

Assessment of the Role of Women's Participation in Politics of Borno State, from 1998–2019

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Abstract

This research study “Assessment of the role of women participation in politics of Borno, from 1998 – 2019” examines the role played by various women of Borno origin, their pattern of politics and their political contribution towards the development of Borno. Politically, socially and otherwise. Data were collected through primary and secondary sources, interview, administration of questionnaire and focused group discussion constitute the primary source, while consultation of textbooks, published and unpublished materials, pamphlets and internet materials served as the secondary sources of data. The women discussed in this study were selected as the focal point of this research and much emphases were geared towards them, their contribution to the political development of Borno State, cannot be said to be over emphasized but it is imperatively overwhelming.

Introduction

Political parties constitute an essential parts of democracy. This statement holds because democracy involves the process of voting through periodic election those who represent their constituencies in government. Other democratic principles include popular participation of all adult citizens, equality, justice, equality and accountability. For democracy to grow and flourish in Nigeria, women who constitute half of the population of Nigeria must be properly represented in the political party structures as well as elective positions in government of all levels. In every society around the world there are political participation at every level and the essence of leadership in that society. In addition it is also aimed at harnessing and contributing to decision making in the society, if women should be given the chance to participate actively in politics, it will enhance their leadership position towards better decision making and implementations. The perception of women hood is useful in providing an explanation to the opportunities and structures available to men and women for self actualization and effective participation in party politics.

In Nigeria, women have been marginalized right from colonial era where women were not granted suffrage until 1979 when suffrage was extended to Nigeria women. Even though many Nigerian women had been politically active since 1922 when the colonial constitution of Sir Hugh Clifford introduced elective principle which gave rise to the development of political parties and nationalism in Nigeria, prominent female politicians in Nigeria during this era were the late Funmilayo Ransome Kuti, Margaret Ekpo, and Hajjiya Gambo Sawaba.

According to UNDP (2005) report, women constitute more than half of the population of the world. This means half of the world populations are women in this respect, their leadership continuations to social and economic development of the societies can be assured to be more than half as compared to men by virtue of their dual roles in the productive and reproductive spheres in the society. However, in spite of their contribution to the society women participation in formal political structures and processes, especially in top leadership positions still remain insignificant.

The inclusion of the perspectives of women and their actual participation in politics are prerequisites for democratic development and good governance. Women's political rights remain an integral part of human rights and an essential aspect of any democratic framework. If the definition of democracy allows for diverse opinion and participation of different groups then it cannot thrive by excluding women who constitute half of each and every single national population (Pogoso (2012)). The focal point of this research is to Assess the role of women participation in politics of Borno State from 1998 – 2019.

Women and Political Leadership in Pre-colonial Nigeria

One of the issues involved in the debate on the status of women in pre-colonial Africa is the question of women and governance. The general belief is that women held very submissive political positions in most African countries. Beyond the household level, power was generally dominated by men, but in many instances intriguing narrative exist about female rulers and women who wielded substantial political power and influence in their societies. In the Yoruba political system there was the *Iyalode* who was a member of the *Alaafin's* Judicial council in Yoruba land. The *Iyalode* was a female representative who was responsible for women issues and served as the spokesperson of women at the *Alaafin's* meetings. In Ibadan the *Iyalode* title was introduced in 1850 in recognition of a wealthy woman trader Madam *Subuola* who used to assist the warriors. Notable among the *Iyalode* was madam *Tinubu* who specialized in Tabaco and slave trade with the Brazilians. In 1846, Madam Tinubu became prominent commercial and political elite of her community to the extent that she supported the exile king of Lagos *Akintoye*, whom she later struggled to restore to the throne in 1851.

In central Sudan, women traditionally played a very powerful role in religion and culture. Special positions with titles were reserved for female members of the ruling dynasty. The leader of women, a sort of Queen mother was called by different

names and given various functions according to region. For example, in Daura kingdom before the 9th century AD, women officials like *Magajiya* of Daura have played an important role in political setup.

In Zamfara kingdom, Queen Argoje (or Yar'goje) reigned as a queen of Dutsi between 1310 and 1350. She later relocated the capital of Birnin Zamfara at a site on the river Gagore, and as a powerful leader she appointed female chief during her reign. One of her role was the lamp, she used during council meeting which is one of the historic relics in Waziri Junaidu History and culture Bureau, museum, Sokoto.

Queen Amina of Zazzau kingdom was another powerful female political figure in central Sudan commonly known as the wamar Queens in the 16th century. She was born by a wealthy ruler, Bakwa of *Turunku*, in the year 1533. Amina was credited as the architect of the strong earthen walls around the city (Garnwa) in order to protect the city from invasion. She extended the borders of the kingdom beyond Bauchi and up to some parts of Zamfara and Kebbi kingdoms. The titles of Inna or Magajiya are also titles of important female political figure and title holders in various part of Hausa land. For instance in Gobir Kingdom Inna was the second most important personality after king. She acted as a regent whenever she stayed in the capital in the absence of the king and even go to battle fields on occasion. The Inna was also involved in the collection of taxes and had a number of women officials who helped her in collecting taxes from various occupational group. Inna *Yar Bukuma* was very famous in the kingdom and she was recorded to have served as the sole regent of Sabon Birni (1814-1978) during her reign. Inna *Yar Bukuma* was said to have not only launched an attack on Zamfara but also demanded for the ruler's sword.

