

FEMALE PARTICIPATION IN LEADERSHIP: A MEASURE TO ENHANCE GLOBAL STABILITY

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Executive Summary

Most African States have the background of seeing women as a 'Chattel' bought over with the payment of bride price and whose core objective in life is to get married to one man, give birth to many children and always do some agricultural work and home keeping. However, some African cultures during the Pre-Colonial Era shows that females such as Ana Nzinga, Kongo Prophet, Idia Queen Mother of Benin, Dona Beatriz, Madam Tinubu and many others held sensitive positions and thus exhibited charismatic leadership skills with proven results in their respective communities. However, during the invasion of the colonial masters, most of these women were relegated due to the then Western stereotyped style of male leadership and the African inherent patriarchal mode of inheritance. This paper considers historically the place of female in leadership in the pre-colonial era in Africa, and the current trends of attaining utmost female participation as same has been proven to enhance global stability. Results have shown that female/women in leadership enhances growth, productivity and proper utilization of the available resources in the interest of the populace. The study recommends that more women at all levels and spheres of life be encouraged to break out of the traditional limitations of cultural impediments and wrong mindset and thus maximize their leadership potentials within their scope of interest.

Keywords: Female, Gender Inequality, Culture, Leadership

Introduction

Traditionally, in the African society, women expected to be quiet when men speak, they are to obey male leadership to the latter and not to ever challenge same. A proper African woman is seen as or perceived to be one who accepts marriage as an end goal

and bear as much children as the husband wants, her interest should just be her family and children, not investments or career. The African woman was seen as a bad example whenever she divorces or separates from her husband, she was not allowed or expected to acquire much education. Women who defied these cultural boundaries were mostly seen in the bad light by the society. (Florence Ebila: 2015).¹

It is worrisome that despite the fact that women form majority of the world's population and workforce, yet in African, women are discriminated against and not allowed to engage in land transaction which would liberate them financially, yet they are only ordered to use the land and not own the land (Patience Mynge Song: 2021)².

The former President of Republic of Liberia, Her Excellency Ellen Johnson (who is also the first female President in Africa, who was democratically elected into power) observed that women's leadership in Africa is not a new phenomenon as women have been noted to be critical problem solvers, freedom fighters and have always exhibited their best during crisis period. She further noted that during the Covid-19 Pandemic women leaders played significant roles to save lives and even among the healthcare workers, the roles of women were significantly noticed. Despite the efforts of women in problem solving, African women have not yet been significantly noticed thus they do not still occupy significantly some sensitive leadership seats. However, their presence is gradually being implanted beyond the national offices as we now have African women in the Africa Union, United Nations, World Trade Organizations and so on.

In the Country of Rwanda, it has been noted that they have highest female participation in politics & Rwanda has 30% gender quota, thus Rwanda is the first country to implement 30% quota for women in order to ensure maximal female participation in governance and decision-making process.³

Before the invasion of the colonial matters in Africa States, some women were really influential. Women were under-represented in most African States, It was only a few

¹ Florence Ebila (2015) A Proper Woman in the African Tradition: The Construction of Gender and Nationalism in Wangari Maathai Autobiography Unbowed" Tydskr. Letterkd. Vol. 52 n.1 Pretoria. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4314/tvl.v52i1.10>.

² Patience Mynge Song (2021) Women, Land and Law in Africa, [Http://link.springer.com](http://link.springer.com), Accessed on 30/4/2024

³ Ritwick Dutta (2023) Rwanda's 30 percent Gender Quota led to the World's Largest Share of Women in Government www.sdg16.pluss Accessed on 06/05/2024.

societal cultures that allowed women to ascend the seat of power.⁴ Partpait June (1986) further noted that in the pre-colonial era, African women had considerable influence and authority. Some lands were owned matrilineal wherein women were fully in charge of. This empowered women in matrilineal-based societies, which Afikpo (Ehugbo) is a part of. These societies protected women and encouraged them to hold political offices too. In other societies in Africa, the whole relevance of women depended on the male folks. In such latter societies, the women were restricted from holding political offices, however in the religions sector, women have proven commitment and relevance. They act as Prophetess, Ritual Specialists and Spiritual Experts in fertility and women affairs in general.

