

AFFIRMATIVE ACTION AND EMPLOYMENT OF WOMEN IN NASARAWA STATE CIVIL SERVICE

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Abstract

The traditional role of women as bearers and nurses of children has advanced beyond the orthodoxy to the contemporary status of clear leadership in all spheres of life: industry, public career, politics, technology and the medical sciences, among others. In contradistinction to the position of adherents of orthodoxy, advocates of modernity believe in and strongly support a shift in the paradigm, for a wider participation of women in formal employment, given the backdrop of the prevalence of labour discrimination, based on gender difference. With advancement in education and civilization among women, the pressure for the emancipation of the folk from the clutches of marginalisation assumed a new dimension in 2006, when the Nigeria Women's Charter of Demand, also known as Affirmative Action, was presented. The objective was to eradicate all forms of gender discriminations artificially erected on the path of women's efforts of attaining gender mainstreaming and parity. Elsewhere on the globe: China, Israel, Sri-Lanka, Taiwan, Malaysia, France and Finland, Affirmative Action dated back to 1949. In spite of the critical essence of gender equal labour market opportunities; there remains a dearth of empirical studies in Nigeria, particularly in Nasarawa State, where the inequality is obvious and copious. This study is therefore instituted to examine the nature, causes and implications of the anomaly for Nigerian women and for national development. Employing panel or longitudinal survey design, and using published data on personnel establishment obtained from Nasarawa State Civil Service Commission for the period 2007—2017, the null hypothesis of no significant discrepancy between gender employment opportunities in Nasarawa State Civil Service and the Affirmative Action was tested. The Chi-square statistical tool was employed, following its wide appeal in the Management and Social Sciences. Based on the findings, it was concluded that there is a significant discrepancy between women employment in Nasarawa State Civil Service and Affirmative Action, leading to underemployment. Accordingly, it was recommended that Nasarawa State Government should redress the imbalance by domesticating the Charter, for the attainment of its objectives.

Key Words: Nasarawa State Civil Service, Underemployment, Affirmative Action, Inequality, Gender Discrimination.

Introduction

The role of women in a society, whether traditional or modern, is as significant as it is diverse. Under the traditional setting, women provided the framework for sustainable family life, as key agents of family economy and as bearers and nurses of children. Interestingly, the traditional role of women has metamorphosed into the more complex and rewarding paradigm as leaders, industrialists, politicians, career diplomats, top public officers and bread-winners, in contemporary times. Thus, the current thinking is that in all spheres of life, except for the natural inexorable biological differences, women should enjoy *pari-passu* opportunities with men, whether in the public or private sector. In essence, no artificial barriers premised on gender should be erected on the path of women, whether in the short run or in the long run. Recognizing the need to reconcile the natural gender differences between the male

and female folks, and in cognizance of the clutches of socio-economic and political discrimination, pervasive deprivation and marginalization to which Nigeria women had been subjected, a new vista of hope was opened in the agitation for gender equality. The Nigerian Women Charter of Demand, otherwise known as Affirmative Action, in 2006, adopted a national gender policy with a goal to develop a society totally devoid of gender discrimination. The Action also moved to harness the full potentials of social groups and to promote women and girl-child education, social and economic welfare, pursuant to 1999 Constitution of Nigeria, as variously amended. In practical terms, the Action demanded that for all intent and purposes, the formal benchmark for women in the distribution of public offices shall be 35 percent of the establishment. The objective was to establish a system of gender mainstreaming that incorporated 35 per cent of women in all sectors of government and public lives.

Affirmative Action policy had been widely adopted in various countries across the globe: China (referred to as Youhni zhangece or preferential policy) in 1949; Israel, 2000; Sri-Lanka (Standardization Policy), 1981; Taiwan, 2004; Finland, 1980; Malaysia and France respectively (Kim Forde-Mazrui, 2004).

Through pronouncements, Government in Nigeria has acquiesced to the Affirmative Action. It is now trite knowledge that the Federal and State Governments have acknowledged the Affirmative Demand, with a firm commitment to its full realization. In essence, the Charter or Action is a “policy” of Government in Nigeria aimed at eliminating discrimination against women, with respect to employment and career progression. Hala El-Hadad (2016)’s position that about 70 per cent of the world’s poorest people comprises of women corroborates the pervasive view about the seeming plight of the folk.

