

INHIBITING FACTORS TO GENDER EQUITY IN LOCAL GOVERNANCE IN NIGERIA: A CASE STUDY OF SOUTH EAST NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT: *Governance is a sure way of building stronger communities and forms an avenue for the poor, women and minorities to participate in the development of their communities and influence the decision-making process that matters in the development of the communities. However, Nigeria records poor governance index as evidenced by the Worldwide Governance Index (WGI). In addition, there is a clear gender inequality in local administration over the years. This paper was aimed at searching empirically the factors that militate against women's participation in local governance in South-East Nigeria using a structured questionnaire. The study affirmed that there is low participation of women in local governance and found that the major factors inhibiting women participation in local government include the higher social status given to men; lack of resources available to women; discriminatory customs, laws and religion; nature of Nigeria's political system; and poor networking among women. It was thus recommended that for increased participation of women in local government, there is need to remove all these barriers that discourage and prevent women from full participation.*

KEYWORDS: Gender disparity; Political participation; Women empowerment

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INTRODUCTION

Government exists to correct for market failures, mobilize and allocate resources as well as offer direction and guidance for sustainable growth and development. Through governance, equitable development is guaranteed to all people at all times. Governance is made up of laws, traditions and institutions that direct and influences the exercise of authority in a country and includes procedures of choosing, overseeing and replacing of authority as well as the ability of the government to effectively devise and execute robust policies (World Bank, 2015). For any society to function better there must be governing policies, regulation and a form of monitoring at all levels of government.

Nigeria is a federation of 36 states grouped under six geo-political zones. Constitutionally, there are seven hundred and seventy- four local government council areas in Nigeria. Local government is a political sub unit of a nation and the third tier of government. It is established by law and enabled and empowered to direct local affairs. Kyenge (2013) affirmed that the concept of local governance focuses on the transfer of political power to local areas by involving the inhabitants in

the provision of basic needs in their respective communities. The establishment of local government dates back to the colonial period and have undergone levels of reforms. Gboyega (1992) pointed out the historical reference in the development of the local government in Nigeria to include (a), colonial rule, (b) the local government reforms in the East (1951) and west (1952) respectively (c) the military coup of 1966 and (d) the 1976 local government reform.

Governance in general but local governance in particular, is a sure way of building stronger communities and forms avenues for poor populace, women and minorities to participate in the development of their communities and influence the decision making process that matters in the development of the communities. However, Nigeria records poor governance index as evidenced by the Worldwide Governance Index (WGI) developed by Kaufmann, Kraay and Mastruzzi (2010). Nigeria performed very poorly on all the six indicators of governance which ranges from -2.5 to +2.5 whereby higher score indicate better governance. On the other hand, governance rank shows the rank of a country among all other countries. While 0 is the lowest rank, 100 is the highest rank. On the average, Nigeria scored -0.796 within the review period while it ranked 25.66 within the same period.

The local government is a multipurpose local body responsible for a wide range of services which includes; road constructions and repairs, collection of taxes and fees, planning, economic and community development, service delivery, law making and enforcement, amenity services, policy development and advocacy, among others. But in spite of their large numbers, the (LGAs) in Nigeria represents or constitute the weakest tier of government. It is seen that strings of regimes and choices of their leaders alternatively enhance or reduces the autonomy and resources of the LGAs. Past studies affirmed that there are significant gross inactivity and poor performance by local government leaders that arises from corruption, structural imbalance, gender inequality and lack of resources. Bolatito and Ibrahim (2012) identified the problems of the local government as strictly inefficiency and ineffectiveness in addressing the primary needs and wants of the people at the grass root.

One feature of governance in Nigeria is gender imbalance at all tiers of governance. Nigerian socio-economic and political environment is marked with serious gender disparities. Data available on women in governance is an evidence of this inequality as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Women in Local Governance in Nigeria 1999-2007

Office	1999		2003		2007	
	Seat Available	Women	Seat Available	Women	Seat Available	Women
Chairmen	710	13 (1.8%)	774	15 (1.9%)	740	27 (3.6%)
Councilors	6368	69 (1.1%)	6368	267 (4.2%)	6368	253 (3.7%)

Source: Awofeso, and Odeyemi, (2014).

