UDC: 316.334.56-055.2(662.6)

URBAN POOR WOMEN AND GOVERNANCE IN NIGERIA

Caroline Okumdi Muoghalu, PhD

Chiedu A. Abrifor, PhD

Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria

Abstract

Currently, urbanization has increased at an alarming rate in Nigeria. This situation has created so many urban poor women who are living on the margin of the society. Due to the hegemonic patriarchal cultural values and practices, women are deprived of access to land, credit, inheritance and other means through which they can be gainfully employed. Many of these women migrate to cities to become prostitutes, petty traders, messengers and cleaners in companies and with this, they automatically become urban poor women living in slums and even on the streets with their children. By virtue of where they live and who they are, government provision of social amenities do not reach them. In fact, any time this group feel the impact of government policies and decisions, it is usually in form of demolition of their houses and shops; their means of livelihood. Also due to these patriarchal practices, most women do not have the required educational qualification to enable them participate fully in urban life and to lift them out of poverty and all these mingle together to deprive women of the opportunity to participate in politics and urban decision making.This paper reviews how poverty, educational attainment interlock with cultural values and practices to deny women of participation in urban governance in Nigeria. Previous studies on urban poor women and governance were examined which formed a pattern in the body of knowledge on women and governance in Nigeria.The indications were that in Nigeria, women do not participate in urban governance as a result of low educational attainment, poverty and hegemonic cultural practices. The problem of women's powerlessness was indicated throughout Nigeria and this affects women in everything they do and in their life chances as individuals and collectively. The conclusion is that inability to participate in urban governance has made impossible for issues concerning women to be addressed such as social amenities like water, sanitation, and so on. Instead of addressing the problems faced by this group, urban governance has directed urban expenditure to providing amenities for the rich. The major issue here is that this situation does not just end with this women, it extends to their generations and the vicious circle continues which has serious implications for participation in governance in the future. It therefore becomes pertinent that women's poverty and low educational attainment should be addressed in order to make it easier for women to participate in governance. It is only when this is done that Nigeria can be said to be marching towards achieving sustainable development.

Keywords: Urban, Education, Poverty, Poor women and Gender.

1.   **Introduction**

Urbanization in Nigeria has been on since the introduction of cash cropping by the colonial masters and the rate is increasing. In pre-colonial times, Nigerians were mainly farmers and hunters and lived in villages among relations and production was an affair of the extended family. With the advent of the Europeans, commercial agriculture was introduced. This was how migration as we know it today started. Originally, there was migration from one village to another but the commercialization of agriculture brought about the development of towns around major agricultural centers. Men were attracted to these towns to work in the farms as paid workers. Ever since, there has been influx of people from rural to urban areas in search of employment. With the oil boom of the early 1970s, agriculture was abandoned by the federal government and remained at the subsistence level where women work to feed their families and more people migrated to the cities to seek for livelihoods.

This mass urbanization brought about congestion and problems associated with it in the urban areas. This also exposed the problem of governance in Nigeria. Governance is the co-operation between government officials and the entire citizenry. It is the decisions and allocation of resources to the different sectors of the society which affects the lives of the people in whatever they do. Urban governance is the decisions, resources allocations and directions of municipal activities that make it possible for urban dwellers to have basic amenities necessary for decent living. Urban governance therefore has some direct relationship with urban living. In-spite of the importance of governance, women are poorly represented in urban governance and governance generally and when such women are poor, it becomes a double burden. Urban poor women are hairdressers, women tailors, daily paid labourers, full time housewives, petty traders, widows, female heads of households, prostitutes and other women that live on the margin of society. My interest in poor urban women stems from the fact that the patriarchal nature of Nigerian society placed women in a highly disadvantaged position educationally, economically and socially which has a lot of implication for their participation in urban politics.

Women participation in politics in Nigeria is minimal and has become topical in recent times due to its centrality to the issue of development. Women are discouraged from participating in public life from childhood and this follows them to adulthood. Many Nigerian women are barred from politics by significant others (husbands, fathers, mothers and other relations) due to the cultural image of a woman of virtue which defines such a woman as a quit, lamblike lady who is only seen and not heard. Any woman that has contrary ambition is

seen as too ambitious and unfeminine. This cultural orientation discourages women from participating in politics and even when a women is interested in politics and wants to defy these cultural constraints, she may be incapacitated by money, low level of education and problem of being accepted by both males and females. The problem of women not being fully represented has been there for a long time in Nigeria especially since the colonization of Nigeria.