The discrimination against women has its root in cultural gender equation which places women on a lower pedestal. This dependence is the basis of the resistance of previous efforts at addressing the existing “natural” inequality between the status of men and the status of women. The awareness is however on a rapid increase and the situation is changing. In the contemporary paradigm shift, the perception that women are culturally, economically and socially “inferior” to men has become outmoded. Instead, increasing women participation in all human endeavours is assuming the commanding height. In its reaction, the United Nations (UN) in 2001, included gender equality and women empowerment in its development goals as an essential ingredient for achieving sustainable development. In spite of the widely acknowledged need for attaining the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in the 21st century, the opportunities for women in Nasarawa State Civil Service (NSCS) remain diminished by gender discrimination, the increased participation of women in business management and politics notwithstanding (Ayuba, 2012).

Studies in Nigeria: Ogwumike (2006) and Onyechere (2008) report incidents of gross under-representation of women in executive management and in top political offices in the private and public sectors. Among the major reasons often advanced for the imbalance is spousal employment, extended family responsibilities, differential educational and training opportunities, socio-cultural impediments, biological limitations and gender nonchalance (Jagun, 2013). Without doubt, the incidents of women underemployment vary among states in Nigeria. The situation is more worrisome in states where the identified factors exhibit stronger manifestations. Among the states are Nasarawa, Taraba, Jigawa, Bayelsa and Yobe, (Jagun, 2013).

Statement of the Research Problem

The United Nations (2001) and Surma (2007) posit that culture and low level of education of women among other factors constitute major hindrances against achieving gender equality in labour market opportunities in Nigeria. Given the above premise, and in the light of limited scope of empirical studies, this effort considered the expedience in examining the nature and status of women employment in NSCS.

Objectives of the Study

This study contends that literature and empirical studies in women underdevelopment is still growing. Arising from the inchoate status, the study is instituted to examine affirmative action and employment status of women in Nasarawa State Civil Service (NSCS). Ogwumike, et al (2006) argue that in Nigeria, factors which affect entry into the labour market produce the inequalities in income and work place opportunities among employees. This position is reinforced by the views of Rubbery (2008) who contended that such factors are a composite of demographics.

The major objective of this study is to examine the nature, status and causes of women employment status in NSCS. Specifically, the study examines the major factors militating against equality of gender labour opportunities in NSCS, against the backdrop of the Affirmative Action.

Significance of the Study

The findings of this study will provide useful insights into the observed discriminatory labour practices, based on gender, in NSCS. In effect, the findings will be valuable as policy input in the effort at redressing the prevalent imbalance in gender labour opportunities in NSCS. The impetus so generated will add fillip to women's struggle for gender mainstreaming in Nigeria.

Research Questions

The following research questions are posed, for answers:

1. Is there underemployment of women in NSCS?
2. Is educational disparity responsible for underemployment of women in NSCS?
3. Is disparity in training or career progression aptitude contributory to women underemployment in NSCS?
4. What are the major socio-cultural factors limiting women's equal employment in NSCS?

2. Theoretical Consideration and Review of Empirical Studies

Mincer (1962)'s and Cain (1966)'s pioneering studies in the United States of America (USA) laid the foundation for the plethora of empirical works in female work force participation. Basking in the euphoria of a pioneer, Ackah, et al (2009) posited that the growing interest in women participation in labour market in the developed and emerging world is now of considerable social and academic interest, leading to further insightful studies in gender labour economics. Ackah noted that based on literature, at least two general theoretical paradigms to explain the changing pattern of female participation in labour force in low income countries are discernable. Earlier, Nam (1991) in his review, categorized the literature into two perspectives, namely, modernization and world systems.

Advocates of the modernization theory posit that economic development is positively correlated with female labour force participation through changes in a country's occupational structure and increased educational opportunities, usually accompanied with declining fertility rates and household responsibilities. The process of modernization, in the view of Baner and Shin (1987), is associated with increased

demand for labour, general social acceptance of women education and employment, reinforced with lower fertility. As for the relationship between education and female labour force participation, Standing (1981) offered three hypothesis, namely, the opportunity cost, relative employment and relative aspiration.

This study adopts the modernization hypothesis due to its relevance, and for several reasons: first the theory advocates a positive association between economic development and female workforce participation; and second, the theory is associated with a growing social acceptance of women education, lower fertility and employment, all interoperating to diminish the artificial barriers against women, and thus increasing their opportunities in the labour market. The relevance of this theory lies in its ability to explain the need for a new role to be accorded women in contemporary Nigeria, through gender parity in opportunities, whether in public or private sectors.