Gender inequality is a global problem and many studies have tried to x-ray the effect of gender inequality to includes; loss of productivity due to inefficiency that result from lack of gender parity, discrimination against women guarantee them marginal role in the economic and political sphere,

it promotes poverty and endangers our society, and different kind of inequality are serious impediments to individual capabilities and choices and the accumulated effect worsen deprivation and underpin a kind of hardship that leads to economic downfall.

According to Jacoba Van et al (2012), gender equality and local governance provides a vivid evidence for the existence of best practice that provide fundamental aspect of good governance, take into accounts the needs of women and men, girls and boys as citizen through policy making, planning, budget allocation, programme development, local service delivery and monitoring to achieve result that leads to development. There is also strong evidence that closing gender gaps can accelerate progress towards other developmental goals.

Therefore, this study sought to find out the factors that hinder gender equality in local governance in the South – East Nigeria by answering these germane questions are: is there gender imbalance in the local governance in Nigeria and if yes, what are the factors that inhibit women participation in local governance in the South – East Nigeria.

Stylized Facts

Gender inequality is pervasive in Nigeria. This is further seen in workplace, education, and labour market /employment, federal, state and local governance. Figure 1a shows the percentage difference in literacy rate of men (72.1%) and women (50.4%) while the total literacy rate is 61.3%. Figure 1b indicates that the literacy status of men in the south-East is 76.2% against 74.8% for women in 2014.

Women in Nigeria are predominantly engaged in subsistence agriculture and less likely than men to be engaged in professional, technical and managerial fields and even in governance. Women lag behind men in employment status, educational attainment, literacy and exposure. All these factors mitigate women involvement in socio-political development of Nigeria. Figure 2 is a reinforcement of the existence of gender inequality in Nigeria. It shows the disparity in percentage in the employment rate of men and women from age 15 – 49 in 2013. The employment rate of male from age 15-19 was 87.6% against 31.4% for female, while age 20-24, 25-29, 45-49; the percentage employed men figure rose from 97.6% to 99.0% and declined 98.6% against 32.5%, 41.0%, and 45.3% for women respectively.

Literacy Status of Male and Female i
(Age 15 - 49)

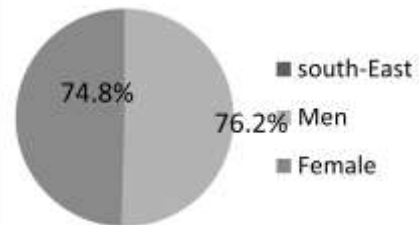


Fig 1b-Source: Nigeria Demographic
2014

Total Literacy in Nigeria (percentage)

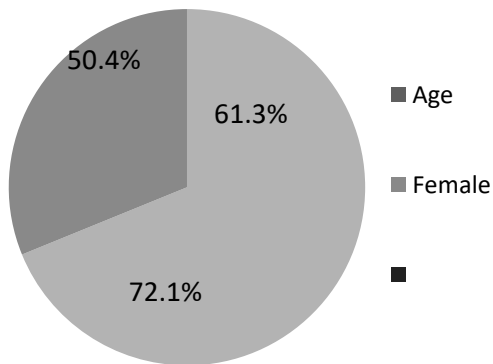


Fig 1a-Source: Nigeria Demographic Profile
2014

Figure 1: Gender Disparity in Education

Source: Women's Empowerment and Demographic and Health Outcomes (2013)

