



Assessment of the Role of Shuwa Arab Women in Politics and Administration in the Civil Services since Independence

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Abstract

This research study evaluated the various contribution of Shuwa Arab women towards the development of Borno in particular and Nigeria as a whole. Their contributions in politics and administration in the civil services is x-rayed and their developmental role is clearly expressed at both state and national level. Women empowerment could not have been possible without the foundation being laid down by the first generation women that sacrificed their lives and time to make it a walkover for the present day women generation in struggle for women liberation. Sources were drawn from both primary and secondary data. Interview and phone calls represents the primary data for this study. While extracts from text book, magazine and Archival materials delineate the secondary data obtained. The study dwelled on Shuwa Arab women in politics and administration in the civil services being the borne of contention in this research study and therefore gives much emphasis on Shuwa Arab women's contribution in politics and administration in the civil service.

Keywords: Assessment, Shuwa Arab, Women in Politics, Administration, Civil Services, Independence

Introduction

By October 1960, Nigeria had gained her Independence from the colonial administration, and became a Republic by 1963. The Independence marked the beginning of yet another long journey in the political structure of the country. There have been various transitions, from the initial civilian administration to the various military interruptions and to the recent return to civilian rule. Nigeria today, operates a federal political structure, under a democratic civilian administration.

Nigeria's development since pre-colonial times, recorded various tangible contributions by women- politically and other wise. Various studies, literatures and oral accounts show that women have overtime contributed socially, economically and politically to the development of Nigeria although not much attention is or has been paid to these various contributions. Traditionally, it was uncommon to have women coordinating their clans as they were just seen as advisers to the clan heads who were usually the men. Women were in charge of farming within the family, and women were prominent in the area of trade. Oral accounts recognized such figures as Madam Tinubu, Moremi, amongst others in the Western region, who was a powerful business woman even at the time of colonial rule. In the area of politics, there were female rulers, female warriors, cabinet members- the queens and *erelus*' who were special advisers to the king, priestesses and other custodians of traditions.



Women and Politics in Colonial and Post-colonial Nigeria

The era of Colonialism for Nigerian women was the era of inactivity especially in politics. This is because the administration brought with it the assumptions of ‘European patriarchy into Nigerian society’. Colonialism in many ways was biased against women and their advancement in the society because most of the ‘legislation concerning women attempted to control them, their sexuality and fertility’ and in many ways defined their subordination and the restrictions placed on them changed their positions in indigenous societies.

It has been argued that the origin of structures of inequality that has led to discrimination against women became more prominent in the colonial era with the promotion of predominantly male dominated social systems.¹ Although structures of inequality existed in the pre-colonial times no doubt, however they were institutionalized as new legal structures under the colonial rule. At this time, women were marginalized in various aspects- economically, with the denial of access to loans, educationally by predetermining their school curricular and ensuring that girls enroll for things like domestic science as against other skill enhancing courses.

A major adverse effect of colonialism on women was glaring in the area of politics. First and foremost, women were denied their franchise and as such the political field was completely dominated by men, women had little or no power to take part or contribute in this field and this was the case for years until the 1950s. By the 1950s at the height of the clamor for independence, very few women were offered political or administrative appointments. The major reason given in this regard was that the colonial authority simply refused to acknowledge and interact with female office holders or women associations and as a result they faded into the background. Secondly, it was only at this time- 1950s that women in the South were granted their franchise while- women from the North were still denied franchise until 1978. Nonetheless, three women to be exact were appointed into the House of Chiefs and they are Chief (Mrs) Olufunmilayo Ransome kuti (appointed into the Western House of Chiefs); Chief (Mrs) Margaret Ekpo and Janet Mokelu (both appointed into the Eastern Nigeria House of Chiefs).²