The power and influence of women was also demonstrated in Borno empire, where women occupied the highly respected offices of *Majira*, (Mai's mother) *magaram* (Mai's senior sister) Yar Gumsu (first wife of the mai), yado'oma (mai's daughter) the *magira* for instance in her capacity as queen mother wielded tremendous power and drew much respect. Magirafusam Sakarami was said to have intervened and deposed the mai Biri for detention and confinement for miscarriage of justice and imprisonment for one year. Magira Aisa also played a very important role in the political life of the state in the 1560s. She was known as the owner of the white stallion. Magira Aisa Ngermaram intervened the state administration to control a dynastic crisis which might lead to the total collapse of the kingdom. According to tradition she had reigned for seven years. She was considered as one of the most powerful rulers of Borno and led successful military expeditions. Her name is inserted in the list of rulers in the state.

In the former Nupe Kingdom there existed two women title holders of Nimwoye and Sagi who were bestowed on the king's mother, paternal aunt, sister or daughter. These titled women lived in the *Etsu's* (king) house and they had their estates and officially represented the court at certain ceremonies. Another example of powerful female ruler was that of Ezenwenyi (female king) Nnenna Mgbokwu the fourth *Aro* ruler who properly reigned between the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. She assumed a male political position as female king and presided over

the Aro political leadership just as the male monarchs. In Bonny kingdom, Queen *Kambasa* is remembered as a warrior, the first ruler to organized and led the kingdom to an external war.

In the Sokoto caliphate, *Nana Asma'u* the daughter of sheikh Uthman Bn Fodio was a writer and educator, who served as a key political adviser to the male leaders of the caliphate for several years largely through her writing and poems. She guided these men on how to appropriately attend to issues of succession, military engagements and enslavement within the caliphate. Boy's description of *Nana Asma'u* provided an insight into her complex role as an influential women in the Sokoto caliphate.

“*Asma'u* was by far the most prolific writer and influential woman to have emerged in the western Sudan during the nineteenth century. What is more, her influence carried over into the world of men. Her voice was the traditional one of women, she was so kind, her charity was a thousand fold. But she carried it to places where decisions were made. She was a surrogate man, she led no troops on the battle field like Queen Amina, was in charge of no tax collectors like the Inna. She made stringent and apt observations in her political verse as a wearer of the Shehu's mantle but remained decorously within the confines of her home.

From this it is logical to argue that women emerged from colonization with profound political and economic disadvantages which could not immediately be reformed not because of their political apathy, but due to the unwillingness of the male gender to share political power with them. Margaret Ekpo, Funmilayo Ransome Kuti both of National council of Nigeria and Cameroons (NCNC) and *Hajiya Gambo Sawaba* of NEPU in conjunction with other women helped to form the women's wing of their parties and contributed to the mobilization of women folk throughout Nigeria. The also laid a solid foundation for women's development and participation in post independent politics.

Brief History of Borno State

Borno state was created out of the defunct north-eastern states of Nigeria in 1976 during the administration of late General Murtala Ramat Mohammed. The state has a physical setting which arises from an amalgamation of factors relating to location, geological climate as well as intensity of resources for exploitation in the area. The state is the largest of all the 36 states of Nigeria. The state is also highly pluralistic in its ethnics= composition with Kanuri being the dominant ethnic group, other ethnic groups include the shuwa Arabs, Fulani, marghi, Babur bura, etc. the state lies within latitude 10^oN and 14^oN and longitude 11^o30E and 14^o45E of the equator. The state has an area of 611,435sqkm. The state occupies the greatest part of the chad Basin and shares boarder with the Republic of Niger to the North, Chad to the North east and Cameroon to the east. Within the country its neighbors are Adamawa to the south, Yobe to the west and Gombe to the south west. Borno State has a population of 4,151,193 people. This is made up of 2,161,157 males and 1,990,036 females according to the 2006 census.

Women in Politics in Borno State

The participation of women in politics in Borno state democratic processes involves much more than just voting rather it also means the freedom to speak out, assemble and associate. The opening of political space for women in Borno state started soon after the declaration of the years 1976-1985 as the united nations decide for women, which focus on gender issues and acted as catalyst in the process of integrating women into the mainstream of development. The government of Buhari directed that at least, one female must be appointed as member of the executive council in every state, all the states in Nigeria including Borno state, complied with this directive.

