

**Research Article****PUBLIC RELATIONS: AN EFFECTIVE TOOL FOR GENDER EQUALITY AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

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Abstract

Public relations as “An Effective Tool for Gender Equality and National Development” have received much attention from authors, researchers, practitioners and the society. Gender equality is disparity in access to opportunity to contest election or appointment into various positions of governance in Nigeria. Gender disparity is created and widened in most developing countries not only by economic circumstance but by the forces of culture. The objective of this study is to investigate public relations as an effective tool for gender equality and national development with focus in South-East, Nigeria and to what extent women have been discriminated in governance. It was observed that these women are discriminated against in governance. Existing data and survey methods were employed in the collection of the data. It was further observed that women were not given equal opportunity to participate in the mainstream of governance and decision-making positions but merely seen as second class citizens. This study therefore, shows the extent of gender bias and discrimination in the country. These findings were exhaustively discussed and recommendations made to minimize the gap.

Keywords: Public Relations, Gender Equality and National Development.

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria as a patriarchal society is a developing country and faces gender discrimination as well and men are in the forefront of every position of governance. Some of the new approaches to peace-building and good governance, place much emphasis on gender uniqueness in the process of conflict resolution. A United Nations report (1994) argues that the majority of persons displaced by war are women and that they could therefore play an important role in efforts to resolve conflicts. The mothers serve as a uniting force in families and take care of the children during times of conflict. The Gender and Development (GAD) approach focuses on the social, economic, political and cultural factors that determine how women and men can participate and benefit from development. There is also an attempt to transform the underlying structural constraints. Nigeria, for instance, is already involved in gender mainstreaming. It ratified the convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women in 1985 and is currently domesticating the convention. The creation of the Ministry of Women Affairs, the formulation of the National Policy on women and the establishment of special units at the Federal, State and Local Government levels attest to government's commitment to gender equality and social justice. However, there has been no deliberate attempt to make the sector gender sensitive. If women are the most vulnerable in any problem, then women should be involved at every level in the decision-making process. Huyer and Sikoska, (2003) stated that in patriarchal societies where men are dominant figures in decision-making, women are not in the forefront of development efforts, and therefore face more challenges in embracing innovations.

They maintained that because of gender stereotype women are rarely in decision-making positions in governance where men dominate in management. According to Tarasiewicz (2004) most societies have promoted and favoured men in education and training, and have denied women of equal opportunities with men to access productive resources and benefits. Men believed that the needs and purpose of women in the society consist of reproduction and domestic duties. These cultures value males highly and focus attention on their education, health and income-generating capabilities. Women take second position in the home, have little or no access to education, set limited goals for themselves, and can only develop fewer skills used outside the home, thus leaving most rural women illiterate. The role of women in the globalization of leadership position in governance is the focus of this study, whether their roles were such that could enhance women empowerment or such that made them mere employees who work just to earn a living. Gender differentiation is well pronounced in patriarchal societies where a group of individuals have been tagged and groomed to be the decision-makers for another group considered inferior, weak and subordinate (Gailey, 1987). The invocation of cultural beliefs, values and the maintenance of the status quo keep the decision-making group at the top. Unfortunately, in Nigeria and in many societies, women are considered weak, while the men are the decision-makers. The findings of this study will add to existing literature and also an effort to make the fruits of equity and equal opportunities on gender issues for national development.

Statement of the Problem

Nigerian government has initiated a lot of policies and programmes to address the issue of gender disparity in Nigeria governance. However, the study observed that much has not been achieved to eliminate the gender disparity. It is expected that government will adopt international best practices by

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giving women equal opportunities in leadership positions and decision-making process in Nigeria. The problem however, is that despite the programmes introduced by the government to effect positive behavioural change in gender equality in Nigeria, the injustice on disparity continue to exist. Another problem is ineffective way Nigerian political actors view women in decision-making. This gap reveals that there is a lot to be contributed by women, if the issue of gender disparity is eliminated in governance in Nigeria. Developed countries have adopted the use of public relations tools to change negative perception to positive situation. In South-Eastern Nigeria, women are politically handicapped. The majority of political office holders and decision-makers in the South-East in particular and Nigeria in general are men. The wrong perception that politics is a man's game has created the wrong idea on political actors. Politics should be viewed as a tool for capturing, sustaining and managing the affairs of the society. This issue of gender equality and synergy will contribute to the realization of United Nation's sustainable development goals on gender equality (2014). However, previous studies on gender discrimination did not dwell on the effect of public relations tool on gender equality in Nigeria. It is against these backdrops, that the researchers seek to investigate the effect of public relations as an effective tool for gender equality and national development in Nigeria, with a view to recommending approaches that will close the gap in line with international best practice.