Review of Previous Studies

In a study undertaken in 2002 by the African Centre for Gender Development to examine gender participation in the formal sector, it was reported that the rates of labour force participation for women were lower than the rates for men, in all the countries covered by the studies. Although women employment is increasing, the rate of increase remains relatively low. The unfavourable concentration of women in the lower cadres in the formal sector was reported by Chandra and Nganou (2001) in their study. Furthermore, surveys conducted by the World Bank (2010) reported that when job rationing is undertaken, the men, with better education and training, survive to take the few available places than the less opportune women. In Nigeria, Ogwumike, et al (2006) noted that factors which affect entry into the labour market resulted in the differences in income and workplace opportunities among employees. The respective assertions of the United Nations (2002), Surma (2007) and ILO (2008) supported the observed marginalisation of women as widely reported. More specifically, ILO reported that in the early 2000, the weekly earnings of women as fractions of men's earnings were 79 per cent in Ghana, 51 per cent in Nigeria, 45 per cent in Mozambique and 23 per cent in Burkina Faso (ILO, 2000).

According to Onyechere (2008), culture and belief systems are stronger factors affecting labour market participations, particularly in some parts of Nigeria. Onyechere therefore submitted that cultural factors result in the observed differences in workplace opportunities and earnings between men and women employees. Similarly, studies by Leach (1998), Onah (2001) and Odera (2003) support the positive correlation between high formal education and women employment. Leach's study, using a sample of 700 women from Ibadan, and employing the Pearson's product moment correlation method to analyse the primary data, reported a high correlation coefficient of 0.84 at 0.05 per cent level of significance between formal education and employment opportunities. The study concluded that women were predisposed to the use of contraception, to check the tide of fertility, and to increase the likelihood of employment.

Using a sample of 1,500 male and female workers in Lagos State public service, to establish the effect of education on employment and career progression, and employing primary and secondary data, Onah (2001)'s study found a positive strong relationship between formal education, career progression and salary. The significance of the results was correlated when subjected to a t-test analysis. Odera (2003) conducted a study on the socio-cultural determinants of women employment in Nigeria. Employing 500 women of different ethnicities, and using Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), and primary data, the result of the F-ratio revealed a highly positive relationship between education and women employment. Similarly, Adeke (2006) employed a sample of

300 female graduates as primary data to examine the relationship between education and access to employment by women in Owerri. Using Chi-square (χ^2) to analyse the data, a non-significant relationship was found at a Chi-square value of 9.37 at 0.05 significance level. The study concluded that highly educated women lacked access to formal employment and were therefore clustered around the informal sector. The study may have been largely influenced by the setting of Owerri, a largely business environment, where educational qualification is deployed to an assortment of alternative economic activities besides formal public service.

Empirical studies on mental status and women employment focus mainly on three variables: women involvement, husband cooperation and task sharing on the home front. In a study conducted by Izuh (2003) on women employment in Rivers State of Nigeria, a sample of 500 women was employed. The results of the primary data analysis, using multiple regression and F-test statistics concluded that spousal cooperation is highly related to women employment in Rivers State. A corollary observation of the study revealed a positive relationship between the age of the marriage and the likelihood of spousal consent to a woman's employment. Expectedly, the wider the age difference between the couple, the less the likelihood of spousal consent and, hence, the less likely the prospects of a wife's employability.

3. Research Methodology

The research methodology is presented and discussed in the sub-sections outlined below.

Research Design

The study focuses on women employment status in NSCS. The variables and data traverse the period 2007-2016, as obtained from Nasarawa State Civil Service Commission (NSCSC). Accordingly, and following Ezennia (1986) and Nnamdi (1986), the design is a panel or longitudinal survey, as widely employed in Management and Social Sciences (Nwokoye, 1986).

Variable Description, Data Sources and Methods of Collection

The variables employed include civil servants and gender employment profiles across the cadres of NSCS. Data were obtained from NSCSC, vide a letter referenced NSCSC/SIG/001/VOL.1, dated 21/08/2017. Oral interviews were also held with civil servants across the strata, to validate the secondary data.

Population, Sample and Sampling Techniques

The population comprises of the entire workforce of NSCS as profiled across the various cadres. This population was 16, 422, obtained from Nasarawa State Civil Service Commission in 2007. In effect, a census of the staff strength less the manipulative cadre (GL 01-03) was adopted.

