

Feminine Gender Self Defeat as the Bane of Women Participation in Nigerian Politics

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Abstract

Feminine Gender self defeat refers to inferiority complex on the side of the female folk that displays in lack of courage to stand out for key political contests. It is visible in undergraduate politics where female students prefer to pick up nomination papers for Vice President of Students Union, voluntarily leaving the position of President for the male students. In Nigerian politics it is observed that women are hardly presenting themselves for President, Governor, Local Government Chairman and other Executive positions. They are satisfied with a lower level position or supportive positions. Why should the female folk feel at home with supportive positions in Nigerian politics? What possible measure could be adopted to integrate them into the mainstream of political executive positions in Nigeria? These are the problems this research resolved. The research adopted a descriptive phenomenological method in view of the historical origin of the factors and the need to avoid personal biases. The research concluded that the feminine gender self defeat is traditionally rooted in patriarchal African society that has resisted Western cultural influences. Drastic grass root mobilization and consistent re-orientation are required to salvage the present self defeat so as to inculcate in the female gender the boldness and courage as well as self esteem required in mainstream politics in Nigeria.

Key words: Self Defeat, Women Participation, Politics, Leadership

Introduction

We believe that a nation's progress depends on the progress of women; that the strength of democracy depends on the inclusion of women that the richness of civil society depends on the full participation of women; that human rights are women's rights; and women's rights are human rights."

-Hillary Rodham Clinton, Vital Voices of the Americas, October 1998.

Women are a major force behind people's participation in the life of society today. Not only do they comprise the majority in terms of population, but they also play a crucial role in society as procreators of posterity as well as producers of goods and services. However, they hold only a fraction of other leadership positions nationally and internationally.

Women participation in politics is the involvement of women in politics such as in party positions, elected offices, political appointments etc. Political participation is also women's leadership and engagement in decision making processes in their communities. Political accountability to women begins with increasing the number of women in decision-making positions, but it cannot stop there. One of the pillars of UN Women's work is advancing women's political participation and good governance, to ensure that decision-making processes are participatory, responsive, equitable and inclusive. Efforts are focused through strategic entry points that can advance the status of women by catalysing wide-ranging, long-term impacts.

The strengths and potentials of women in national development have been demonstrated by Izuke and Idika (2009) who pointed out that a critical look at nature's arrangement in child bearing and rearing would reveal the enormous strengths and potentials women have when juxtaposed with men. The women bring a child into the world with a man but outplay the man in the process of upbringing of the child. Women belong to various associations in churches, towns and villages such as the August meeting prevalent in the south eastern part of Nigeria. They use these associations to showcase their leadership potentials and qualities. Women have proven abilities as leaders, agents of change and right qualities to participate effectively in politics.

Another interesting quality of women that would make them a veritable tool of national development is that they are detailed in whatever they are involved in. Women are care givers, kind hearted, and dependable. These qualities make them very strategic in national development if fully harnessed. Participation of women in decision-making and as leaders are very essential for the full development and advancement of women. It will encourage other women to participate in public life. The convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against women (1981) is a reminder that: "The full and complete development of a country, the welfare of the world and the cause of peace require the maximum participation of women on equal terms with men in all fields".

In the same vein the Australian's draft National Action plan (2011) recognizes that women are powerful agents of change and that to achieve sustainable peace and security women's voices must be heard at all the levels and stages of peace process. However, the potentials and qualities of women might be seen if actually they don't participate, it becomes a wishful thinking. In Nigeria, participation of women in politics is grossly inadequate and falls short of global standards.

