

IMPACT OF MASS MEDIA IN THE MOBILISATION OF RURAL WOMEN FOR EQUITABLE POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND REPRESENTATION IN THE THREE SENATORIAL DISTRICTS OF KWARA STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

An active participation and equitable representation of women in political activities is essential to building and sustaining a strong, egalitarian and vibrant democratic society for sustainable development. Similarly, the meaningful participation and representation of women in national, state and community leadership roles have become an important focus on gender studies and global development policy. There is no gainsaying the fact that women's active political participation and equitable representation is capable of promoting and advancing dividends of democracy including a greater responsiveness to citizen's needs, increased cooperation across party lines, ethno-religious barriers and a more meaningful growth and sustainable development. What more, women's active participation and representation in politics advance gender equality and affect both the range of policy issues that get considered in line with the types of solutions that are proffered and implemented. But be that as it may, the level of women participation and equitable representation in the political arena in Nigeria's democratic process has been adjudged by some studies and scholars as grossly inadequate when compared to their male counterparts. This research work therefore examined the "Impact of Mass Media in the Mobilisation of Rural Women for Equitable Political Participation and Representation in the Three Senatorial Districts of Kwara State Nigeria". The study explored some selected communities of certain local government areas in the three senatorial districts of Kwara State in an attempt to identify some of the factors militating against the active participation and equitable representation of rural women in the Nigeria political terrain. The study was conducted using the descriptive survey method with two hundred adult women in each of the two selected under developed local government areas of the three senatorial districts of Kwara Central, Kwara South and Kwara North of Kwara State Nigeria making a total of one thousand two hundred adult rural women. The study revealed that though the mass media through various programmes create the avenues for the mobilisation of rural women for political participation but various factors militate against their equitable representation in democratic process and governance. Some of these identified factors ranged from illiteracy, cultural and traditional practices, religion, attitudes and gender stereotypes, lack of access to adequate health care system, domestic responsibilities and the disproportionate effects of poverty and wealth distribution.

Keywords: Mass Media, Mobilisation, Rural Women, Political Participation, Representation.

Introduction

The full and equitable participation and representation of women in public life is essential to building and sustaining a strong and vibrant democracy. Accordingly the meaningful participation and representation of women in national, state and community leadership roles has become an important focus on global development policy. Still, some may ask why it makes any impact for women to become political leaders, elected policy makers or civil society activists. Why does the world need more women to be involved in all aspects of the political process? There is no gainsaying the fact that women's political participation and representation results in tangible gains for democracy, including a greater responsiveness to citizens' needs, increased cooperation across party and ethnic lines and a more sustainable future. Women's participation and representation in politics helps advance gender equality and affects both the range of policy issues that get considered and the types of solutions that are proposed. But be that as it may, the level of women participation and representation is grossly inadequate when compared to the population of the menfolk. From the local to the global level, women's leadership, political participation and representation are limited and restricted. Women are underrepresented in leadership positions, whether in elected offices, civil service, the private sector and the academia. This problem persists despite the proven abilities of women as leaders and agents of positive change in addition to their civic rights to participate and be equitably represented in democratic governance. Historically, women have participated in political activities such as attending and speaking at public meetings and contributing to candidates but at lower rates than men. One explanation for this phenomenon according to Nicholas and Alixandra (2018) is women's under representation and low level participation in political institutions which compromises their sense of efficacy. In support of this explanation, as the number of women in government seems to increase, gender gaps in participation and representation in politics have narrowed in most modern democracies. Recently, the Federal Government of Nigeria under President Muhammadu Buhari (GCFR) released a list of forty-three (43) nominees for Ministerial appointments, for his second tenure in office, only seven out of them were women. Ever since the release of the list, there have been a myriad of public outcry and worry by so many women organisations. These women have come out in their numbers to express their dissatisfaction over the low representation of women in the ministerial list. They have also made a reference to the Nigerian gender policy on 35% affirmative action which unfortunately is not being fulfilled due to the already low number of women in elected offices after the 2019 elections.