Techniques of Data Analysis

While descriptive statistical tools, notably frequency tables were used to present the data, quantitative tools, including percentage (%) and Chi-square (χ^2) were employed quantitatively for comparison and statistical test of significance of observed discrepancies. The percentage statistic is defined as

$$X = \frac{n}{N} \times 100,$$

where:

x = percentage to be computed,

n = proportion of occurrence against the total

N = total occurrence: and

$$\chi^2 = \sum_{e=i}^n \frac{(O_i - e_i)^2}{e_i}$$

where:

χ^2 = Chi-square statistic

o = observed frequencies

e = expected frequencies

(Spiegel and Stephens, 2008)

Test of Hypothesis

The following null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 significance level and at degrees of freedom 3 (4-1). The decision rule is to reject the null hypothesis if $\chi_c^2 \geq \chi_t^2$ at the specified significance level and degrees of freedom.

H0₁: There is no significant discrepancy between women employment in NSCS and the Affirmative Action.

H0₂: The discrepancy in educational qualification is not a significant factor in under-employment of women in NSCS.

H0₃: Disparity in training and career development is not a significant factor in under-employment in NSCS.

A priori Expectation

By women Affirmative Action, it is established that a gender mainstreaming system which incorporates 35 per cent of women in all sectors of public offices in Nigeria should exist. Therefore, a public sector establishment which violates this pro-women palliative arrangement acts inconsistently with the affirmative movement. Accordingly, it is expected that, demoting women employment as "W", the relationship $W \geq 35$ per cent should hold in the distribution of public offices, whether career or political.

4. Data Analysis

Gender Composition of Nasarawa State Civil Service

Table 1 below presents the staff composition of NSCS.

Table 1: Gender Composition of NSCS, 2007-2016

Cadre (GL)	Male	Percentage (%)	Female	Percentage (%)	Total
Directorate (15-17)	1,072	80	267	20	1,339
Senior (12-14)	2,619	73	947	27	3,566
Intermediate (08-10)	4,957	76	1,530	24	6,487
Junior (04-07)	3,785	75	1,245	25	5,030
Total	1,2433	75	3,989	25	16,422

Source: Nasarawa State Civil Service Commission, 2017.

It could be observed from Table 1 above that out of a staff strength of about 16,422, 12,433 (75 per cent) were males, while 3,989 (25 per cent) were females. On cadre-specific composition, 1,072 (80 per cent) of the 1,339 staff in the Directorate Cadre (GL 15-17) were males, while only 267 (20 per cent) were females.

Similarly, 2,619 (73 per cent) of the 3,566 employees in the Senior Cadre (GL 12-14) were males, while 974 (27 per cent) were females. The distribution for the Intermediate and Junior Cadres (GL 08-10 and 04-07) exhibited similar patterns. Thus, 76 per cent and 75 per cent of the employees were males for the respective cadres; while 24 per cent and 25 per cent were females for the Intermediate and Junior Cadres respectively. The data excluded figures for 2012 and 2014 because they were unavailable, according to the Commission. Nevertheless, the available data approximated the true profile of NSCS staff strength.

Affirmative Action and Expected Composition of NSCS.

Given the implication of the Affirmative Action, at least 35 percent of every cadre and indeed the entire Civil Service staff strength should be female employees. Table 2 below presents the expected distribution of the staff strength when Affirmative Action is incorporated.

Table 2: Affirmative Action and Expected Staff Strength.

Cadre (GL)	Total Staff Strength	Expected Composition , Male	Expected Percentage Composition , Male	Expected Composition , Female	Expected Percentage Composition , Female
Directorate (15-17)	1,339	870	65	469	35
Senior (12-14)	3,566	2,318	65	1,248	35
Intermediate (08-10)	6,487	4,217	65	2,270	35
Junior (04-07)	5,030	3,269	65	1,761	35
Total	16,422	10,674	65	5,748	35

Source: Computed by Authors from Data in Table 1.

Table 2 above indicates that incorporating the Affirmative Action, the proportions of female employees should be 469, 1,248, 2,270 and 1,761 respectively for the cadres, giving a total of 5,748 for females. When viewed against the actual proportion of 3,989 (25 per cent), the imbalance is worrisome. Table 3 below presents the percentage variances in the composition, for women.

Table 3: Affirmative Action and Profile of Women Employment in NSCS

Cadre (GL)	Existing Staff Composition		Total Staff Strength	Existing % of Women	Required % women by Affirmative Action	% Variance
	Men	Women				
15-17	1,072	267	1,339	20	35	(15)
12-14	2,619	947	3,566	27	35	(8)
08-10	4,957	1,530	6,487	24	35	(11)
04-07	3,785	1,245	5,030	25	35	(10)

Source: Computed from Data Obtained from NSCSC.

A perusal of Tables 3 above reveals the negative variances in female employment statistics when Affirmative Action is incorporated. The variances cut across all cadres, resulting in a cumulative deficit of 5,748.