Some of the women or women offices that waxed very strong in the pre-colonial era were: The Iyalode of Yoruba, the Omu among the Igbos, Nehanda – a Shona Priestess, Marinda Priestess in Kongo named Dona Beatrice, The Position of the Queen Mother seen in Asante, Baganda, Zulu etc, Women Chiefs in Mande and Serbro of Sierra Leone, Village Head Women in Tonga, Queen Amina of Hausa land and Nzinga of Angola. The colonial era relegated the roles of women, as the colonial masters preferred to work with the men in actualizing their objectives. Women lost control of land and power, they were excluded from the global market place (Ibid).⁵

It has been widely noted that colonialism hold a negative effect on the African women as it opened up wider the concept of gender inequality. The Europeans grew on the ladder of patriarchal practice and thus failed to acknowledge women in power. Scholars have suggested that the genesis of gender inequality in Africa is traceable to slavery and colonialism. It is worthy to note that prior to colonial era in West Africa, women waxed strong over disputes pertaining to markets and agriculture. Colonialism tutored man that they were superior and that women should be subordinates always. The men were educated first and thus made to occupy more sensitive positions of power and authority, this led to a gender gap. In 2018, Global Gender Gap Index⁶ (The Global Gender Gap Report 2018) made a publication that it would take 135 years to close the gender gap in Sub Saharan Africa and nearly 153 years in North Africa (Wikipedia, 2024)⁷.

⁴ Parpait J.L (1986) Women and The State in Africa. <https://pdf.usaid.gov>pnax586>. Accessed on 5/5/2024

⁵ Kathleen Sheldon(2018).Women and Colonialism.<https://www.oxfordbibliographiess.com>. accessed on 06/05/2024. DOI:10.1093/OBO/9780199846733-0067

⁶ Global Gender Gap Index (The Global Gender Gap Report (2018), World Economic Forum, Retrieved on 11/05/2019

⁷ Wikipedia, 2024) Colonial Roots of Gender Inequality in Africa. *Wikipedia*. <http://en.m.wikipedia.org> Accessed on 7/5/2024)

On the other hand, Irakoze (2020)⁸opposed the argument that Patriarchal was nonexistent in Africa in the Pre-colonial Era. He argued that in Ancient Egypt where they had high respect for their Egyptian Queens and had a functional matrilineal system working for them (with the likes of Cleopatra, Nerfititi and the likes), however behind the scene, there was a structure in Ancient Egypt which focused on a male King usually seen as a male god. At some points in the Ancient Egypt where there was no male heir or the heir is still very young, to succeed a King usually called Pharaoh, then a woman would be crowned as a Pharaoh or as a Regent. In Egypt, the first woman Pharaoh to rule was Princess Sobekneferu because there was no Male heir, then next woman Pharaoh was Queen Hatshepsut because her son was a minor, she was crowned a Regent but she forced on and made herself a Pharaoh. After 14 centuries, Queen Cleopatra a powerful woman became Pharaoh. The net is Queen Nefertiti who stepped up as Pharaoh upon the demise of her husband King Akhenaton.⁹

In this Post Colonial Era in Africa, women have lost their place, the Patriarchal system have dominated Africa and this subdued the matrilineal relationship and inheritances. Female chiefs are relegated and lands are now commercialized thereby making its access to women to be more difficult. Women are now less influential in position of authority. In Ghana, the roles of Queen mothers are reduced as male Tribal Chiefs are matching up. The cultural values that upheld the sacred roles of women are now demonized thereby making the practice of same unachievable.

In this 21st century, women in Africa are the worst hit as it affects gender inequality and discriminators. The fact that women put a lot of constraints by the African society, women are subjected to be less economically independent. Women have proven to be major contributors to economic, socio-cultural and political growth of a nation. Yet, women are mostly under-represented in the political sector which actually are the decision-making sector of a state. Women however are not relenting in this 21st century as most women are all out to enlighten and empower other women to see and maximize their potentials in the society. However, some men also believe that women should also be allowed to participate in politics and play their roles in leadership positions and otherwise in order to enhance global stability in the polity and economy of this 21st century in Africa and beyond.