Objective of the Study

The objectives that guided the study were:

From the introduction, there are evidences to how public relations as an effective tool has significant role to play in gender equality and peace in all sectors of the Nigerian economy for national development. We should therefore, look into the following specific objectives:

1. To determine the level of women participation in governance in Nigeria.
2. To determining the level of women involvement in decision-making and execution.
3. Finally, to determine how effective public relations can be in gender equality and national development.

Significance of the Study

Both government and society will benefit from the findings of this study. Men and women should have learnt a lot and thereby be in a position to have synergy in the governance. It is hoped that the study would add to the existing literature and also act as raw materials for anybody who would like to do more work in this area in future. Generally, it is intended to serve as a contribution to knowledge.

Theoretical Underpinning

Researchers over the years have made attempts to understand why gender disparity is applied in governance, but have not been able to reach any deep conclusions. To some researchers, gender disparities are not an issue to them. Furthermore, men believe that exposing women in governance will distract them from domestic duties. Gerbner (2002) stated that these actions of gender disparity are symbolic expression through which people structure their social and cultural world. A system of

relevance provides the framework of meaning in terms of how people view themselves and interpret others.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Public relations in Nigeria have had a relatively long history but less activity. The literature available for review in this sensitive area of management is numerous. According to Black (1995) public relations practice is the planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain good will and mutual understanding between an organization and its publics. He further noted that public relations are not fire brigade responses but should be an integral part of corporate strategy and forward planning. Jefkins and Yadin (1998) stated that public relations is about creating understanding through knowledge, and this often involves effecting from negative attitude to positive change. They further noted that public relations is therefore a form of communication. It applies to every sort of organisation, or non-commercial in the public or private sector. According to Ogunsanya (1991), modern public relations has assumed the position of a scientific management function which involves the creation, building and maintenance of mutual understanding and respect between government and its public based on truth, using effective two-way communication, and strategic management agenda to enhance performance of corporate institutions or government and the social and economic development of the society. The United Nations Development Programme (1986) defines gender as the qualities associated with men and women that are socially and culturally, than biologically determined. Gender includes the way in which society differentiates appropriate behaviour and access to power for women and men. Although the details vary from society to society and change overtime, gender relations tend to include a strong element of inequality between women and are strongly influenced by ideology.

Gender is often seen as loosely synonymous with sex and lazily synonymous with women. However, Scott (1986) argued that gender is not only seen as a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived difference between the sexes but also as a primary way of signifying relationship of power. There are two major perspectives that cannot be ignored; feminist theory could be defined as theorizations of women's oppression. While gender studies can be defined as investigations into the ways that sex and sexuality become power relations in society. Here, sex and sexuality means male and female and sexuality as in sexual behaviour. These identities or perhaps identity claims are the real stuff of the asymmetrical social relationships that we have inherited. Gender can change, if there is a major social change in the value system because it varies from society to society. But, unfortunately, it has persisted through history, especially in Nigerian environment, which is our focus. In many countries men and women have unequal access to education and a lack of financial resources on the part of women. This difference creates inequalities in engagement with these appointments between men and women (Huyer & Sikoska, 2003). In patriarch societies, men are in the forefront of development and therefore, key players to decision making. Women, on the other hand, are saddled with reproduction and family management responsibilities which rarely expose them to governance. (Epodoi, 2003; Tarasiewicz, 2003), stated that other factors responsible for gender inequality in the developing countries, have been identified to include less access to financial resources.

Nigerian Feminism

The Nigeria feminist approach differs radically from the western forms of feminism with which we have become familiar since 1960s. Nigeria women's resistance to western hegemony and its legacy within Nigerian culture have largely shaped this brand of feminism. Women have experienced marginalization in the capitalist-oriented transition of these societies to independence fraught with economic dependence. During economic restructuring and democratization, male politicians have sought to convince women that their interest were served by the current politicians, while at the same time they deny women additional benefits. This has pushed women toward greater boldness in addressing the economic and political elements that determine and affect their status in societies that have distinct cultural traditions and historical experiences.

Public relations as an effective tool for gender equality and national development

We have mentioned earlier in this paper that gender studies are usually inaccurately equated to women's studies. In almost all societies, especially most of African countries, the female gender are usually referred to as the other gender or the weaker gender. On the basis of this classification, women have been given the crumbs from the master's table. Who are these masters? These masters are the men, who have appropriated the position of leadership of the society. Such appropriation has led to unequal treatment of both genders. If the essence of strategic public relations is mutual accommodation to help our complex, pluralistic society to reach decision and function more effectively by contributing to mutual understanding among groups and institution, as stressed by Yusuf (2000), then strategic public relations functions start before the decision-making stage, when attitudes toward the issues are being formulated. It will be tempting to say that strategic public relations is the engine-room of development and bastion of ideas which could improve the growth of a nation through gender equality and management of economy. Indeed, meaningful strategic public relations functions can provide an effective platform for gender equality in Nigeria. Also, strategic public relations functions create an atmosphere in which both parties can meet as persons with gender equality and work together for national development.