Before colonialism, Nigerian women were fully represented in politics in many parts of Nigeria. According to Agbalajobi (2010), in traditional Yoruba states, women held high political offices like the Iyalode, Iyaloja, Iyalaje and even the office of the Oba. During the colonial times, the Nigerian woman was excluded from the political life of the country. The colonial masters came with their own patriarchal values that mingled with our own patriarchal values to edge women completely out of politics. Agbalajobi (2010) maintained that at the establishment of the colonial order, women became en-stranged from their political rights. It is women's non participation in politics that translates into their non participation in urban governance.

This paper becomes significant in the light of the fact that women's low representation in urban governance has made it difficult for problems and issues relating to women to be addressed. Exposing the factors militating against participation in urban governance would help in designing effective programmes as solutions to these problems. It would also create knowledge and build theory on the problem of women and governance in Nigeria. Against this backdrop/ there is need to examine these issues militating against women participation in urban governance. This paper therefore examines the issues of women's poverty, low level of education and how these interlock with patriarchal values and practices to edge women out of urban governance in Nigeria.

2.   Theoretical Framework

The theoretical frameworks for this paper are the political economic and feminist theories. This theory explains the influence of government policies and decisions on the economic lives of individuals and groups. For instance, when structural Adjustment programmes were introduced in 1986, it produced a multiplier effect on the economic situation of Nigerians. For poor people especially women, it meant reduced purchasing power, retrenchment, reduced patronage of customers. Political economic theory is used to explain the influence of governance on the lives of poor urban women.

Furthermore, Feminism is used to explain the study. Feminism is a diverse collection of groups aimed in one way or the other at advancing the position of women. Feminist agree that something is amiss in the treatment of women – what Betty Friedan(1963) memorably described as a problem without a name. Feminism is not only a set of belief but also a set of theoretical constructions about the nature of women's oppression and the part this oppression plays within social reality more generally (Stanley and Wise 1983). Feminist approach is used to explain the aspect of women's vulnerability in Nigeria. This theory points out that women's exclusion and subjugation lies within patriarchy and that it is manmade and can be changed. It points out further that the more difficult situation being endured by urban poor women is grounded in the social system, which accords a man a higher status in society than a woman.

3.   Women and politics

Women's equal rights are extensively treated in international instruments including conventions, resolutions and declarations. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) refers implicitly, through its articles 2 and 21, to women's governance rights. The same applies to the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966) in articles 2 and 25. The Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW 1979) treats women's governance rights explicitly in article 7, while the Beijing Platform for Action (1995) is also explicit about this fundamental human right of women. Nevertheless, in many countries women's political, civil, social and economic status remains unequal to that of men.

In-spite of the fact that Nigeria is a signatory to these international agreements, it has not implemented these in practice. According to Arowolo and Aluko (2010), the low level participation of women in Nigerian politics is disturbing. Empirical observation have shown that women in positions of responsibilities are noted to be hardworking and firm in their decisions, still only few of them are found in such positions. Careful observation have indicated that the involvement of women in Nigerian politics is mainly at the voting and latent support levels. In 2003, out of the seven females that vied for governorship positions, none of them won, and out of twenty-six females that contested for presidency, none of them won the election. In 2003 therefore all governors were males and all Deputy Governors were males except one, Lagos State while at the Local Government level, 8 females and 744 males emerged as local Government Chairmen and women. In 2007, six females emerged as deputy

governors, none as governor, none as president, nine as senators and 25 as members of house of representative out of three hundred and sixty seats (Gender audit and IPU PARLINE database, 2003 and 2008). At all levels and all aspects of political life, women are highly marginalized.

The major issue is that governments contribute to poverty. The result of ineffective governance of urban areas is that its residents are likely to be less wealthy and that the poor among them are likely to be poorer. Government intensifies urban poverty by distorting the distribution effects on wealth production as well as net wealth, which comes into public ownership. It has been observed that government tend to favour the more wealthy and powerful with housing, roads, water supply drainage and electricity (World Bank, 1992). In Nigeria, services supplied to the rich gobble up most of the municipal budget. Government of urban Nigeria does not have a good record of providing information to the general public much less to the poor. Schmetzer (1990) found that most people did not understand land allocation processes. Often, the new urban migrants and poorly educated masses who use illegal land sub-divisions and informal housing do not even know of the existence of land use laws and building construction regulations.