⁸ Irakoze J. (2020)Patriarchy in Ancient Africa. *Judicaelle*. <https://www.judicaelleirakoze.org>. Accessed on 18/05/24

⁹ Ibid

Statement of the Problem

The female folks have indeed faced several obstacles and discrimination based on their gender as females. They have experienced several constraints and restrictions from family, friends, colleagues, fellow females and the society at large. Women have suffered under representation in the leadership roles not minding their capacities at workplaces and at home. The roles of females in leadership positions cannot be however emphasized as this research works seeks to unveil those details.

Significance of the Study

This research work seeks to expose the roles of women in handling leadership positions which shall in turn enhance stability globally. The work compares female participation in leadership from the pre-colonial days in Africa up till this 21st century. The masculine interpretation of religion and colonial master's choice of empowering men in leadership positions over women may have contributed to the gender disparity of this present day. Thus, this study aims to escalate people that females/women in Africa are also capable of occupying leadership positions. They did it in pre-colonial era and are still strong to do more with the aid of several legal authorities which forbids gender discrimination and thus supports female participation.

Objectives of the Study

The study aims at the following:

1. To identify the participation of African women in the pre-colonial era
2. To recognize the effects of colonialism on female participation
3. To identify African women who played effectively positive roles in the past and presently to advance global stability
4. To identify the laws/legal Instruments that empower the African women to be free from discrimination

Research Questions

The study attempts to answer the following questions:

1. What was the place of African women leaders in the pre-colonial era?
2. What are the effects of colonialism on the female leaders and beyond?
3. How to identify the African women (past and present) who had advanced the economy by their leadership prowess
4. What are the laws/legal Instruments that protects women/females in the African society?

Research Methodology

The content analysis methodology was adopted as the most appropriate method for these studies. The study tool was in Books, Articles, Published Research works, Laws, Conventions and Treaties that are related to the subject matter of the study. Female participation, according to Fireable Inc (2024)¹⁰ involves women's involvement in various activities such as work, politics, sports, or any other area where their contribution can make an impact.

Discussion

Khaled K. Nser & Rakan R. Alhrahshah (2019)¹¹ states that from the gender index of 2010, it shows that the rate of participation of women in the Western countries are higher because over there, females participate in International Conferences and Symposia, they make their voices to be heard by demanding to be more relevant. In Europe and America, female participation is higher in social and political life because from the family unit, children are taught equality, females are not relegated to the background, there is no discrimination whatsoever based on age, this makes the female confident and work towards financial independence. This is unlike the situation in Arab and African states where children especially females are treated with cruelty and neglect, the status of women are undermined and relegated, thus leading to low self-esteem, lack of confidence and financial instability. Female participation in Africa have been known to be of positive value to the society politically, economically and socially.

However, there are some African women who have distinguished themselves in this post-colonial era and have occupied seats of powers and influence, some of them are: South Africa's Dr. Nkosazana Olamini-Zuma (the immediate past Chairperson of the African Union (AU) Commission, the first and only woman to head the Republic of Liberia and Africa's first female Head of Government, HE Ellen Johnson Sirleaf (Liberia's President from 2006 to 2018). Our Nigerian Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala (Nigeria's Former Minister of Finance and currently, the Director General of the World Trade Organization, the first African Woman to lead the WTO). She is ranked by Forbes as Africa's most powerful Woman and amongst the World's 100 most powerful Women Ranking in Forbes 2023.¹²

¹⁰ Fireable Inc (2024) Female Participation. <https://library.fiveable.inc>. Accessed on 8/5/24

¹¹ Khaled K. Nser & Rakan R. Alhrahshah (2019) Feminism: Women, Equality and Empowerment in the Community. *Opcion*, Ario 35, Regular No.24.pp.346-359. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication>

¹² Bird Story Agency (2024) African Women Rise Up in Forbes 2023. Most Powerful Women Rankings. <https://www/aboutbird.africanofilter.org>. Accessed on 19/01/2024

Other notable African women leader is Catherine Samba-Panza who served as Head of State of the Central African Republic from January 2014 to March 2016, Malawi's Joyce Banda (Former President of Malawi, Mpumi Madisa, a South African Business Woman, who became the first Black and African female to be appointed CEO of the Johannesburg Stock Exchange (CEO Designate of Bidvest Group (Wikipedia 2024)¹³. She is also recognized by Forbes 2023 as ranking second place as the most powerful woman in Africa.