What further opened political space for women in Borno State was the 1985 women's conference held in Kenya. The conference marked the end of the united nations decade for women. Member states were urged to come to terms with the reality of women participation in public and political life. The promulgation of decree 30 of December 1989 (as amended 1992) led to the establishment of the national commission for women. The Borno women commission encouraged women to take part in politics. Thus during the 1998 federal elections, many women in Borno state showed interest in elective positions. In 1998 Dr. Asabe Vilita Bashir a former staff in the department of education, university of Maiduguri contested on the platform of the CNC and won the Borno state House of Assembly seat for Gwoza constituency.

Hon. (Dr.) Asabe Vilita Bashir ventured into politics again in 2003 and won the house of assembly seat of Gwoza constituency. She became the only minority leader in the Borno state house of Assembly on the platform of people's Democratic party (PDP). As member representing Gwoza constituency, Dr. Asabe was made the chairperson of the statehouse of Assembly committee on women affairs. Within two years of her stay in the Borno State House of Assembly Dr. Asabe cross-carpeted from PDP to ANPP, the ruling party in Borno state. Eventually, she made a member of the Borno State executive council and Honorable commissioner of Health. In the 2011 federal elections in Borno State, Dr. Asabe entered the race for the southern Borno Senatorial seat under the platform of ANPP, but lost to senator Ali Ndume.

Hajja Fanta Gubio is another prominent woman politicians in the state. She represented Gubio, Kaga and Magumeri federal constituency in the federal House of Representatives between 2007 and 2011. She was also made chairperson for Gubio local government. His excellency the then governor of Borno State Kashim Shettima appointed her as commissioner for women affairs.

Hajja Zara Bukar. Another lady who assisted in widening political space in Borno State is Hajja Zara Bukar. She holds a diploma in social work at the University of Maiduguri. In 1991, she also obtained a degree in sociology from Bayero University, Kano after a stint in the public and private sectors she decided to join politics in 2010. She ran for house of representative but could not make to it. The

then former Governor of Borno state Senator Ali Modu Sheriff appointed her as a special adviser, special duties. She was also made special adviser, women affairs by his excellency Alhaji Kashim Shettima the executive governor of Borno State. Her principal duties include formulating politics relating to women development and empowerment, particularly in the educational sphere.

Dr. Hauwa Maimusa is yet another women who assisted in the political development of Borno State. She graduated from university of Maiduguri with B.A (Ed), MPA, Msc. (political science) Phd. (history) in 1990, 1997, 2000 and 2012 respectively. She was one time a Director in the Borno State ministry of local government and chieftancy. She was also appointed charian for Chibok local government between 2007 – 2008 by the Governor of Borno state Senetor Ali Modu sheriff. After a year as chairman she became the commissioner for women affairs and social development for 3 years. She is presently member Borno state carrier guidance committee.

Hajiya Yagana Mu'azu is also among the women who have enormously contributed to the political development of Borno state; she joined the social democratic party (SDP) and was appointed as the secretary-general of the party for the Maiduguri Metropolitan Council (MMC) in 1993. When the bans on political activities were lifted under the General Abatcha administration, she joined the united Nigeria congress party (UNCP) in 1996. She contested and won a seat to represent the MMC at the state House of Assembly in 1997. In 1998 Hajja Yagana joined the people democratic party (PDP) and was appointed a member, state executive of the party, representing central zone. In 2005 she was appointed senior special assistant to his excellency Senetor Ali Modu Sheriff.

Hajja Halima A Rabasa is another woman politician in the state who contributed in the development of her community and local government. She holds a bachelor degree ad masters degree in Adult Education between 1988 – 1992 and 1993 – 1998 respectively. She was appointed a honorable commissioner in charge of ministry of women affairs and social development in 1999. She discharged her responsibilities as a commissioner with zeal and was also appointed chairman caretaker committee, Gwoza local government in 2003. Hajja Halima was also appointed as the senior special assistant to his excellency Alh. (Dr) Ali Modu Sheriff, the executive governor of Borno State..

Dr. Zainab Gimba is a household name in the politics of Borno State. She was born in Kala town in Borno State, Nigeria. The then Governor of Borno State Kashim Shettima appointed her as commissioner for poverty Alleviation and youth empowerment from 2011-2014. She was re-appointed as honorable commissioner, universal basic education board from 2014 – 2015. she was again appointed honorable commissioner ministry of water resource from 2015 – October 2018. Dr. Zainab is presently the Nigeria's House of Representative member representing Ngala, Bama and Kala Balge constituency. She is the only female House of representative member from Borno State.

Conclusion

Women participation in politics in the northern part of Nigeria and more especially Borno State is something very rare amongst womenfolk due to religious affiliation hindering women to mingle with men in public or social gatherings. It is therefore, like a taboo for women to participate freely in a political circle. Despite such consideration within the society, these women took the bull by the horn to give their utmost contribution to the political upliftment of their state.

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