Furthermore, Badmus argues that although women did not have their franchise and as such did not contribute much within the political parties, they were still a force to be reckoned with outside the parties either in support of the various parties or just fighting for women’s rights. For example, Mrs. Ransome-Kuti independently organized women’s revolt against taxation and other policies unfavorable to women in Abeokuta. She also supported Mrs. Ekpo who was also fighting against unfavorable colonial policies in the Eastern part of the country. These revolutions later transcended the various regions into the federation of Nigeria with the mandate of bringing to the fore women’s position in Nigerian society.³ There were also other women who mobilized to support the political parties-the likes of Chief (Mrs) Bolarinwa and Alhaja Humani Alaga and others who fought for the enfranchisement of the Northern women- prominent in the area was Hajiya Sawaba Gambo.

¹ The Gardian Newspaper of 16th August 2009.

² S.A. Attoe (2002) “Women in Nigerian politics” the way forward. Free world publishers Ltd. P 25.

³ O. badmus (2006) “ Women in the Move in contemporary politics” Revolutionary publishing Ltd. P 18

This is an indication that some socio-cultural principles not only define the position of women within the society but also the way the women view and project themselves. It points to the fact that despite the Women's aspirations to step out of the shackles of subordination, they still desire to conform to societal dictates. They still want to command certain social 'respects' which could be a form of handicap when they have to shine in a male dominated arena like in-politics.

From a feminist point of view one can argue that society especially a male dominated one, set these values to ensure, for example, that no matter the achievements of these women, there would always be that sense of being under the control or protection of a man. In other words, they can never be true competition for their male counterparts, and this could be a contributory factor to the degree of women's participation and representation in politics today.

The colonial era could be considered the most uneventful period in areas of women's participation and representation in politics, despite the fact that there were records of women resistance for example, the Aba Women's riot of 1929. The lack of recognition at this time can also be said to have contributed to the state of women participation in politics today especially in political parties. This is because, this era marks the formation of political parties as well and because of the inactive role of women at this time, these parties were formed without any visible role played by women.⁴

Although these parties were formed out of cultural organizations which ideally recognizes women, the outcome was not the case as the colonial orientation had somehow distorted the perception and position of women in the country. At this time, the country could not boast of any prominent female nationalist and as can be expected the so called Women's wing of the pioneer political parties possessed little or no functional relevance.

Women and Politics in the First Republic

Post-colonial Nigeria simply refer to the time of her independence, the beginning of self- rule through to the present. For women, the initial stage of this period was, "the period of awakening because it marks the stirring of women from their seeming slumber in the political arena". This awakening in many ways has been linked to the restoration of franchise to women in some parts of the country. Though at this time women had begun to showcase their abilities yet again especially in politics, the results was far from satisfactory. At this time, women were behind in education, economically and socially. The legal system adopted from the colonial times did nothing to improve the situation of women in the country's development.

In the First Republic, the participation of women in politics was very minimal in terms of involvement in policy making and political appointments. Attoe⁵ notes that this was the case despite the support of various women organizations like the market women amongst others for the various political parties. With the granting of franchise to women in some regions, by 1960 they started showing interest to be part of the new government. Mrs. Esan from the West became the first female member of the federal parliament, by 1961 Mrs.

⁴ K. Yusuf (1985) "Politics in Colonial Nigeria": women's Contribution towards the political aspiration in the society, p 23.

⁵Op. Cit. S.A. Attoe (2002), P 27.



Ekpo also became a member of the Eastern Nigeria House of Assembly until 1966. Mrs. Mokelu and Miss Ekpo A. Young also won seats in the Eastern House of Assembly.⁶

By this time, in the North women had no say as they were still denied franchise because of the strict Islamic beliefs of the people. These beliefs enforced various practices that restrict women from public role, for example, such practices as women seclusion ‘Purdah’ was very common at the time. Notwithstanding, there were agitations in support of women and the likes of Hajiya Gambo Sawaba led the fight for the emancipation of Northern women. Given the level of women’s involvement at this time plus the level of awareness in the area of women’s rights, these aforementioned pioneers faced a lot of challenges in politics mostly from ‘unsympathetic men who regarded them as troublemakers’.