Survey on Employment and Career Progression in NSCS

A survey on the critical factors in employment in NSCS was conducted using a questionnaire and oral interviews, to obtain information from a cross section of the top echelon of the Civil Service. Table 4 below presents a summary of the responses by 300 civil servants who were requested to provide “Yes” or “No” answer to the questions on the key factors militating against gender employment parity in NSCS.

Table 4: Key Employment and Career Requirements and Militating Factors in NSCS.

S/N	Question	Responses				
		Yes	%	No	%	Total
1.	Is the educational qualification for employment in NSCS same for both genders?	300	100	0	0	300
2.	Are the competences based on training and development required for career advancement same irrespective of gender?	300	100	0	0	300
3.	Which of the following factors, in your view, limits a female employee from aspiring to the top in NSCS?	300	100	0	0	300
	1. Culture	300	100	0	0	300
	2. Family Responsibility/Distractions	300	100	0	0	300
	3. Spousal Objection/Resistance to Job Demand	300	100	0	0	300

Source: Computed by Authors from Information Extracted from Questionnaire.

From Table above, it could be observed that, responses to the questions as to whether educational prerequisites and competences required for employment were same, irrespective of gender, were provided in the affirmative by all 300 respondents, giving 100 per cent agreement. As to the factors limiting career advancement of women, all 300 respondents (100 per cent) were also positive that culture, demand of family responsibilities and spousal consent were all critical.

Results of Test of Significance

Table 5 below presents the results of the Chi-square test of significance.

Table 5: Results of Chi-square Test of Significance

Cadre	o	e	(o-e)	(o-e) ²	$\frac{(o-e)^2}{E}$
Directorate	20	35	(15)	225	6.43
Senior	27	35	(8)	64	1.83
Intermediate	24	35	(11)	121	3.46
Junior	25	35	(10)	100	2.86
Total (∑)					14.58

Source: Computed by Researchers from Data Obtained NSCSC

From Table 5 above, the value of Chi-square computed (χ_c^2) is 14.58, higher than the corresponding Table values (χ_f^2) of 7.815, at the specified level of significance and

degrees of freedom. We therefore reject the null hypothesis and instead accept the alternative hypothesis and conclude that a significant disparity between men and women employment existed in NSCS.

Summary of Findings

The major findings of this study are outlined below:

1. There exists no formal establishment which discriminates against gender employment and career advancement in NSCS.
2. However, there exists pervasive imbalance in gender employment in NSCS.
3. Arising from 1 and 2 above, the situation, which is unexplained by formal design by policy or legal provision, may have evolved and developed from practice.

Summary and Conclusion

The results of the findings of this study provide the fundamental ingredients in explaining the hypothesis that women are marginalized, with respect to employment and career progression in NSCS. The disparity in the status has no reasonable explanations in differences in educational requirement, training and aptitude. Instead, the disparity is ascribable to cultural inhibitions, as corroborated by the results of the responses to the questionnaire and interviews presented at the various tables. The situation is exacerbated in the case of married women where spousal consent is required for employment and progression. Without doubt, the custodians and operators of labour policies in NSCS may have capitalised on the discriminatory cultural and allied factors, to perpetrate the imbalance.

To be sure, the gender imbalance is a disregard for the Affirmative Action, to which Nigeria is a signatory, and which impliedly settled the demand by women for at least 35 per cent of available positions in public offices, be they career or political. This disregard is manifested in the pervasive negative variances in women employment as highlighted at Table 3. Generally, the results of the findings align substantially with the respective positions of literature and empirical studies earlier presented: Onyechere (2008) and Izuh (2003), for note. In conclusion, it is clear that the existing employment practice by the Service is unjustifiably discriminatory against women. This defect is a harbinger of sustained marginalisation and de-motivation of women, based largely on gender disparity. In effect, the practice is anti-Affirmative Action.

Recommendations

Arising from the findings and conclusion, the policy options offered are highlighted below:

1. The observed imbalance in gender employment against women should be redressed by NCSC, through a deliberate increase in the run rate of women employment, in order to rapidly and ultimately close the deficits.
2. Except where clear disparities exist in qualification and aptitude, the policy on equality of career progression for women in the Service should be sacrosanct. Thus, the "Federal Character" principle should be entrenched and religiously implemented.
3. As a corollary, women Affirmative Action should be domesticated as a policy in NSCS.
4. More important, gender discrimination in employment and career progression should be eradicated in the Civil Service through conscious monitoring of gender employment statistics. In this wise, an inspectorate unit should be established to periodically audit the staff profile in the Civil Service, and indeed all government agencies, to ensure gender compliance.

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