According to the statistics carried out by NAN (2019), 2,970 women contested elections into different positions in the 2019 general elections but only sixty-seven (67) got elected across the nation. A breakdown of the elected members showed that no woman was elected as president, vice president or governor while only seven (7) were elected to the Senate, twelve (12) were elected into the House of Representatives and forty-four (44) to the States Houses of Assemblies with about eleven (11) States not having any female member. There is no doubt that the Nigerian women went to the elections with high expectations but the overall level of participation and representation of women in politics remains a cause for concern as the number continues to dwindle. The low rate of women participation in politics when compared to that of their male counterparts in Nigeria is worrisome and calls for concern, Daniel and

Faith (2013). Does it mean that women are not keen about political participation? Does it mean that there is no enabling environment and opportunities for Nigerian women to contribute their quota through political participation? How can the issue of low representation and poor participation of women in politics be tackled? It is based on the foregoing that this research was embarked upon to examine how the mass media can be utilized for the mobilisation of more women especially in the rural communities for active political participation and equitable representation in Kwara State, Nigeria.

Conceptual Clarifications

For an explicit understanding of our subject of discourse, we begin this section with conceptual clarifications of the key concepts in the study:

The Concept of Mass Media

According to Kadir, Muhammed, Raji & Sulaiman, (2015), mass media is defined as the sources of information in the various media vehicles such as newspapers, magazines, radio, television and so on, that reaches and influences large number of people from different, heterogeneous background. McQuail (2000) defines mass media as a means of communication that operates on a large scale, reaching and involving virtually everyone in a society to a larger or lesser degree. Media is the plural of medium which means a channel or vehicle through which something is carried or transmitted. In other words, mass media are channels of communication in any modern society, primarily consisting of the print, the electronic media and most recently the new media. McQuail further described the mass media as the organized means of communicating openly and at a distance to many receivers within a short space of time. The mass media are impersonal communication sources that reach large, heterogeneous and anonymous audiences. The mass media are the uniquely modern means of public communication and much of their importance lies in the fact that they are a major cause of influence on the mode of perception, thought, public discourse and political action. Due to the size and the large number of people which they can reach simultaneously and instantaneously, the mass media have tremendous impact in the society. Meanwhile, the most common platforms for mass media are newspapers, magazine, radio, television and the social media via the Internet.

Mass Media and Political Communication

Political communication is the creation and exchange of ideas and opinions between citizens, public officials, political institutions and related entities like the mass media. It includes discourse throughout the political process in local, state, national and international political systems as well as how information and rhetoric can be leveraged for political gain or to achieve political goals. Political communication is all about the dissemination of political information among and between political elites, mass media organisations and the general public. The study of political communication emerged as an important subfield of both political science and communication in the 20th Century with research focused on the influence of the news media on public opinion and voting behaviour, theories and voting behaviour, the theories of agenda setting; media framing and priming effects, the tactics and efficacy of political campaigns, the effects of negative political advertising; the discourse and deliberation among the mass public; the speeches and rhetoric for office holders; interactive relationships between the elites and mass opinion; the influence of commercial and political pressures on the content of news and political pressures on the content of news media; the

relationship between partisan polarisation, partisan media and the advent of digital media, digital communication and the new media technologies.

Mass Media and Political Mobilisation

The report by Political Bureau (1987) noted that all along human history, there were points where a massive effort was engineered to bring people together to achieve some set objectives. The report further conceptualized political mobilisation as an increase in the level of awareness, of a people, to specific set objectives intending to achieve those objectives Political Bureau, (2012). Mustapha (2016) conceptualization of political mobilisation to mean simultaneous engagement of large masses of people in activities that have a predominantly social or collective objective in the same vein, political mobilisation is opined as change in the attitudes, values, and expectation of people from those associated with the traditional word it is a consequence of literacy, education, increased communication, mass media exposure and urbanization' (Huntington, 2015), and more recently it is the consequence of social media. Hence, from the foregoing political mobilisation encapsulates the sensitization of the citizenry, increase and improvements in their political consciousness to effect change in a political process. It is the ability to emotionally organize people, which in the process breeds organic solidarity towards a course of action. Enemaku (2013) stated that, the role of the media in any democratic process cannot be downplayed. Journalists are the trustees of the public trust in any sustainable democracy. Information is power. Information is an accelerator for any meaningful development and it is adequate information that can propel or bring about sustainable democracy. In view of this, the mass media should be taken seriously. Many studies have concluded that the instruments of mass communication are useful vehicles with the potential to bring about social change and consequently development in societies where they exist.