Shuwa Arab Women in Nigeria’s Political Development

Shuwa Arab women did not play much significant role in the political process of their state as many of them are apathetic and not conscious of the political environment around them, especially the rural women and the uneducated. Few are mere spectators who only participated on literal political discussions especially rural elite women, while some are mainly used as instruments by involving them in meetings and financial contributions. Political participation has been seen as a function of certain parameters, the higher an individual position in the class structure, the greater his degree of participation in the political arena.⁷

Political participation is directly proportional to income level, occupational status and educational qualifications had been linked to both cultural and biological factors in comparing men and women. Differences in social structure, gender attitudes and gender interests have always been seen as the major reasons for Shuwa Arab women participation in politics. On traditional aspects Suma says women are traditionally believed to be keepers of the home, for that, they are restricted from participating. Economically the women are expected to perform the motherly role in their homes while husbands goes out to seek for means of livelihood.⁸

Educationally, **Suma** also maintained that fewer Shuwa Arab girls go to school and that this disparity widens at higher levels of education. The girls are subjected to early marriage especially when they reach the age of 16. For economic reasons boys are given educational training at the schools. Marriage is perceived more important than schooling for girls. She is expected to be a good home manager than going into politics. She stands the risk of losing her marriage if she acts contrary to the will of her husband. Most men do not like to marry highly educated women because it is generally believed that they don’t have respect for their husbands, in-laws and care little for home affairs and so they are perceived as not marriageable.⁹

Shuwa Arab Women in Borno Politics

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Omo Omorunyi, *Democratization in Africa, Nigeria Perspective Volume II*, P 98.

⁸ Interview with Hajiya Suma Mohammed on 7/11/2015.

⁹ Ibid.

As already noted earlier, lack of Shuwa Arab Women participation in politics was due to socio-cultural, economic factor and education. The opening of political space for the women in Borno started soon after the declaration of the years 1976-1985, as the United Nations decade for women. The declaration led to sharper international pressure on gender issues which acted as catalyst in the process of integrating women into the Mainstream of development.¹⁰

Shuwa Arab women contribution towards the political development in Borno has little significance in terms of physical development but could be seen through their various contributions towards the administrative setup in governance and smooth running of the governmental affairs of Borno State. Shuwa Arab women contribution in Borno politics have significance towards the development of the state by assisting the less privilege, such assistance could be traced during Hajja Ka'amuna Ibrahim Khadi assistance when she was a member of House of Representative. She assisted many in her constituency ranging from seeking employment and issuing capital to those who prefer running their businesses. She was considered as a grass root politician and has contributed immensely towards politics in Borno.

Many prominent Shuwa Arab women have contributed immensely in Borno politics by setting up standard such as living up to expectation of the electorate by keeping to their promises during campaign. Although most of the Shuwa Arab women that participated in Borno politics have never contested for a seat and won with the exception of Hajja Ka'anuna Ibrahim Khadi who once won a seat as a member of House of Representative. But many of them were appointed as commissioners, accountant general and Head of Parastatals within the state political circle and governance in Borno.

Hajja Yabawa Lawan Wabi is yet another Shuwa Arab woman who has contributed to national development through politics. She was born on August 26th 1962 of the family of late Mohammed Lawan, a highly disciplined civil servant and agricultural list who was one of the pioneer chief executions of the Chad Basin Development Authority. Lawan's daughters were sorted by elites and highly placed individuals years back because the ladies were regarded in Maiduguri as amongst the educated and disciplined. She attended federal government college Maiduguri where she passed out with grade a results. She also holds a second class upper degree in Accountancy from Ahmadu Bello University Zaria. She holds Member National Institute (mni), having attended the National institute for policy and strategic studies, Kuru in 2009.