Women and Poverty

According to UNICEF (2001) poverty has many dimensions including poor access to public services and infrastructure, unsanitary environmental surroundings, illiteracy and ignorance, poor health, insecurity, voicelessness and social exclusion as well as low levels of household income and food insecurity. These features, which are part of the social reality of the poor in Nigeria tend to be mutually re-enforcing, trapping the poor in a vicious circle. In a situation of poverty, women are poorer than men due to socio-cultural constraints. Akinlo (2000) describes the poor as people who lack adequate food, shelter, education and health. They face extreme vulnerability to ill health, economic dislocation and natural disasters. They are often exposed to ill treatment by institutions of the state and society and are powerless to influence key decisions affecting their lives. When they are employed, they are over worked and underpaid.

In urban areas, they are mostly found living in slums and squatter settlements, on the street and from birth to death they remain destitute. The poverty situation of Nigerian women has gone from bad to worse due to the impact of governance on them. According to World Bank (2006), 66 percent of the Nigerian population now falls below the poverty line of a

dollar a day compared to 43 percent in 1985. World Bank concluded that the wealth from oil has not feel through many sectors of the economy because poverty is still a growing problem in Nigeria, a country which is estimated to have earned 280 billion U. S. Dollars from oil in the last thirty years. Among this poor, majority are women and this has exposed the problem of governance in Nigeria.

Women, Education and employment

According to the State of World Cities (1999), at present 22-23 per cent of households in cities are headed by women and many of these women are poor. UNIFEM (2000) argues that, in both the North and South, women remain unequal to men in terms of employment opportunities, access to resources and representation. In Nigeria, there are only few women in formal labour force. Even among those in formal labour force, very few are in high ranking positions while the majority are in low paid jobs due to low level of education. Women have to cope with extra work in order to do housework and paid work making it a double burden. There are several factors that militate against women's participation in formal labour force. This include cultural practices and beliefs, low educational attainments and discrimination. According to Anugwom (2009), educational attainment is only part of the story, women are underutilized even after acquiring education. This is due to the patriarchal nature of the work place and it is a bad return on investment.

In many parts of Nigeria, women predominate in the urban informal economy where they pursue survivalist activities. The economic contribution of these women has remained largely unacknowledged and unmeasured, while the economic potential of women entrepreneurs is constrained. In many cases urban by-laws have not been up-dated to address these women's need for work in or near the home, meaning that their economic activities may contravene the law. This failure to support women's contributions can negatively affect the urban economy as a whole.

Where women lack access to and control over land and housing because they are women, this constitutes a violation of human rights, as well as contributing to their increasing poverty. Despite important recent legal reforms, women in many places in Nigeria do not benefit through increased rights to inherit property. This may be due to legal systems being inaccessible or to a preference for customary over statutory law. Property titling systems may grant title to men rather than women or simply be too costly for poor women. Oladimeji (1999) therefore suggested the need for expansion of educational opportunities for women,

later marriages and promotion of contraceptives use in order to increase women's labour force participation and consequently improve women status in Nigeria.

Patriarchal Practices and Values and the Nigerian Women

Patriarchal values and practices deserve to be discussed in this paper due to the fact that it affect everything that women do and even their life chances. In many parts of Nigeria, for instance among the Igbos, Yoruba, Ishan and other parts of Edo land, women are regarded and treated as minors as if they don't have a mind of their own. They are not even allowed to contribute during extended family discussions and if they ever contribute, no one takes them seriously. With such orientation, it is difficult to allow women to participate in decision making and any woman who ventures would not get any support from men and even women because it is somehow abnormal to the people for a woman to come out and declare her intention to vie for any political position. Also the socialization process which women undergo in Nigerian society is such that a woman should be seen and not heard, she is not supposed to air her views in public and positions of decision making are seen as public spaces and are not meant for women. As such, any woman who is outspoken or ambitious is termed unfeminine and therefore cannot be a good wife and mother.

4.   Discussion

From the foregoing, it has become obvious that urban poor women have been excluded from the entire urban life and pushed to the margin of the society. In the first place, the urban poor women do not participate in urban politics. This low representation of women in urban decision making makes it difficult for problems encountered mostly by women to be presented and tackled. Generally, women non participation in politics is mainly due to the nature of politics in Nigeria which is usually bedeviled by violence, so much money and patriarchal value systems. The violence involved in Nigeria politics makes it difficult for women to even think of being involved in politics. Also, the money involved in politics is so much that most women cannot afford it as most women are poor. Above all, the hegemonic patriarchal values which places a subordinate value on women and makes them to only be regarded as mothers and wives made it difficult for women to vie for political positions. Due to this belief and value system, any woman who shows interest in politics may not get any form of support from her husband and significant others and this discourages women immensely.