Next is Tanzania's Samia Suluhu Hassan, who is currently serving as Tanzania's Head of State. Her proactive business approach has led to economic growth in Tanzania and improved Tanzania as an attractive centre to the world (Okafor Chinedu (Dec. 7, 2023)¹⁴. Another strong woman in Africa is Nigerian MO Abudu, a Media Magnate, the founder and CEO of Ebony Life Media. The Punch Newspaper (10th March, 2024)¹⁵ recognizes MO Abudu (Mosunmola Abudu) as the 2024 Business Woman of the year, she is waxing strong in the media and entertainment industry and ranks 98th position in the Forbes Ranking of 100th Most Powerful Women in the World. These amongst others are the most influential powerful and most talked about women in Africa. There are still other women who are in leadership positions in their different fields of endeavours and sectors of the economy, however, we believe that more women are needed to stand above equals and allow their natural skills, talents, endowments and education to showcase them notwithstanding the diverse cultural limitations and mindsets that seems to always be a factor of constraints.

Amy Novotney (2023)¹⁶ observed that psychological research has shown that women leaders improve businesses, they help increase productivity and organizational dedication. Research has further shown that women are more honest and competent in leadership, they are more compassionate, and they are goal oriented and corroborative unlike men that are authoritative. However, the proportion of women to men in leadership is still very low, thus there is need for women to never relent.

¹³ Wikipedia (2024) Mpumi Madisa <https://en.m.wikipedia.org>

¹⁴ Okafor Chinedu (Dec. 7, 2023) Most Powerful African Women in the World 2023. *Business Insider Africa* <http://africa.businessinsider.com>. Accessed on 10/01/2024

¹⁵ Oghenovo Egado Michael (10th March, 2024) MO Abudu named as 'Africa' Most Successful Woman by Forbes Africa' Punch Newspaper, <https://punchng.com> accessed on 10/05/2024

¹⁶ Amy Novotney (March 23, 2023) Women Leaders Make Work Better. APA. www.apa.org. Accessed on 10/05/2024

Legal Backup to the Women's Rights

The need for women to be free from the age long marginalization in education, health, employment, socially, politically and otherwise has made the United Nations and countries of the world to see the need to promote women rights through the force of the law. There are many International and Regional instruments (Conventions, Declaration, Treaties) which is geared towards promoting the rights of women in the world, they are also enforceable in countries which ratifies them. They include¹⁷:

1. The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) adopted in 1979 by UN General Assembly, 189 countries have ratified CEDAW.
2. The Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against women, adopted in 1994 by Organization of American States (OAS).
3. The Protocol to the African Chapter on Human and People's Rights of Women in Africa, adopted in 2003 by the African Union.
4. The Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations made in June 2004 in Jakarta and signed by 10 ASEAN member countries.
5. The Council of Europe Convention on prevention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence or Istanbul Convention, adopted in 2011 by 34 member States.
6. The International Labour Organization Convention No. 190 on Violence and Harassment adopted in June 2019.

Judicial Authorities that upheld the Rights of Women

In the Court of Appeal case of *Alajemba Uke & Anor V. Albert Iro*¹⁸ , the law condemned the 'Nnaeto' custom in Imo State of Nigeria, which restricts a woman from giving evidence in land matters. In the words of the Learned Justice Ignatius Tats-Acholonu JCA (as then was), he stated thus "Any laws or customs that seek to relegate women to be status of a second-class citizen thus depriving them of their valuable and constitutional guaranteed rights are laws and customs fit for the garbage and consigned to history.