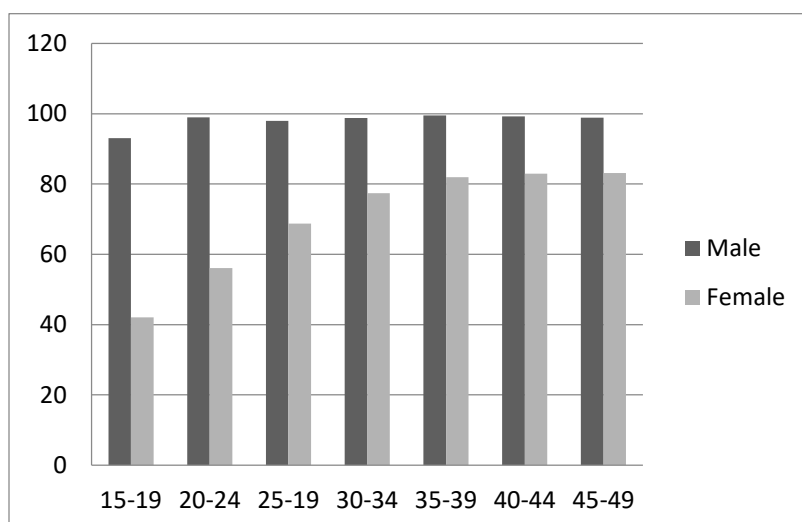


Figure 2: Percentage employed Men and Women in Nigeria 2013 (12months)

Source: Women's Empowerment and Demographic and Health Outcomes (2013)

Statement of Problem

Nigeria has a large population of the women folk with many of such women resident in the rural areas where governance is at the grass root. The 2014 World Bank report on gender ratio noted that the percentage of the female population in Nigeria is 49.09%. The participation of these women in the governance of their affairs is critical to their social and economic emancipation. Participating in governance will not only get them involved in the governance process but will provide them the opportunity to liberate themselves from the shackles of poverty and deprivation. However, in spite of the near equality in the gender ratio, female participation in governance in Nigeria is abysmally low.

Objectives of the Study

- (i) To determine whether there exists gender imbalance in local governance in Nigeria.
- (ii) To ascertain the critical factors militating against female participation in local governance in Nigeria.
- (iii) To provide a blueprint for increased female participation in local governance in Nigeria.

Research Questions

- (1) Is female participation in local governance very poor in Nigeria?
- (2) What factors are critical to female participation in local governance?
- (3) What must be done to boost female participation in governance?

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Conceptual Issues

We provide explanation to certain concepts as used in this paper. Governance as a concept has a wide and varied connotation. It goes beyond the institutions vested with authority to involve the processes and interactions that bind individuals together in a society. Stoker (1998) noted that governance has about five propositions one of which is that governance is about autonomous self-governing network of actors. This proposition suggests that governance involves a network of

actors. These actors must have the capacity to get things done based on the authority vested on them. In this study, we define governance as the use of government institutions and apparatus to protect the rights of the citizens and to provide their basic needs while offering equitable opportunities for all.

Gender simply refers to one's sex in terms of male or female; man or woman; masculine or feminine. The word gender was first used in the United States in the 70s (Krieger, 2003) as a euphemism for the word sex -connoting not just the biologically determined traits of a person but also the socially learned expectations, attitude and behaviours of a person acquired over time. However, in this article gender is defined along the dichotomy of male/female; man/woman or masculine/feminine.

Gender equality means equal treatment and opportunity for all while gender equity means fair treatment and opportunity for all. What is equal is not necessarily fair and what is fair is not necessarily equal. In this context, fairness is possible and realistic but equality is unrealistic and almost impossible.

The concept of gender equity in governance arises because the networks of actors in the business of governance are biased in favour of the male gender. Moreover, it has become a norm that the men folk are the only and rightful ones to be in this 'network of actors' while the women folk remain outside it. If less women participate in governance, the women folk may suffer deprivations. This may explain why the prevalence of poverty is higher in the women folk.

Theoretical Review

Governance has been defined in many ways. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) defined governance as "the exercise of political, economic and administrative authority to manage a country's affairs at all levels. It comprises mechanisms, processes and institutions through which groups articulate their interests, exercise their legal rights, meet their obligations and mediate their differences" (UNDP). Thus, governance is not just limited to the state institutions vested with authority but involves exercising this authority with a view to meet the obligations of the people. That is why the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) noted that in governance, citizens are rightly concerned with a government's responsiveness to their needs and protection of their rights. Thus, in governance there is always a government vested with the power to exercise of authority and the governed expected to benefit from the government. Governance involves being accountable to the people by developing a process of public management that is participatory and gives the governed the opportunity to defend their rights and meet their needs. By divine providence, the governed and the government are not made of one gender. What determines one's gender? What determines the level of participation, for a particular gender, in governance? A few theories on this have been adduced

The Evolutionary Theory

This theory asserts that distinct gender norms result from the different heterosexual mating processes which are informed by the relative costs and benefits of certain sexual behaviors. These sexual behaviors may also be linked to development of the brain structure and the hormones that determines a masculine or feminine gender. From this theory, one can deduce that what defines

one's gender is the sexual practice which in turn is informed by the brain and hormonal structure. Thus, someone with a multiple sex partner is likely to be a male while someone with less multiple sex partners is likely to be a female. This conclusion is not absolute since there are exceptions and given the religious, economic and health implications the idea of one man one legal sex partner is most ideal.