As a result of the exclusion of women in city decision making processes, they form CBO (Community Based Organizations) and NGOs (Non Governmental Organizations) and this is why most NGOs are meant for women and they are run by women in order to alleviate the problems encountered by women in their daily activities. The emergence of NGOs and CBOs in Nigeria is therefore a result of Government failure to provide the necessary amenities and help needed by poor women to meet the challenges of everyday life.

On the issue of employment and education, it was indicated that due to women's low level of education, many of them are found in the informal sector where they do petty trading and other petty jobs. These activities generate little income that is not commensurate with the amount of time and energy put into such activities. Those in formal employment are usually in low paying jobs, at the bottom of the ladder and every little policy decision affects them negatively. For instance, these were the first people to be retrenched during the structural adjustment programmes in Nigeria. Women are poorly represented in formal employment and other areas of human endeavours corroborating UNIFEM 2000 that in both the North and South, women remain unequal to men in terms of employment opportunities, access to resources and representation.

Owing to this low educational attainments and low participation in formal employment, women are made poorer and poorer by the social system and governance. This is in the sense that in education, when resources are limited, the family would ask the female child to drop out of school so that the little money would be used to sustain the male child in school. This hegemonic patriarchal value follows the girl child in her life chances throughout life. This is why in Nigeria, one sees a male professor whose immediate senior or junior sister is a complete illiterate. This is to say that the exclusion of the female from school leads to her exclusion in future life endeavours and makes her live on the margin of society from cradle to the grave. Interestingly, high educational attainment does not guarantee women employment because patriarchal value system makes it difficult for women to get employment if there are male applicants corroborating Anugwom (2009) that educational attainment is only part of the story, women are underutilized even after acquiring education.

Women's low educational attainment, low participation in formal labour force and other forms of exclusion are at the root of women's poverty and this could explain why women are among the poorest of the poor all over the world. This high level of poverty is incapacitating as many urban poor women are busy struggling for daily meal and may not have any time or resources to meddle with urban governance.

5.   Conclusion and Recommendation

The conclusion is that it is the urban poor women's low level of educational attainments, poverty and cultural values and practices that mingle together to exclude them from participating in urban governance. Due to these cultural constraints and expectation, women do not generally have the urge to vie for political positions because they already know that they would not be supported by their significant others and experience has shown that many women that have done so did it at the expense of their marriages and families. Despite an obvious presence as citizens, women stay under-represented in governing structures.

The recommendation is that direct effective affirmative programmes be directed at this group in order to solve the problems of women's poverty and low participation in politics. Such programmes includes educational and economic empowerment and this I'm sure would have very positive impact on poor urban women.

References:

Agbalajobi, D. T (2010) Women participation and political process in Nigeria: Problems and prospects, African journal of political science and International relations Vol 4(2), pp 075 - 082.

Akinlo Anthony A. (2000) Strategy For Poverty Alleviation in Nigeria. A paper presented at the National Workshop for Local Government Executives, Organized by Centre For Gender and Social Policy Studies, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria. Pp 1-11.

Aluko, Y. (2003). Formal Labour Participation of Women in Nigeria. Ife Psychologia 11 (2), 192 – 213.

Anugwom, E. (2009). Women Education and Work in Nigeria. Educational Research and Review Vol 4(4), 127 – 134.

Arowolo, D. and Aluko, S. (2010). Women and Political Participation in Nigeria. European Journal of Social Sciences, 14 (4), 584 – 598.

Friedan B (1963) The Feminist Mystique. London, Pengiun.

Oladimeji, T. (1999). Determinants of Women Employment in Urban Nigeria: The Impact of Socio- cultural Factors. Journal of Asia and African Studies Volume 34(1), 279 – 297.

Schmetzer, H. (1990) Municipal Planning and Management in Lusaka, Unpublished paper, Swidish International Development Authority, Stockholm.

Stanley,L. and Wise S. (1983) Breaking Out, Feminist Conciousness and Feminist Research. London Routledge and Kegan Paul.

UNICEF (2001). Women and Children's Rights in Nigeria: A Wake up Call, Situation Assessment and Analysis.

United Nations Development Fund for women (UNIFEM) (2000).The conditions of women in Nigeria.

World Bank (1992) Urban Policy and Economic Development. An Agenda for the 1990s, World Bank, Washington D.C.

World Bank, 2006. Nigeria Country Brief. Retrieved from http: //web world bank.org website/ external/ countries/africaext/Nigeria extn/0, menu PK:141107-the site PK:368896.00.html.