¹⁷ (Focus 2030 (2023) Treaties and Conventions promoting Women's Right: An Overview. Facts and Figures – Focus 2030. <https://focus2030.org> Accessed on 10/05/2024

¹⁸ *Alajemba Uke & Anor V. Albert Iro* (2001), 17 WRN 172

In the same vein, the case of *Mojekwu V. Mojekwu*¹⁹, here, a custom of Nnewi in Anambra State of Nigeria was condemned by the Supreme Court because it forbids a surviving wife who is without son to have access to the husband's property, instead the husband's brother inherits the said property. Here, the Learned Niki Tobi stated thus:

“We heed not to travel all the way to Beijing to know that some of our customs including the Nnewi Oli Ekpa customs relied upon by the appellant are not consistent with our civilized world in which we all live today including the appellant. In my humble view, it is the monopoly of God to determine the sex of a baby and not the parents... I believe that God the creator of human beings is also the final authority as who should be male and female. Accordingly, for Customary Law to discriminate against a particular sex is to say the least an affront on the Almighty God himself. Let nobody do such a thing. On my part, I have no difficulty in holding that the Oli Ekpe Custom of Nnewi is repugnant to natural justice, equity and good conscience.’

The Learned Justice Niki Tobi continued and stated further in the case of *Muojekwu v. Ejikeme*²⁰ that,

‘... All human beings male and female are born into a free world and are expected to participate freely without any inhibition on grounds of sex, and that is constitutional. Any form of societal discrimination on grounds of sex, apart from being unconstitutional is antithesis to a society built on the tenets of democracy which we have freely chosen as a people.’

Recommendations

There are plethora of Statutes and judicially decided cases that now support the women and grant them freedom from discrimination, yet, the women need to stand up for themselves in embracing the seat of leadership which they are meant to occupy in order to make positive impacts in the economy just like the likes of Okonjo-Iweali and others.

Women are encouraged to also support their gender; Aba Women's Riot of 1929 was a reality because the women came out in one voice to protest against the oppressive rule of the colonial government. This goes to show that from inception women had always been at the forefront of the fight for freedom and justice, and their voices are yield results. Even in the customary ways, there are subtle and efficient ways that

¹⁹ *Mojekwu V. Mojekwu* (1977) 7 NWLR (pt. 512) P.281

²⁰ Excerpts from Niki Tobi JCA (As he then was) in the case of *Muojekwu v. Ejikeme* (2000)5 NWLR (Pt. 657)413 ; and also cited in Funmi Falana (2008) *Cases & Materials on Women's Rights Law*. 1st edn, Lagos: Legal Text Publishing Coy. Ltd, p. 131 -141@ 140

women showcase their lack of support of a government policy or laws and in most cases their voices are heard. We therefore urge women to support the vision of their fellow women to ensure that more women rise up to occupy leadership positions as same would be beneficial to the families, the society at large and the globe. When younger girls see older women excelling in their chosen fields of career and endeavours, it gives them hope that they too can succeed as a girl-child. Some women like the wives of Governors of States in Nigeria use their good office as the Wife of the Governor to support, empower and mobilize women to occupy leadership positions; a very good example is the wife of the current Governor of Ebonyi State, Her Excellency Mary-Mandaline Uzoamaka Nwifuru who is so endeared to see women occupy leadership positions.

We therefore maintain that more women would be empowered when women occupying leadership positions sees the need to empower and groom more women.

Conclusion

The 1999 Nigerian Constitution in its Section 42 provides that no Citizen shall be discriminated against by reason of sex/gender. In Article 3 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights²¹ stipulates that the Covenant shall ensure the equal right of men and women to the enjoyment of all civil and political rights set forth in the present Covenant, while Article 26 is on the protection from discrimination based on sex, colour, political, property, birth and so on. Furthermore, the Article 3 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights entitles every individual (both male and female) to be equal before the Law, and Article 18 (3) encourages the state members to eliminate every form of discrimination against women.

Having seen all the legal instruments in support of women as female gender, the duty lies on women to now brace up and take up leadership positions. The leadership positions occupied by women in time past and currently has proven that women are capable of leading in order to achieve a global stability in Africa and beyond.

²¹ The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 16 December 1966 and entered into force on 23rd March, 1976

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