Role of Mass Media in Political Mobilisation

It is an undisputable fact that the mass media has a very important role to play in channeling political mobilisation to serve the goal of national development. This is because the mass media is described as "a pivot of social interaction, seeking to use the power of mass information to solve the problem of national cohesion and integration, which are both critical to the growth of healthy political mobilisation" Agba, (2013). Becker, S. and Lower, E (2010) name the functions of the mass media in political mobilisation as "reporting and interpreting events, defining issues, portraying personalities, and investigating support". But the 2015 political campaign did not live up to the expected standard. The mobilisation was characterized by misuse of the media by political parties and their candidates through the publication or mass of unwholesome information passed to the public as the truth. The mass media lent themselves to most of the negative factors in Nigerian politics and became partisan. Most mass media organizations aligned with one politician, political party or one region against another. They acted as the mouthpiece of some of the political parties they are aligned with. This posture did not give room for objectivity, fairness and justice in the discharge of their responsibilities to the public. Edogbo (2016) traces this act to media ownership structure and the owner's relationship with the political system. It is widely believed that most media owners with political interests prevent their media outfits from adhering to the fundamental principles of balance, fairness and objectivity. This level of unprofessionalism is detrimental to the growth of a healthy political culture in the country. Agba (2013) is of the view that the mass media should internalize the concept of public interest in the discharge of their functions

in any electoral process. In this regard, the mass media is expected to set the pace for a healthy electoral process and also ensure they are guided by public interest. The media can achieve this by directing the goals of political campaign to the desirable goal of responsible democratic principles that recognize the sovereignty of the people's votes. Nwaozuzu (2010) advises the media to seek out relevant truths in political mobilisation for the people who cannot witness or comprehend the events that affect them. This means the media should interpret campaigns in the light of the electoral needs of the people. It is also incumbent on the media to channel the electoral process towards the desirable goal of national development. Buttressing this point, Kalu (2017) posits that "the ordinary expectation is that the mass media will focus on serious matters that portend serious consequences for the people and their political choices".

Rural Women in Political Participation and Representation

Women's involvement in politics presents different dimensions across the globe and their participation in politics and the democratic process has become an integral part of contemporary discourse on national development and governance (Ogbogu, 2012). Nigeria has been recording low participation of women in both elective and appointive positions, even after the initiation of democratic government in 1999. The mass media dominate public thinking and form a cogent force of political mobilisation. Several studies have linked the media with women's political participation in Nigeria, ascribing advocacy and mobilisation power to the media in terms of coverage of the subject and other roles the media have to play in encouraging women's participation in Nigerian politics. In a research on the role of radio in the mobilisation of women towards political participation done in Ogun State, Nigeria, by Adekoya, Akintayo and Adegoke (2015), it was discovered that radio plays a positive role in mobilising women to participate in politics and with the right contents, it can indeed become a potent medium in fostering vast developments for women in politics in Nigeria. The study also revealed that there is a strong relationship between political programmes and participation of women in politics because a good number of women listen to both the English and the Yoruba political programmes, especially the Yoruba programmes on Ogun State Broadcasting Service (OGBC 90.5FM), which was the radio station under study.

Similarly, Akanu (2015) carried out a research on the portrayal of women in the Nigerian mass media. The study surveyed how the mass media in Nigeria portray women and treat issues affecting them. The study sought to find out if women are misrepresented by the mass media, causes and consequences of negative portrayal of women by the mass media, and ways to eradicate stereotypes of women. Findings from the study revealed that 256 respondents (representing 91.4%) were of the view that women are misrepresented by the mass media while 24 (8.6%) were not. On the causes of negative portrayal of women by the mass media, a greater number of the respondents indicated that women are seen mostly as wives and mothers and thus, they are negatively portrayed in the mass media. The other causes attested to by the respondents were that women are seen as sex objects by their male counterparts, hence they are not given their rightful place in the society. This explains why women are given passive roles in organisations they find themselves because of the belief that they are naturally the weaker sex. The consequences of this negative portrayal of women by the mass media include limitation in societal/career opportunities for women, increase in the likelihood and acceptance of sexual violence in the society and loss of respect for women by the males. The respondents listed some ways by which this negative portrayal of women by the mass media can be eradicated, such as installation of legislative frames, women empowerment schemes

and providing role models to women who would encourage them to brace up against societal challenges and reduce how badly they are being portrayed by the mass media. Several researchers have conducted studies on why women are poorly represented in the politics and governance and why they do not enjoy the same political support and acceptance like their male counterparts. Iloka (2021) found that patriarchy and gender roles are major setbacks for women's participation in Nigerian politics. According to the study, the family is the main institution of patriarchy, which is an important concept in explaining gender inequality. Men have been given a higher social status over females and this reflects in state activities. The family plays an important role in maintaining this patriarchal order across generations. This goes to affirm that the mass media more often than not, mirror and project the existing discrimination against the female folk even as it affects their political involvement. This is so rooted in our system judging by the media ownership structure in Nigeria. It is often said that he who pays the piper dictates the tune. Most Nigerian mass media channels of information dissemination are owned by powerful male politicians. Media ownership has continued to play an influential role in the editorial policies of media organisations. Also, the top management of these media organisations are dominated by men. Across the media landscape, female media workers are usually under male editors and sub-editors who determine what should and should not be published or aired.