The Social Role Theory

This theory posits that gender is a fixed and static variable. Thus, gender does not change by the role someone performs. This suggests that even when one's social function has changed such as when a woman becomes a bread winner due to loss of husband, her gender remains static and fixed. Thus, changing role does not mean changing gender. Some have criticized this theory asserting that gender can be classified on the basis of roles, behaviours and expectations which changes over time and in different cultures.

Relating governance at all levels to gender leads us to the concept of gender equity and gender equality. Both expressions are sometimes used interchangeably but we will like to make a distinction here. While equity relates to fairness in treatment equality relates not just to *fair* treatment but *same* treatment in rights, status and advantages. Thus, gender equality as technically different from gender equity is a social condition whereby men and women share equal rights and a balance of power, status, opportunities and rewards having equitable access and use of resources, equitable participation in relationships, the household, the community and political arenas as well as safety or freedom from violence (Rolleri 2012). This will be a herculean task given the general perception of women as being second to as implied by the scriptural statements such as 'your longing will be for your husband and he will dominate you' and 'let wives be subjecting themselves to their husbands' (Genesis 3: 16 and Titus 2:5 respectively). Nevertheless, the desire to be treated fairly and justly with equal opportunities is a natural desire that is not and should not be gender sensitive. The obvious fact about gender and governance asymmetry is that gender participation in governance is skewed to the male gender. The following theories of gender equality explain why.

The Classical Theory of Gender Inequality

This theory explains the rising trend in equal opportunities for all gender in modern societies. It argued that economic growth and development creates opportunities for all but more especially for more women to vie for and occupy positions of social power. This view is captured in the works of Lipset 1959; Rostow 1960; Deutsch 1964). They noted that economic development brings about expansion in the distribution of educational and occupational resources thereby increasing women's opportunities to become eligible for and access these resources to attain social positions. In retrospect, it follows that one fundamental reason for gender inequality over time is the prevalence of underdevelopment which cripples economic activities and limits the growth opportunities opened to all especially women.

The Modern Emancipative Theory of Gender Inequality

This theory notes that the increasing awareness and drive for autonomy as well as the movement for women emancipation in modern times engendered by the products of economic development (educational and occupational resources) has contributed to the drastic reduction in the gap existing

in opportunities for both genders creating more opportunities for women. This theory is supported by Inglehart and Noris (2003) Inglehart and Welzel (2005). Prior to such awareness and movements, the gender gap has been astronomically disturbing.

The Cultural Theory of Gender Inequality

This theory posits that ancient cultures, traditions and religions are gender biased and exalts the favoured gender above the other and does not give the other equal opportunity as the favoured ones. Historically, most cultures and traditions tend to grant men the supervisory and leadership role over and above the women and this naturally precludes the women from having equal opportunities. This is common in the Jewish, Middle East and African traditions. This is supported by Inglehart and Welzel (2005). As can be observed in the African and western world orthodox religions are more gender biased than modern religions. However, the rising wave of globalization and modernization is fast eating into these ancient cultures, traditions and religion, reducing the gender inequality gap.

Theoretical Framework

A basic theory that underpins this research is the classical theory of gender equality. This theory observes that economic development provides the educational and occupational opportunities that narrows the gender equity gap. As women take advantage of these resources, they become educated and aware of the needs of the society they live in. They can thus seek for competitive employment and can be eligible for social positions of governance. As the economy grows further, providing more educational resources and enlightenment, there will be a shift away from any culture, tradition or even religion that does not promote fair treatment for all. Thus, lack of economic development which itself is a function of education among others is a fundamental factor inhibiting women participation in governance. This will be determined from the questionnaire distributed.