Communication plays vital roles with which peace and harmony can be achieved. Therefore, the role of public relations is borne out of an organized practice of communication designed to inform, educate and effect change by using all available tools of the trade to encourage gender equality and peace for national development. As a development tool, Odukamaiya (2000) noted that communication is very vital to the survival of every system integration, socialization, and change when it becomes necessary. His expertise in communication could be used to discourage gender discrimination in our systems which view women as inferior in the leadership position. Perhaps, public relations practitioner should use his expertise in communication to kill class syndrome, which has, clearly manifest itself in Nigeria today. If through his expertise the class syndrome is eliminated, peace will become reality for national development. Strategic public relations functions must be pointed out, it will be very useful in the settlement of the confusing situation that is causing problem in gender equity. In

addition, public relations is crucial and very important in effecting a change in the structure, habits, perception which is suspicious, for even development and growth of all sectors of the Nigerian economy. These functions must also be contextualized with the level and pace of our national development. As an agent of change, strategic public relations are key concept capable of complementing development efforts. As an educator, informer, and catalyst, strategic public relations through their practitioners must be seen as reservoirs of equity and knowledge because the success and progress of any nation depend on how meticulous practitioners perform their duties and how such efforts are allowed to be properly executed in line with the ethics of the profession, thereby propelling the country to greater heights. For as long as public relations is relegated to the background in the area of gender equality there will ever be gaps in the management of gender participation in decision-making and governance in Nigeria. From the above, there are evidences to show that public relations has significant roles to play in gender equality and national development.

METHODOLOGY

The researchers used the survey research design. The researchers chose two states in the South-east, Nigeria. These two states, Anambra and Imo were chosen because of their high number of Local Government Areas and population in the South-east. The population of the study consists of twenty (20) Local Governments, 10 each from the two states selected for the study. The sample consists of 587 people between the ages of 18 and above. For the purpose of this study, the researchers used stratified sample technique. The respondents were selected randomly from a stratified sample of twenty (20) Local Government Areas. Both secondary and primary data were used. (600) Six hundred copies of the research instrument (questionnaire) were administered to the Local Government Areas in Anambra and Imo States. Five hundred and eighty-seven were returned that were related to the research questions, while (13) thirteen instruments were not returned. The data were analysed on tables. These tables have information on different categories of gender in governance in each Local Government Area, as well as total number according to gender for each category. The data in these tables will help to determine how far the roles of women in these Local Government Areas are in conforming with the on-going international best practice or effort to create gender equality in governance.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data contained in Table 1 and Table 2 were combined and analysed to show totals of different categories of Local Government Area gender in governance and the percentages of the total number that belong to each category. Table 3 contains the summary of gender disposition in the twenty Local Governments Areas that were surveyed. The data above shows that out of 587 respondents in the twenty Local Governments Areas surveyed, 397 were males (67.6%) while 190 (32.4%) were females. The make-up of respondents by categories shows 40 people occupying high profile positions of governance. A total of 8 (20%) of them were women, while 32 (80%) were men. These Local Government Areas have special assistant support staff, which ensures that the council areas are in working order.

Table 1. Gender distribution in the ten (10) local governments in Imo state

L.G.A	Respondents 18-35 years		Respondents 36-50 years		Respondents 51 years and above		No of Respondents By gender		Total No. of gender
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	
Owerri Municipal	0	3	4	8	12	3	16	14	30
Ideato North	1	3	2	8	15	3	18	14	32
Aboh Mbaise	0	2	2	3	13	0	15	5	20
Ehime Mbano	0	1	3	1	11	2	14	4	18
Ikeduru	0	2	3	3	17	2	20	7	27
Mbaitolu	1	0	3	0	6	2	10	2	12
Ngor Okpala	2	2	6	2	38	4	46	8	54
Oguta	2	1	6	1	18	3	26	5	31
Nkwere	3	1	7	4	25	5	35	10	45
Isu	1	0	2	1	7	1	10	2	12
Total	10	15	38	31	162	25	210	71	281

Table 2. Gender distribution in the ten (10) local governments in Anambra state

L.G.A	Respondents 18-35 years		Respondents 36-50 years		Respondents 51 years and above		No of Respondents By gender		Total No. of gender
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	
Awka South	2	0	4	1	23	8	29	9	38
Onitsha North	1	1	4	2	12	5	15	10	25
Nnewi South	1	0	4	2	18	3	20	8	28
Njikoka	1	0	4	2	20	3	22	8	30
Aguata	1	1	5	2	9	4	12	10	22
Anambra East	1	0	3	1	9	1	10	5	15
Idemili North	1	0	3	2	10	2	12	6	18
Ihiala	1	0	5	3	25	2	28	8	36
Orumba North	1	0	7	3	29	4	32	12	44
Ogbaru	2	1	6	5	29	7	15	35	50
Total	12	3	45	23	184	39	190	116	306