In Africa, countries like Ethiopia, Rwanda, Uganda, Mozambique, South Africa and Namibia have all recorded an increase in the number of women in their parliaments in recent years Townley, (2019). While explaining data from the Inter-Parliamentary Union, Oladapo, Atela and Agbalajobi (2021) point out that current figures for women's representation in these countries as of 2020 are: Rwanda (61.3 percent lower house, 38.46 per cent upper house), South Africa (46.58 percent upper house, 37.74 percent lower house), Namibia (43.27 percent lower house, 19.05 percent upper house), Mozambique (41.2 percent), Ethiopia (38.8 percent lower house, 32 percent upper house), and Uganda (34.9 percent). However, Nigeria's case is the reverse of the regional trend in women's participation in political leadership. In fact, women are hardly visible in the country's political narrative. A woman has never been elected president, vice president nor governor since Nigeria's independence. The highest number of female deputy governors ever attained was six out of the possible 36 elected in 2007. Since then, the number has consistently decreased (Agbalajobi, 2021). The influence of the mass media in mobilising women for political participation is enormous at varying levels. The mass media are capable of stimulating women's engagement in political activities such as registration as members in political parties, registration as voters, vying for electoral positions, campaigning for elections and electorates' management. This is because the press is more important than the three arms of government in exerting ramifying influence and great power on the daily lives of millions of people (Sanyaolu & Oni, 2017). Also, Narayana and Ahmad (2016) opine that the mass media are considered to be the most important tool of society in modern times as it has the power to reach out to a large audience. The mass media, especially the electronic and digital media, encourage the personalisation of politics by bringing the voice and faces of politicians to the homes of citizens in a consistent manner.

Table 1 –Number of Women in Elected Positions in Nigeria since 1999

Office	No.of seats available	1999	2003	2007	2011	2015	2019
		Women	Women	Women	Women	Women	Women
President	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Vice President	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Senate	109	3	4	9	7	7	7
House of Rep.	360	12	23	27	26	20	11
Governor	36	0	0	0	0	0	0
Dep. Governor	36	1	2	6	3	6	4
State HA	990	12	38	54	62	-	40

Source: The Guardian Online, 2018, July12 and PremiumTimes Online, 2019 April 20

Statement of the Research Problem

The low level in the active participation and equitable representation of rural women in the Nigerian political terrain has no doubts become a subject of controversy, debate and public outcry. This is as a result of the effects on women in particular and the society at large. The role of women in nation building cannot be over-emphasised as women have been adjudged by many scholars and observers as help mates to the men folk; an observation which is aptly captured in the popular saying that “the hand that rocks the cradle rules the world”. But this quite unfortunate and a disservice when the womenfolk are deliberately denied the opportunity of contributing meaningfully to nation building through active political participation and equitable representation. At the 2011 United Nations General Assembly resolution on www.unwomen.org, it was noted on women’s political participation that women in every part of the world continue to be largely marginalized from the political sphere often as a result of discriminatory laws, cultural and traditional practices, attitudes and gender stereotypes, bias, low levels of education, lack of access to maternal and family health, family commitments and the disproportionate distribution of economic resources and poverty on women”. From the local to the international level women’s leadership potentials, political participation and equitable representation are restricted and marginalized. Women are grossly underrepresented in political appointments even after participation as voters as well as in leadership positions whether in elected offices, political appointments, civil service, the Organised Private Sector (OPS) or in the academia. Despite the proven abilities, intellectual capabilities, integrity and academic attainment of women as leaders and agents of change, added to their rights to equal participation in democracy and governance, women continue to face several obstacles towards participating in politics in Nigeria. But what can be done to salvage the prevalent situation and achieve the desired result of active participation and equitable representation of women in politics in line with the 35% affirmative action. What measures can be put in place to ensure an improvement in the prevailing trend of low level of women in political participation and representation? This study was therefore carried out in a bid to examine the relationship between the mass media and the mobilisation of women for political participation and equitable representation in Kwara State, Nigeria. The following questions formed the bedrock for the conduct of the research study: What are the major factors responsible for the low level of women participation and representation in politics? Are the target groups aware of the existence of the mass media? To what extent can the mass media

be utilised in the mobilisation of rural women towards active political participation and equitable representation?

