in politics.	90 (42)	120 (57)	Nil (0)	Nil (0)
On the basis of political competence, our society rates men over women	90 (42)	120 (57)	Nil (0)	Nil (0)

From the analysis on the table 2, it was revealed that 120(57%) and also 90(42%) of the respondents strongly agreed and agreed respectively that women create more empowerment schemes when in local governance. The data however showed that none of the respondents either choose to disagree or strongly disagree on the variables under consideration.

In the same vein, 100(47%) and 110(52%) of the respondents strongly agreed and agreed respectively on the view that represented in governance are confined to areas that are relatively feminine e.g. social welfare But, other was no respondent for the other options available.

Similarly, it was revealed that 60(28%) and 150(71%) of the respondents agreed and strongly agreed that women are adequately not represented in politics in Edo State. However, none of the respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed on this under consideration.

In the same vein, 100(47%) and 110(52%) of the respondents strongly agreed and disagreed respectively on the view that women are adequately not represented in politics in Edo state. But, there was no respondent for the other options available.

Again, the researcher was also interested in finding out if most women in this state do not see themselves capable enough to hold political office. And from the responses gathered, it was revealed that 110(52%) and 50(23.8%) of the respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed respectively. While, 50(23.8%) of the respondents agreed on this issue. However, none of the respondents strongly agreed on this variable under consideration.

By the same token, 90(42%) and 120(57%) of the respondents strongly agreed and agreed respectively on the fact that political activities in this state are dominated by men and this discourages women from participating in politics. There were no contrary opinions on the issue.

The last on research question two was meant to find out whether on the basis of political competence, our society rates men and women. And from the results of the analysis revealed that 90(42%) and 120(57%) of the respondent disagreed and strongly disagreed on this issue. However, none of the respondent responded otherwise on this issue under consideration.

On the basis of the analysis, it can therefore be included that women create more empowerment schemes when in local governance, their representation in governance are more confined to areas that are relatively feminine, political activities in this state are dominated by men and this discourages women from participating in politics. As well as on basis of political competence, our society rates men over women.

Hypothesis One: Economic status will not have any significant influence on involvement of women in governance

Table 3

Chi-square test analysis of Economic status influence on involvement of women in governance.

Variables	N	DF	X^2 . Calculated	X^2 critical	Decision
Economic status influence on Women in governance.	42	41	282.5	7.82	Reject

Significance at 0.05 level.

The result of chi-square statistical test on economic status influence on involvement of women in governance is presented in table 3. From the calculation, the computed chi – square (X^2) value is 282.5 and it is greater than the value of 0.05 significant level, X^2 critical of 7.82, hence we reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternate and thus conclude that Economic status has significant influence on involvement of women in governance.

Hypothesis Two: Gender Equality will not encourage full participation of women in governance in Edo State.

Table 4

Chi-square test analysis of Gender Equality will not encourage full participation of women in governance in Edo State.

Variables	N	DF	X^2 . Calculated	X^2 critical	Decision
Economic status influence on Women in governance. Significant at 0.05 level.	42	41	99.94	7.82	Reject

The result of chi-square statistical test on Gender Equality full participation of women in governance in Edo State.

From the calculation, the computed chi-square (x^2) value is 99.94 and it is greater than the value of 0.05 significant levels, x^2 critical of 7.82, hence we reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternate and thus conclude that gender equality will encourage full participation of women in governance in Edo state.

Discussion of Results

The result of the study has been quite instructive, informative and revealing. Based on the analysis of data or information collected on the opinion of the respondents on the political participation of women in local government governance in selected local government in edo state.

In the study, two (2) research questions were raised and examined. The first research question revealed that women are not given more opportunities in traditional and religious leadership positions. Also, women have low recognition of power within the community. This result is supported by another study conducted by Kosomo (2012) on the factor affecting women participation in electoral politics in Africa: challenge and protest. Findings of the study revealed that in spite of the international declarations affirming the rights and equality between men and women, of which Nigeria is a signatory, the available literature shows that women still constitute a disproportionately small percentage of those participating in political decision making and leadership. Many global conferences, including the Cairo conference on population and development (1994), the Fourth World Conference on Women (1995), and the World Summit for Social Development (1995) have recognized that, despite the progress made globally in improving the status of women, gender disparities still exist, especially with regard to participation in electoral politics.