Empirical Literature

Women play crucial roles in their number both in social, political and economic development. The issue of gender equity visa-a-vis participation in local governance is not new in the political environment. Empirically, there are scholarly works done both in the areas of gender differences in political participation and the factors affecting women's participation in politics. Empirical evidence regarding the inhibiting factors to gender equity in local governance in developing countries is limited but few studies tried to analyze empirically these factors. Meanwhile, there are a lot of studies on politics and local governance in other part of the country. Hence, this study on inhibiting factors gender equity in South East to fill the gap, creating awareness on the position of the inhibiting factors to gender equity and local governance in the zone. The sub section dwells on reviewing empirical literatures on gender equality and local governance, factors affecting women participation in politics, the relationship between women participation and causes of quest for more women in local governance. To do this only, current studies were considered.

Kristin et al (2012), on their study on gender equality and local governance in a joint collaboration between Austrian Development Corporation and UN women investigated activities implemented by UN Women and Austrian-funded 'Equity in Governance' project from 2007-2011 with the aim at addressing how national gender legislation, gender policy and gender indicators can be

applied including the processes for local government units and their citizens. The study covered six intervention projects of the UN as case studies applying different methodologies to suit different interventions in five municipalities of Albania and one of Serbia. The analysis of the primary data obtained revealed that there is gender responsiveness in local governance shown in the gender equality in the benefit from development, decision making, service delivery and in governance at large. Though Albania has made a remarkable progress in terms of legal and policy framework to promote gender equity effort should be geared towards applying the laws and policies at all levels. They advocated for local ownership of governance process, which are pro poor and gender sensitive. The study was compressive in it areas of coverage involving the local people from the inception of the study through the development of the indicators used for analysis. There was evidence of the existence of engendering local governance in Albania especially on the sixth project on grant delivery where there was equal consideration for gender. This result confirms why the continuous support for Albania by the UN both bilateral and multilateral donors. It also signifies the fact that local government matter so much in promoting gender equality and gender equality is important for holistic development.

Endale A. H (2014): conducted a study on the factors that affect women participation in leadership and decision-making position in Bedele town, Ethiopia using both primary and secondary sources of data. The result of the study revealed that low educational status, overburdened domestic responsibilities, negative attitude, socio-cultural attitude and lack of experience for taking part in public decision making and role model were identified factors inhibiting women's ability to lead and govern. This result is in tandem with findings of our study which shows that males' social status has a significant marginal negative effect on female participation in local governance of about 57%. The importance of local governance cannot be overemphasized because local governments know the community needs better, major means for service delivery to people, best placed to respond to gender inequality and play key role in socio-economic development. It is the starting point of growth. Therefore, an equal access to economic resources at this level has a multiplier effect on the society at large.

Fatile, et al (2012)) investigated hindrances to effective female participation in Nigerian politics. They estimated a model using primary data of seven hundred and twenty (720) respondents from the six geo-political zones of the country for the investigation. The study found that lack of adequate finance, family responsibilities and child bearing as crucial hindrances to effective female participation in Nigerian politics. The study also observed that the prospects of Nigerian women in politics are bright if the obstacles highlighted in the study are removed. However, the study recommended the need for social revolution among women if they are to attain the desired position in Nigerian politics. It concludes that the need to educate women and their female children which is invariably a source of political, economic and social power cannot be over emphasized. This does not totally agree with the findings of this particular study with regards to the situation of women in local governance in the south east Nigeria which identified majorly such factors as cultural, religious, economic, political and sociological as inhibiting women participation in local governance. Both agreed on inadequate finance as inhibiting factor. Hence, for women to actively be involved in local governance access to economic resources is paramount.

Ajibade, et al (2012) also conducted a study to investigate the factors militating against women active participation in politics in Ofu Local Government Area of Kogi State, Nigeria. The study was based on primary source of data collected using questionnaire administered to a total of 550 women in addition to oral interview. The study revealed that factors such as inadequate financial resources, insufficient education and enlightenment as well as lack of clear policy by political parties for women political ambition as factors militating against women active participation in politics in Ofu Local Government Area of Kogi State.