Maclosky (1968) defines political participation as voluntary activities shared by members of a society in the selection of their rulers and directly or indirectly involve in the formation of public policies". The voluntary activities shared by members of a society in the selection of their rulers and directly or indirectly involve themselves in the formation of public policies. From the above definition of political participation, it

appears that those actions (e.g. voting at elections, campaigning, contesting at election) must voluntarily or willingly come from the individuals before they can be described as active political participants. A survey carried out among national parliaments in the world by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (1997) revealed that women make up less than 5 per cent of world's heads of state, heads of major corporations, and top positions in international organizations. Five years down the line, the IPU has established that women are not just behind in political and managerial equity, they are a long way behind. Politics is everyone's business and affects the lives of each of us. The more women are associated in numbers in political decision making process in governments, the more they can change the modalities and outcomes of policies. Only then will the concept of democracy find concrete and tangible expression.

Self Defeat is when someone is viewing themselves in a negative light; their behavior tends to follow how they are feeling about themselves. Usually it is a self-defeating behavior which keeps the person stuck with low self-esteem. Baumeister & Scher (1988) defined self-defeating behaviour as "any deliberate or intentional behaviour that has clear, definitely or probably negative effects on the self or on the self's projects". Feminine gender self defeat is attributed to the look down of women on their abilities. Women having a low self esteem, inferiority complex and negative feeling of themselves of not being able to actualize or achieve a certain role that has been assigned to them. According to the Christian broadcasting Network, Self-defeating behavior is found in individuals who deliberately make decisions that will result in failure. Other self-defeating traits include: engaging in clear and obvious risky ventures; procrastination; self-seclusion; continual, unrelenting stress; missing appointments; social withdrawal; withholding one's needs; giving up easily when facing adversity; playing the role of victim; and easily sinking into vices.

TENETS OF SELF DEFEAT

According to the Power of thoughts Meditation Club, the components of self defeat as they apply to women are highlighted below.

- 1. Emotional perfectionism:** This means one being confident and in control of his/her emotions and wouldn't want to hear bad comments about her. Most times women are scared about what people will say about them.
- 2. Performance perfectionism:** It is a quality of feeling that one must never make a mistake. People with such mindset do not want to be seen as having made a mistake. Women do not easily accept a mistake. They are always on the defensive side.
- 3. Perceived perfectionism:** This is the perception that people will not love and accept one as a flawed and vulnerable human being.
- 4. Fear of disapproval or criticism:** Women are always afraid of being criticized and would not like opposition. They feel that they need everybody's approval to be worthwhile.
- 5. Fear of rejection:** Women perceive rejection as end of life.
- 6. Fear of being alone:** Women equate loneliness to being miserable and unfulfilled.

7. **Fear of failure:** They believe that their worthwhileness depends on their achievements (or intelligence or status or attractiveness).
8. **Conflict phobia:** People who love each other shouldn't fight. In other words not seeing conflict as part of human nature.
9. **Emotophobia:** I should not feel angry, anxious, inadequate, jealous or vulnerable.
10. **Entitlement:** Here women feel that what belongs to them should be naturally given to them. That is to say that they do not believe in one contesting for one's rights.

LEVEL OF WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN POLITICS IN NIGERIA

According to Ogazi Christopher (Chief Project Implementation Officer Development Education Center Enugu and Human Right Education) his analysis of the participation of women in governance and politics is of strategic importance not only for women empowerment, but because it has wider benefits and impact (British Council Gender in Nigeria report 2012). Disadvantaged people and or groups can obtain fair representation only if they are present in elected assemblies. Based on the above therefore, women and men should be represented at decision making-bodies levels locally, regionally and nationally particularly where crucial resources are distributed and are allocated. Nigeria has made several efforts to ensure the participation of women who are the excluded to participate in governance issues through the adoption and creation of some institutions that will facilitate the full participation of women in governance.

In 1985, Nigeria ratified the convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women of 1979 (CEDAW). But it is worthy to note that the operation of the 30 articles of the convention in Nigeria is not achieved. Nigeria also adopted the 1985 Beijing Platform of Action and signed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, The African Charter on People's Rights, The Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo protocol). Even with the affirmative action of 35% representation of women in political and non elective positions in Nigeria, the number of women in the legislative houses is not encouraging as a result of the patriarchal dominance of the men in Nigeria.