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to examine the relationship between the mass media and the mobilisation of rural women for active political participation and equitable representation in Kwara State, Nigeria. Other specific objectives of the study are as follows:

1. Identification of the various factors responsible for the low level of women participation and representation in politics.
2. Finding out the knowledge level, availability and accessibility of the target group (rural women) to mass media.
3. Assessment of the impact of the mass media in the mobilisation of women towards active political participation and equitable representation.
4. Examining the relationship between the mass media and mobilisation of rural women towards active political participation and equitable representation.
5. Assessment of the level of improvement in political participation and representation of women as a result of sensitisation and campaigns in the mass media.

Research Questions

Based on the identified research problems as stated above, the study is seeking to provide answers to the following research questions:

1. Do the target group (rural women) have regular access and adequate usage of the mass media?
2. Does the mass media have any impact in the mobilisation of rural women towards political participation and representation?
3. What are the factors responsible for the low level of women participation and representation in politics in Kwara State, Nigeria?
4. Is there any relationship between the mass media and the mobilisation of rural women for political and representation in Kwara State, Nigeria?
5. What is the level of improvement of women participation in politics in Kwara State, Nigeria?

Methodology

The study adopted the cross-sectional survey design in gathering the needed data pertinent to this study. The reason for this is that whenever the major source of primary data for a study depends on the views of the members of the public or any particular group, a survey is better suited for the research. The aim of survey is to provide empirical data collected from a population of respondents on which valid conclusions can be made. Therefore, research designs simply imply a comprehensive plan or blue print showing how the research will be used to solve the already identified problems. According to Ohaja (2003, p. 11) "survey is a study of the characteristics of a sample through questioning that enable the researcher to make generalization concerning his population of interest." Consequently, since the study focused on human behaviour and cognition, the survey research method adopted is more appropriate.

Population of the Study

According to Oloyede and Adejare (2012), "population can be referred to as living or non-living things; it may be people, animals or things that the study is essentially carried out to

investigate". The target population of this study was got from two selected communities from two local government areas in each Senatorial Districts of Kwara Central, Kwara South and Kwara North Senatorial Districts of Kwara State, Nigeria. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (2021), In Kwara South, Offa Local Government has a population size of 120,000 inhabitants and Ifelodun Local Government has a population size of 276,700 inhabitants. In Kwara Central, Asa Local Government has a population size of 168,300 inhabitants and Ilorin-South Local Government has a population size of 282,500 inhabitants. While in Kwara South, Kaiama Local Government has a population size of 167,400 inhabitants and Moro local government has a population size of 146,700 inhabitants.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Table 1.0 Respondents Response on Accessibility to Mass Media

Variable	No. of Respondents	Percentage (100%)
Yes	100	100
No	0	0
I can't say	0	0
Total	1200	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2022

Table 1.0 shows that the sampled 1200 respondents from Asa LGA, Ilorin South, Offa LGA, Ifelodun LGA, Kaiama LGA and Moro LGA, all in the three senatorial districts of Kwara Central, Kwara North and Kwara South of Kwara State all have access to mass media.

Table 1.1 Respondents Response on Exposure to Mass Media

Variable	No. of Respondents	Percentage (100%)
Daily	1103	91.9
Weekly	74	6.2
Once in a while	23	1.9
Never	0	0
Total	1200	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2022

Table 1.1 shows that 1103 respondents representing 91.9% of sampled population attested to the fact that they get exposed to mass media on daily basis; 74 respondents representing 6.2% of sampled population opined that they get exposed to mass media on weekly basis while the remaining least populated 23 respondents representing 1.9% indicated to only get exposed to streams of mass media once in a while.

Table 1.2 Respondents Awareness of Political Mobilisation Programme on the Mass Media

Variable	No. of Respondents	Percentage (100%)
Yes	1200	100
No	0	0
I can't say	0	0
Total	1200	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2022

Table 1.2 shows that the sampled 1200 respondents from Asa LGA, Ilorin South, Offa LGA, Ifelodun LGA, Kaiama LGA and Moro LGA, all in the three senatorial districts of Kwara Central, Kwara North and Kwara South of Kwara State attested to have been at one time or the other gotten exposed to political mobilization programme on the media.