Similarly, Ihemeje (2013) studied the participation of women in local governance in Nigeria in a bid to identify causes of quest for more women participation in local governance as well as causes of low women participation in local governance. The study was based on time series data which were collected from secondary source of data over the period from 1960-2000. The result shows that women participate more in governance in other parts of the world than Nigeria. More so, that they participate more at Federal and State government level than in the local level of governance which is dominated by men. The study attributed the result to low political consciousness and negative attitude by the women as a result of culture and lack of economic power. The findings agree with the result of this study which posits among other factors identified that lack of ownership and access to productive resources such as finance, education etc had a marginal negative and insignificant effect on female participation in local governance (2.6%). Nevertheless, the study concludes that there is a case of marginalization against women in local governance in Nigeria. It also agrees with cultural theory of gender inequality which tend to grant men the supervisory and leadership role over and above the women thereby excluding the women from having equal opportunities.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Sampling Method

The South-East geo-political zone is made up of five states with the following population according to the National Population Commission of Nigeria (2016): Abia (2,881,380); Anambra (4,177,828); Ebonyi (2,176,947); Enugu (3,267,837) and Imo (3,927,563). The choice of the South-East is purposive for the researchers' convenience as well as for financial reasons.

There are many ways of choosing a sample size and this study relied on published table by Krejcie & Morgan (1970). From this table, for a population of 1,000,000 and above with a confidence level of 95% and 5% margin of error, the sample size should be 384. Therefore, 400 questionnaires were distributed in each state in the region. Simple random method was used to select the respondents.

Data for the Study

Primary data was used for the study, obtained through structured questionnaire. The research instrument was vetted by experts for consistency and reliability. Pilot study was conducted and this enriched the questionnaire. The questionnaire was distributed in July and August 2016.

Method of Data Analysis

Binary probit regression was used to analyze the data obtained from the survey. This models the conditional probability of a successful outcome.

That is, $Y = 1$,

$$P[Y_i=1|X_{1i}, \dots, X_{Ki}; \beta_0, \dots, \beta_K] = \alpha(\beta_0 + \sum_{k=1}^K \beta_k X_{ki})$$

Where $\alpha(\cdot)$ is the cumulative distribution function of the standard normal distribution. This simply means that, conditional on the regressors, the probability that the outcome variable, Y_i is 1, is a certain function of a linear combination of the independent variables. The regressors for this study are: men are usually given higher social status and have dominion (SS); women are usually complacent and need to be pushed to be active (Co); lack of resources (Re); Discriminatory laws, customs and religion (Clr); lack of family support (Fs); lack of government support in implementing the affirmative action on quota (Gs); conflict with women's reproductive roles (Rr); and low networking among women (Ne).

Generally, coefficients from the result of a probit regression are not interpreted in the standard way of linear regression model. Rather, once the probit regression results were obtained, the next step was to obtain the marginal effects. The marginal effect, otherwise called the partial effects measures the effect of a change in one of the independent variables (while holding other regressors constant) on the conditional mean of the dependent variable. Specifically, in a binary dependent variable, it is the effect of an independent variable on the probability of the dependent variable changing from 0 to 1 while controlling other variables in the model.

Analysis of Data

The valid questionnaires returned from the different states are as follows: Abia (330); Anambra (320); Ebonyi (338); Enugu (310) and Imo (325); totaling 1623 respondents. This is 81.15% return rate. The descriptive statistics are presented in the appendix. The objectives of the study are to find if there is gender imbalance in the local governance in Nigeria and if yes to identify factors that inhibit women participation in local governance in the South – East Nigeria. Responses from 73.8% of the respondents believe that women do not participate fully in local governance in Nigeria. Following this, 94% of the respondents agreed that women should participate in local governance for varied reasons. Such reasons include that it is also the right of women to govern (25%); that women are as qualified as men to led (24.7%); that it is time to give women chance to govern (23%). On the other hand, 19.4% of the respondents believe that the reason why women should participate in local governance is that they can do better than men in governance.

Having identified that there is gender disparity in local governance in Nigeria, 89.6% agreed that women have hindrances from participating in local governance. These hindrances are identified in this study using binary probit. The STATA result of the averaging marginal effect is shown in

Table 2.