Hajja Yabawa wabi was Accountant General of Borno State for four years, she was permanent secretary in the ministry of health and chieftaincy affairs in 2007 where she served until her appointment by president good lack Jonathan. She was the first in the family or serving in the federal cabinet. Since she has served as an accountant general, she attended series of federal accountant allocation committee meeting from 2003-2007, in addition to also being saddled with some responsibilities of following up allocations and payments due to Borno at the Federal ministry of finance.

Another remarkable Shuwa Arab woman who had done well in the field of politics is Hajja Inna Galadima. She was made honorable commissioner of women affairs by his

¹⁰ J.P. Dada et al, *Women Sustainable in Development*, 1976-2012, p.32.

Excellency governor kashim shettima. As a Shuwa Arab woman, she has improved and advanced the condition of women. During her tenure as a commission for women affairs her ministry and the ministry of information had worked together with non-Government organizations (NGOs) such as National Council for women societies, media network and network of traditional and religious leaders on a project called, gender project. The project is aimed at achieving gender equality and empowerment of women in the state. She is presently the commissioner for poverty Alleviation.

Factors that Hinder Shuwa Arab Women from Political Participation

Men have male role models after whom to pattern their lives. That is why it is not uncommon for the little boys to grow up saying that they want to become doctors or lawyers. But for little girls growing up in the society there is hardly any political role model. This has resulted in an uphill battle for women, since Nigeria attained independence. Added to this, are the societal attitudes that made it very difficult for women to challenge the stereotype. For decades, the political stage has been dominated by men seeking and wielding power.

In the history of Nigeria, women have not been given their fair share as torch bearers in the political arena. The oppression of women began from the colonial days and when the nationalists took over from the British, they turn out to be more oppressive to women. Those who became the movers and shakers of the system paid no attention to women issues and for those that paid attention, it was to trickle down material jobs. Nigerian politicians have only one concern- power, the ability to do work and to control people and money. Men seek this power to dominate and place women in such a position that they cannot rise above men. As long as women are to be seen but not to be heard, men do not feel threatened. The factors that inhibit Shuwa Arabs women from participating in politics include the following sexism, fund-raising, education, gender, socialization, situational constraints and political institutions.

Sexism

Sexism is one of the important factors that inhibit Shuwa Arab women from participating in politics. A large segment of Nigerian population do not feel comfortable when women choose positions that society considers unusual as their assigned sex roles. Many men will feel comfortable as long as women are seen only as an influence on men, and not as one out there on political cycle. In addition, the society denigrates women in power.

Fund Raising

In order to win elections, candidates must raise money to finance their campaigns. Here, Shuwa Arab women are constrained because they have been raised to believe a good girl does not ask for things, particularly money. Therefore, they find it unlady-like to go about asking for donors to finance their campaigns. Apart from raising money, they are also their own worst enemies because the majority of them find it difficult to support and finance

candidates on issues of general interest to women and are very reluctant to contribute money or give cheques for females running for political offices.¹¹

Education

The education of women in Nigeria's history is nothing to boast about because it does not serve to empower women. Male bias is one of the factors that has inhibited Shuwa Arab women from taking an active role in politics. This reinforced the colonial policy in Nigeria and others on females. The same bias is evident in the post-colonial era. Nigerian parents contribute significantly to female inability to shatter the "ceiling glass" in politics. Most parents believe that educating girls would amount to nothing since they would eventually get married, and leave home, while the boys will receive and carry on the father's legacy. As a result, Shuwa Arab women do not meet the necessary requirements for taking their rightful places among the Nigerian political elites. This reluctance to train Shuwa Arab women delayed their appearance on the political scene.

Gender and Politics

Shuwa Arab women joined the political fray but for reasons related to gender, they meet limited success. For example, men create a hostile climate for them in their demands. We are too familiar with slogans and warnings by male politicians of the dire consequences of women's equality, such as a soaring divorce rate, rise in illegitimacy, and the loss of African customs, which create a siege mentality for Shuwa Arab women attempts to participate in politics. Ambition is a plus for men but a liability for women. To make matters worse, women are often stigmatized and marginalized by the system.