The second research question revealed that women create more empowerment schemes when in governance, their representation in governance are more confined to areas that are relatively feminine, political activities in the state are dominated by men and this discourage women in participating in politics. As well as on basis of political competence, our society rates men over women. This result is supported by another study conducted by Akokuwebe (2015). Who assert that political equity is still obscure in African counties, although some progress has been made. As men have control over assets and have relatively better education, they have a dominant position in terms of political power. For instance, men councillors may not

necessarily be highly educated but such positions are not given to women who have the same low educational level with them. Lack of awareness leads to situations where they become dependent on male political positions or political parties. Men's participation in leadership will focus more on issues of men's interest than on women's concerns. In some cases, women are elected into a leader.

From the first hypothesis calculation, the computed chi-square(χ^2) value was 282.5 and it is greater than the value of 0.05 significant level, χ^2 critical of 7.82, hence we reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternate and thus conclude that economic status has significant influence on involvement of women in local governance. Similarly, in the second hypothesis it was also concluded that gender equality will encourage full participation of women in governance in Edo state.

Conclusion

Following the analysis of data collected and findings made, the following conclusions were drawn based on the major findings of this study.

- Those women are not given more opportunities in traditional and religious leadership positions. Also, women have low recognition of power within the community.
- That women create more empowerment schemes when in governance, their representation in governance are more confined to areas that are relatively feminine, political activities are dominated by men and this discourages women from participating in politics. As well as on the basis of political competency our society rates men over women.
- That women in politics in Edo state have performed very credibly, divulge into the political process for greater involvement being able to bring about child socialization are not educated enough, do not have the financial strength to participate in politics and the kind of occupations of women in this state do not afford them the opportunity to participate in politics.
- That family responsibilities either women from politics, lack of access to economic resources, low educational attainment, religious beliefs and high rate of poverty, illiteracy and long tradition of women's subordination to men.
- That the measures to enhance women's involvement in governance in the State are; changing the negative perception of political women through education and training, carrying out political electoral system reforms, and creation and sustaining a specified percentage of political posts reserved for women.

Recommendations

Based on conclusion drawn from the findings, the following recommendations are hereby proffered:

^Government should commit themselves to establishing the goal of gender balance in governmental bodies and committees, as well as in public administrative entities, and in the judiciary, inter alia, setting specific targets and implementing measures substantial to increase the number of women with a view to achieving equal representation of women and men in governmental and public administrative positions.

^Government should also, monitor and evaluate progress in the representation of women through the regular collection, analysis and dissemination of quantitative and qualitative data on women and men at all levels in various decision –making positions in public and private sectors , and disseminate data on the number of women and men employed at various levels in government on yearly basis , and ensure that women and men have equal access to the full range of public appointments and set up mechanisms within governmental structures for monitoring progress in this process.

^Political parties should examine party structure and procedures to remove all barriers that directly or indirectly discriminate against the participation of women in politics.

^Political parties should develop initiatives that allow women to participate fully in internal policy-making structures and appointive electoral nominating processes .

^Political parties should incorporate gender issues in their political agenda, taking measures to ensure that women can participate in the leadership of political parties on an equal basis with men .

^All political stakeholders especially, women’s organizations should build and strengthen solidarity among women through formation , education and sensitization activities and also advocate at all levels to enable women influence political , economic social decisions , processes and systems , and work towards seeking accountability from elected representatives on their commitment to gender concerns.

^Finally, all political stakeholders should create a system of monitoring for inexperienced women and girls, and in particular, offer training, including training in leadership and decision-making, public speaking and self-assertion, as well as in political campaigning and develop mechanisms and training to encourage women to participate in the electoral process , political activities and other leadership areas.

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