Table 2: Average Marginal Effects

. margins, dydx (ss co re clr fs gs ps rr ne)			
Average marginal effects	Number	of obs =	1623
Model VCE : OIM			
Expression : Pr(hin), predict()			
dy/dx w.r.t. : ss co re clr fs gs ps rr ne			
Delta-method			
dy/dx Std. Err. Z	P>z	[95% Conf.	Interval]
ss -.0572266 .005847 -9.79	0.000	-.0686865	-.0457668
co .0028728 .0051858 0.55	0.580	-.0072913	.0130369
re -.0026315 .0061992 -0.42	0.671	-.0147817	.0095187
clr -.0112593 .0063337 -1.78	0.075	-.0236731	.0011544
fs .0187559 .0072333 2.59	0.010	.0045788	.0329329
gs -.0194499 .0065739 -2.96	0.003	-.0323344	-.0065653
ps -.0117215 .0067439 -1.74	0.082	-.0249393	.0014963
rr .017591 .0048143 3.65	0.000	.0081551	.0270268
ne -.0160955 .0056979 -2.82	0.005	-.0272632	-.0049279

Source: Authors' Computation using STATA

The STATA output is interpreted and is shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Interpretation of Result

Variable	Question (answer was obtained by 5-point likert scale: 1- Strongly agree, 2- Agree, 3 – undecided, 4 –disagree, 5 – strongly disagree)	Interpretation of marginal/partial effects
Hin	Do women have hindrances from participating in politics? This is the dependent variable with binary outcomes: 1=yes and 0 otherwise	-----
Ss	Men are usually given higher social status and have dominion	Coefficient is negative and significant; showing that men's social status and dominance is a significant hindrance to women's participation in local governance
Co	Women are usually complacent; they need to be pushed to be active	Coefficient is positive and insignificant; meaning that complacency among women is

		not a hindrance to women's participation in local governance
Re	Lack of resources (education, money etc)	Negative and insignificant; meaning that lack of resources is an insignificant hindrance to women's participation in local governance
Clr	Discriminatory laws, customs and religion	Negative and insignificant; meaning that discriminatory laws, customs and religion is a significant hindrance to women's participation in local governance
Fs	Lack of family support	Positive and significant; meaning that lack of family support is not a hindrance to women's participation in local governance
Gs	Lack of government support in implementing the affirmative action on quota	Negative and significant; meaning that lack of government support is a significant hindrance to women's participation in local governance
Ps	The nature of Nigeria's political system	Negative and significant; meaning that the nature of Nigeria's political system is a significant hindrance to women's participation in local governance
Rr	Local governance conflicts with women's reproductive roles	Positive and significant; meaning that women's reproductive roles is not a hindrance to women's governance participation in local
ne	Low networking among women	Negative and insignificant; meaning that poor networking among women is a significant hindrance to women's participation in local governance

Source: Authors' Computation Using STATA

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

Traditionally, most African societies are patrilineal and patriarchal. Such societies, families are connected from one generation to another through the father's line and property, titles and other valuables are inherited by the males in the family. In a patrilineal society, men dominate and matter more than women while women are regarded as secondary and inferior and acquire usufruct rights through their husbands and fathers. Society expects that men should be competitive, aggressive and brave. Thus, men have more social status and leadership and governance is within their purview. The findings of our study support this as the result shows that males' social status has a significant marginal negative effect on female participation in local governance of about 57%. The finding supports the cultural theory of gender inequality. Women in a patriarchal culture do not partake in decision making at all levels of the society and have limited freedom and choices when

compared to males. In fact, male dominance is very much institutionalized that women in governance position is often seen as an aberration.

Another hindrance to local governance identified by the study is lack of ownership and access to productive resources. The study found that lack of resources such as finance, education etc had a marginal negative and insignificant effect on female participation in local governance of about 2.6%. This problem stems from the societal dominance of males in a patrilineal society. In this society, ownership of resources such as lands by women is through usufruct rights obtained from husbands or fathers. Access and control over productive resources by women is one way of engendering women empowerment and gender equality. However, women economic empowerment does not equate political participation as over the years, there are evidences that more women are economically empowered but this does not necessarily translate to political empowerment.