Socialization and Politics

Socialization is also one of the Main reasons for the scarcity of Shuwa Arab women in public office. Males group up in a competitive environment. They are taught from an early age to be team players. They are accustomed to winning and losing sports, prepare for these structured groups even with people they do not particularly like. Shuwa Arab women are traditionally socialized in small play groups that emphasize co-operative rather than competition.

Situational Constraints

Many people stress the impact of situational constraints most especially motherhood. The most enduring obstacle for Shuwa Arab women in entering elite politics is responsibility for the children at home. The unpredictability of the daily schedule of Shuwa Arab women for their children may be attributed to their non-institutional participation in politics. In addition to this, they believe that politics is an unsuitable activity for them and that it is one of men's chores to be involved in politics.¹²

Shuwa Arab Women in Borno State Civil Service and Administration

¹¹Interview with Ibrahim Mohammed on 10st February, 2015.

¹² Ibid

Borno, one of the states of the Federation, lays no claim to an ordered and systematic assessment of the performance of her civil service. This becomes even more intriguing in respect to contributions considered on the basis of gender. The service as already noted is male dominated and does not seem to have the complexities of moral problems in male/female relationships common in the Federation's Public Service. However there abounds a body of opinion which tends to suggest that despite their low numbers and in spite of the performances of a few well educated and articulate women, it will be an error on a grand scale to award a pass mark to female servants in the state service. Conversely, it has been suggested by many others that women more than ever before are desirable to the service and that the civil service of Borno state would be a better service, more efficient and even more humane, if a majority of its staff were women.

A number of male critics also point to the low input of Shuwa Arab Women staff in the critical areas of the service. Apart from the highly placed, well- educated Shuwa Arab women, some of whom hold positions as professional administrators, educators, nurses, medical personnel and some as judicial officers, there is an unusually high number of Shuwa Arab women, trained and available for employment in non-crucial areas. For example, one of the major difficulties facing the state teaching service is the excess production of female teachers with qualifications in home economics. Given the fact that a good number of these women are married and that preference is often given to such women in matters of postings, it is not surprising that there is an over-supply of home-economics female teachers and civil servants in Maiduguri, the state capital. This of course entails sacrificing the general good of the state for individual needs.

The preference for posting to urban locations is a general Nigerian phenomenon. Workers want to be posted to places with a constant supply of electricity, water, good roads and regular transportation facilities, among other things. The generally crowded urban centers are therefore conceived as ideal and convenient places to work. This leads to a situation in which those in authority seek to control or influence not only appointments, promotions and discipline, but postings as well. There are many Shuwa Arabs women in Borno State civil service prominent among them include: Hajja Hamra Imam, Hajja Ammuna Ibrahim Ali, Hajja Gona Abdullahi, Hajja Maryam Bukar Petrol, Hajja Habiba Wakil, Hajja Inna Galadima, Hajja Hadiza Wali, Hajja Zara Wakil, Hajja Fatima Daggash, Fatime Idriss Bultu, Hadiza Ali Shuwa, Mahsin Muhammad, Hadiza Abdulkarim.

Conclusion

A good many people, mostly women within and outside the Borno State civil service, think that these observations are biased, and largely untenable. With regard to what is considered the low general productivity of Shuwa Arab female civil service staff in Borno, a very highly placed Shuwa Arab female civil servant in the state said that most educated working women are not unaware of the prejudices and misconceptions about the adequacy and competence of Shuwa Arab female staff in all aspects of public endeavors. She argues that this has led to a situation where the women strain themselves towards giving dedicated, competent service when called upon to perform any task, but that notwithstanding, Shuwa Arab Women have added value to the development of the nation generally when taking into consideration the contributions made at both State and National level.



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