In the elective positions in Nigeria since 1999, it is evident that women have not reached 10% representation. From 1999 till date, no woman has been vice president of Nigeria and not to talk about president. In 2011, only one woman contested for the post of the president in Nigeria under the platform of the Peoples Democratic Party and she did not survive the primary election. How could she survive the primaries when she got only one vote despite the large number of women that attended the primary election but refused to vote for her even on sympathy bases?

In 2015, 5 women out of the 14 persons contested the vice presidential position while 14 men contested the post of president.

Out of the 109 senate members in Nigeria senate chambers, women were 7 in 1999, 4 in 2003, 9 in 2007, 7 in 2011 and 7 in 2015. In the house of representative, out of the 360 members of the house in 1999, 7 are women, while in 2003 21 are women, 27 in

2007 and 25 in 2011 and 14 in 2015. No woman governor since 1999 till date apart from when the governor of Anambra state Peter Obi was removed from office for one month and as soon as he won his case through the courts, the women governor stepped down to her deputy position, Out of the 990 seats in the State houses of assembly in Nigeria, in 1999 we have 24 women, 40 in 2003, 57 in 2007 and 68 in 2011 the local government councils that are closer to the people, in 1999, out of the 774 councils 13 are women, 18 in 2003, and 27 in 2011. The councillorship position is where some women are compensated for their efforts in making sure that the men get their positions. Though we say that women are compensated here, the numbers of women that are councilors are still less than 30% of the total number of councilors in Nigeria. Out of the 6368 councillorship seats, 69 are women in 1999, 276 in 2003, and 235 in 2011.

In 2011, out of the 20 persons that contested for the position of president in Nigeria, only 1 is woman and men are 19. Out of the 20 persons for the position of the vice president, 3 are women. Out of the 353 candidates for the post of governors in the 36 states in Nigeria, 13 are women. 347 deputy governorship positions, 58 are women and 1 got the position of deputy governor. The 2408 candidates contesting for the seat of house representatives, women are 220 and men are 2189 and only 19 of the women won seats for the house of representative, and out of the 890 that contested for the senate in Nigeria, 90 are women while 800 are men and only 7 women won the senate in Nigeria 2011 general election. These statistics show the level of gender disparity in the Nigerian political system. This same number of female got the senatorial seat in the current 8th assembly in Nigeria. When we have this kind of system in our governance process, how can women make concrete decisions when they are excluded in the process of making the decisions?

Lance-Onyeiwu, Maureen (2011), Except from UN Women's Preliminary Analysis of the Results of the 2011 General Elections in Nigeria, during the 2007 elections, women constituted about 11% of all candidates with only one woman contesting for the office of the President; 33.9% for governorship positions; 13.5% for Senate, 15.6% for House of Representatives, and 15.8% for Houses of Assembly. At the end of the elections, women occupied only about 7.5 percent of key leadership positions in Nigeria. Interestingly, when the Yar'Adua administration came into office, it promised to give 30 percent of political appointment to women (less than the 35 percent in the National Gender Policy). But an assessment conducted by Action Aid after one year indicated that women appointment was only 11 percent.

Official records released by INEC shows that a total of 809 women emerged as candidates for the 2011 elections on the platforms of various political parties. This represents a 17% increase over 692 women who emerged as candidates during the 2007 elections. But when the result was released, women's representation at national level regressed slightly from 7.5% in 2007 to 7.1% in 2011. In the 2015 elections, the number further decreased to 7 in Senate (6.4 percent) and 19 in House of Representatives (5.2 percent).

It interesting to note that during President Goodluck Jonathan administration, women occupied 33 percent of cabinet positions. This decreased to 19 percent in PMB cabinet.