Discriminatory laws, customs and religion were identified as a significant hindrance to women's participation in local governance with a marginal effect of about 11%. Such discriminatory laws, customs and religion in South-East Nigeria include widowhood practices, female genital mutilation, payment of dowry etc. In this zone, culturally, women do not plant and harvest yam, regarded as the king of crops. They do not harvest kolanut, a revered plant and they do not break kolanuts; a very special ceremony reserved only for the males. Women are often involved in subsistence crops and animals while men are involved in cash crops and animals. In the religion scene, most dominant gods are males while female gods are often second class. In religious setting, women are hardly chief priests but are often involved in minor religious activities. These discriminations are aimed at subjugating women to inferior positions.

Lack of government support in implementing the affirmative action on quota recorded a negative and significant marginal effect on women participation in governance by 19%. Many conferences and protocols have confirmed that gender equity is critical to sustainable development, democracy and good governance. They also recognize that achieving women's right is a human right. Such conferences include 1993 conference on Human Rights, the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development, and the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women (the popular Beijing Conference). The Beijing Conference recommends that women are given 35% of political positions, power and decision making. The urgent need to eradicate stereotypes, practices and standards that place legal, economic and political hindrance on women is captured in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

However, these recommendations are not fully adopted and implemented in Nigeria. There is less than 5% of women in governance in Nigeria with most of those in political position being appointed rather than elected. Gender-based crimes such as rape, sex slavery, battery and assaults are rife in Nigeria and the wheel of justice most often is slow in bringing perpetrators to justice. Constitutionally, a woman cannot through marriage, grant citizenship to her spouse but a man can grant citizenship to his spouse. The government is very slow to address all these and they deter women from participating in local governance.

The study found that the nature of Nigeria's political system is a significant hindrance to women's participation in local governance, having a negative marginal effect of about 12%. The Nigerian

political system is riddled with corruption, violence, thuggery, nepotism, ethnicity and the likes. Requirement to contest in the political process is quite tedious, especially funds. It is a general belief that aggressiveness and ruthlessness are necessary characteristics of a typical politician in Nigeria. Holding a political office in Nigeria is most often not regarded as a call to service but rather an investment to be recouped and an avenue to amass wealth. This has led to the godfatherism syndrome where by one man or a group controls the party machinery and his candidates must win at all cost. The selection process is not often transparent and mediocrity often takes precedence over merit. All these discourage women and other qualified and selfless people from participate in politics.

Another hindrance to female participation in local governance, according to findings to the study is a problem caused by women themselves to fellow women. This is the problem of low networking and cooperation among women. The level of mentorship in the female gender is low.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The need to for equity in political participation across gender lines have been recognized by several authors. This work affirmed the low participation of women in local governance in the South East geopolitical zone. Consequences of low gender participation according to this study include poverty, underdevelopment and low income.

Analysis of data obtained through the use of structured questionnaire revealed that hindrances to local governance in South-East Nigeria does not include complacency on the part of the woman; lack of family support and women's reproductive roles. However, the hindrances to women participation in local governance in South East Nigeria ranges from sociological, political and cultural and are: the higher social status and dominion of men above women; discriminatory laws, customs and religion; lack of government support in implementing the affirmative action on quota and low networking among women.

This study therefore recommends that the society should be enlightened on the importance of equal participation of gender on political process. Our patrilineal society should be diffused and made more responsive to the dangers of relegating the female gender to the background in decision making process.

Following this, there is the need to educate the general public on the need to be more accountable and transparent in leadership as well as a thorough reform of the political system in Nigeria. The importance of education of all types in achieving gender equity cannot be overemphasized. Here, there is need to educate the electorates to vote for performance rather than gender or control of party machinery. This study strongly recommends the formation of an all-female political party if the current political parties cannot guarantee gender equity in the political process.

Provision of resources is also important in encouraging gender equity in governance. Such resources include fund, formal education, art of public speaking and political mobilization. Women should also encourage one another by building partnerships and networks. Women in leadership positions are advised to accommodate and mentor younger ones while younger ones should also

allow themselves to be mentored. When women cooperate among themselves, they are able to change the political scene instead of being passive participant, dancers, praise singers and sex toys to men.

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