Table 3. Summary of gender distribution in both Imo state and Anambra state

L.G.A	M	F	Percentage		Total Categories
			Male	Female	
High Profile Positions	32	8	80.00	20.00	40
Management Cadre	94	43	68.6	31.4	137
Special Assistants	346	64	84.4	15.6	410
Total No. of Gender	397	190	67.6	32.4	587

The survey shows that out of a total of 137 of special assistant support staff, 94 or 68.6% were male while 43 or 31.4% were female. The above analysis shows that more men than women work in the surveyed Local Government Areas. The men also occupy more positions than women. The culture in a patriarchal society such as Nigeria emphasizes the reproductive and home management role of women and does not provide them equal opportunities to develop their potentials.

Interpretation of Results

The first research question sought to know whether these Local Government Areas provide equal access to management positions to men and women in Nigeria. Equal access as used in this study would mean opportunities to occupy high profile positions in governance. They are 587 respondents in the sampled Local Government Areas, comprising 397 men and 190 women. Men in Nigeria by virtue of their roles and expectations in the society are in the forefront of development and key players in decision-making (EPOdoi, 2003). Both men and women in Nigeria work in those areas of interest that agree with their role and expectations in society. The second research question in this study was whether; Local Government Areas in Nigeria provide equal access to decision-making positions and processes in their governance to all genders. The data collected shows that men are more than women in these sampled Local Government Areas.

Men occupy (32) out of (40) management positions, and (94) out of 137 special assistant support positions leaving (8) management positions and (43) special assistant positions to women. Apparently the paucity of women in management positions and special assistant support positions arises from the fact that most women are not taking political positions serious in Nigeria, probably because of their cultural believe which defined gender roles and expectation in the society that makes them feel that governance has more to do with men than women. This finding is supported by an earlier observation by Huyer (1997) that African women feel some discomfort with political positions. These barriers need to be removed in order to accommodate gender equality, otherwise the role of women in these Local Government Areas will continue to be that of employees working for their employers for an agreed wage, and making little or no impact on the empowerment of women. The twenty Local Government Areas surveyed unemployed 410 special assistants, consisting of 346 male (84.4%) and 64 female (15.6%). Also, the survey shows that out of a total of 137 of such special assistants engaged, 94 or 68.6% were male while 43 or 31.4% were female. This study shows that the South-Eastern part of Nigeria has a total of 95 Local Government Areas. These Local Government Council/Areas are headed by a Chairman or Chairperson. The research shows that only 6 out of the total number of 95 Local Government Areas are headed by women, while 89 Local Government Areas are headed by men. The 6 women represent a mere 6% of the chief administrators, while a whopping 94% of them are

men. This is a clear disadvantage to gender equality in political geography of Nigeria.

Conclusion

This paper has examined issues around gender equality and national development. Also, the study looked into the effectiveness of public relations as a tool to achieve gender equality and peace. It submits that since men and women are involved in gender equity and national development, they should be equally represented in its making and implementation. A situation where there is a preponderance of men in the policy-making hierarchy leaves much to be desired. This paper therefore, advocates affirmative action in favour of women in decision-making and national development. It is opined that the effective use of public relations tools will change the wrong perception and eliminate Gender discrimination in all sectors of Nigeria economy.

Recommendations

From this study, the ineffective professional responses by the public relations practitioners in Nigeria have been a problem in the gender equity and national development. In this circumstance, the Following recommendations are made for improvement:

- 1) Public relations experts should ensure that gender equity is maintained in the political space as soon as possible, to all stakeholders without partiality or gender discrimination by using the tools of the profession.
- 2) Public relations professionals should encourage education and literacy training for women as a primary goal to achieve gender equality in Nigerian society for national development.
- 3) Public relations expert should organize educational programmes, gender awareness-raising workshops and public advocacy campaigns. The objectives are to rally women together and demonstrate that their mass participation in politics and governance can transform a culture of bad leadership into good leadership.
- 4) Public relations consultant should also initiate short to medium term programmes aimed at building the capacities of women to participate in the decision-making process.
- 5) Finally, public relations managers should ensure that more intensive and systematic work are to be done in the area of documentation in order to generate useful data as regard gender relations in decision-making in all the sectors of Nigeria economy. Such data are needed for effective implementation, monitoring and evaluation of gender-equity for effective mainstreaming. It is only monitoring that stakeholders in gender equity and peace process can identify problems and issues that need to be addressed with respect to women's distribution and equity issues. Therefore, a conscious effort has to be made by public relations expert to collect relevant data on the involvement of men and women in the decision-making process for national development.

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