ARGUMENTS FOR WOMEN'S LOW PARTICIPATION IN POLITICS IN NIGERIA

Scholars from different perspectives presented a number of institutional, historical, socio-economic as well as cultural factors, household responsibilities, illiteracy, few role models and lower expectations as the key reasons that stop women from participating in politics and more. Cooper and Davidson (1982) sought to study the problems that women in leadership positions generally face. They found that women face stress from both the work, home and social environments. In addition, women have to acquire male leadership and managerial skills (for example, being aggressive, assertive, confident), as well as multiple demands in running a career and a family.

However, we are of the opinion in this paper that those factors mentioned might in one way or the other be the reason for low participation but the major cause of low participation of women is gender self defeat. A critical look at the components self defeat would expose the women in Nigeria to this phenomenon. A woman does not want bad comments to be made against her, does not want to be rated poorly in performance, does not want to be a failure or defeated and does not want to contest what belongs to her by right.. All these aggregate to self defeat.

Amongst the factors, education is identified as one of the most important cause of the problem that prevents women's voices from being heard in government. Girls being forced to stay at home to do domestic work and missing out on schooling, one of the factors for low political participation. Yes, women in some areas in the north are not allowed to go to school, but a close look at our tertiary institutions will prove the education argument to be very weak. In our tertiary institutions the number of males is not more than the females. There is no course of study in the university that doesn't have reasonable number of women if they are not greater in number.

It is also argued that the male-dominated nature of politics in Nigeria puts a serious barrier against women trying to enter it, that more women need to be empowered to speak up in the public sphere. In this case we believe that the male domination argument is an illusion but self defeat. For instance, in 2011, the only one woman that contested for the post of the president in Nigeria under the platform of the Peoples Democratic Party Sarah Jubril could not survive the primary election. She got only one vote despite the large number of women that attended the primary election. The women did not vote for her even on sympathy bases. This is self defeat and not male dominance.

On the Social Environments argument, Okoronkwo-Chukwu's (2013) said that it is very difficult for a married woman to participate in politics without people casting aspersion on her person as promiscuous. He continued by saying that the majority of the people in Nigeria believe that no decent woman can play politics without compromising their virtue; all the women that go into it are seen as women of easy virtue even when they are married. Women themselves see the name calling and odd hours fixed for meetings as schemes hatched by the men to remove them from the happenings in the political circle. This attitude of the society creates a sense of apathy in the women. This is yet another aspect of self defeat which is emotional perfectionism. They would not want

something bad to be said against them. The men in politics tolerate all sorts of name calling but it will take a very strong and determined woman to tolerate such.

Recommendations

- 1) Women should be encouraged to study and know themselves. They should spend time meditating to understand which thoughts enter their mind space on a regular basis and observe which thoughts and beliefs need discarding and which ones are useful.
- 2) **Self defeating beliefs should be replaced with positive affirmations.** Replace the 'Impossible' with the 'I'm possible' through repeated positive statements about yourself.
- 3) Ensure that women occupy leadership positions in the political party structure.
- 4) Support women candidates during elections and appointments.
- 5) Give waivers to women in payment of nomination fees

Women empowerment training programmes should be organized for women constantly to encourage them vote for their fellow women and kill fear. Women should endeavour to take a bold step to accept self defeat even if it comes; it is part of political game. They should be allowed in decision makings though guided but their voice must be heard.

The Nigerian Gender Policy that prescribes that at least 35 percent of political leaders will be women should fully be implemented. Political parties should waive nomination fees for women. Therefore, attempts to promote women participation in politics and decision making require the active participation of all stakeholders.

Conclusion

Eliminating self-defeating thoughts requires removing old constraints, freeing one from fears, past decisions and evicting any disempowering thoughts that don't support your vision for success. Saying 'good-bye' to self-defeating behaviour means taking responsibility for your thoughts, your actions and your to what daily life reactions throws your way. Women should know that they have the power to bring about the future they envision. Women have the power to replace self-defeatism with a mindset for success.

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