Table 1.3 Respondents' Response on Political Programmes on how Mass Media Promotes Political Participation

Variable	No. of Respondents	Percentage (100%)
Yes	809	67.4
No	274	22.8
I can't say	117	9.75
Total	1200	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2022

Table 1.3 shows that 809 respondents representing 67.4% of sampled population affirmed that indeed political programme on the media encourages them to actively participate in politics; 274 respondents representing 22.8% of sampled population affirmed noted that political programme on the media do not in any way induce them to participate in politics while the remaining 117 respondents representing 9.75% of sampled population could not be so particular as with whether or not the media they get exposed to encourages them to actively participate in politics.

Table 1.4 Respondents' Response on Adequacy of Media Contents in Dispelling Fears in Women Electorates in Rural Areas

Variable	No. of Respondents	Percentage (100%)
Yes	138	11.5
No	760	63.3
I can't say	302	25.2
Total	1200	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2022

Table 1.4 shows that 138 respondents representing 11.5% of sampled population affirmed that indeed political media contents are adequate to dispel fears women electorates in rural areas; 760 respondents representing 63.3% of sampled population noted that political media contents are not so adequate in dispelling political fears of women electorates in rural areas while the remaining 302 respondents representing 25.2% of sampled population could not be so particular as with whether or not political media contents are adequate to dispel fears women electorates in rural areas.

Table 1.5 Respondents' Response on Adequacy of Political Contents on mass media in Influencing Inhibitions of Women electorates in Rural Areas towards Political Participation

Variable	No. of Respondents	Percentage (100%)
Adequate	607	50.8
Not adequate	102	8.5
Indifference	491	40.9
Total	1200	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2022

Table 1.5 shows that 607 respondents representing 50.8% of sampled population affirmed that indeed political contents on the media is adequate in influencing inhibitions women electorates in rural areas may have towards politics in future; 102 respondents representing 8.5% of sampled population affirmed that political media contents are not so adequate in dispelling political fears of women electorates in rural areas while the remaining 491 respondents representing 40.9% of sampled population could not be so particular as with whether or not political contents on the media is adequate in influencing inhibitions women electorates in rural areas may have towards politics in future.

Table 1.6 Respondents' Response on Adequacy of Media Contents to Dispel Fears in Women Electorates in Rural Areas

Variable	No. of Respondents	Percentage (100%)
Yes	138	11.5
No	760	63.3
I can't say	302	25.2
Total	1200	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2022

Table 1.6 shows that 138 respondents representing 11.5% of sampled population affirmed that indeed political media contents are adequate to dispel fears women electorates in rural areas; 760 respondents representing 63.3% of sampled population affirmed noted that political media contents are not so adequate in dispelling political fears of women electorates in rural areas while the remaining 302 respondents representing 25.2% of sampled population could not be so particular as with whether or not political media contents are adequate to dispel fears women electorates in rural areas.

Summary

The low level in the participation and representation of women in the Nigerian political terrain has no doubts become a subject of controversy, debate and public outcry. This is as a result of the effects on women in particular and the society at large. The role of women in nation building cannot be over-emphasised as women have been adjudged by many scholars and observers as help mates to the men folk; an observation which is aptly captured in the popular saying that "the hand that rocks the cradle rules the world". But it becomes unfortunate and a disservice when the womenfolk are deliberately denied the opportunity of contributing meaningfully to nation building through political participation and representation. Despite the proven abilities, intellectual capabilities, integrity and academic attainment of women as leaders and agents of change, added to their rights to equal participation in democracy and governance, women continue to face several obstacles towards participating in politics in Nigeria. But what can be done to salvage the prevalent situation and achieve the desired result of full participation and representation of women in politics in line with the 35% affirmative action. What measures can be put in place to ensure an improvement in the prevailing trend of low level of women in political participation and representation? This study therefore sought to examine impacts of mass media in the mobilisation of rural women for equitable political participation and representation in the three senatorial districts of Kwara State, Nigeria. The study was therefore hinged on the following objectives;

1. Identification of the various factors responsible for the low level of participation and representation in politics by rural women.
2. Finding out the knowledge level, availability and accessibility of the target group (rural women) to mass media.
3. Assessment of the impact of the mass media in the mobilisation of women towards equitable political participation and representation.
4. Examining the relationship between the mass media and mobilisation of rural women towards equitable political participation and representation.
5. Assessment of the level of improvement in political participation and representation of women as a result of sensitisation and campaigns in the mass media.

Conclusion

It is worthy of mention that the media intervention through various enlightenment campaign have truly mobilised women towards increased political participation throughout the state and country. It has been able to bring many positive changes in the status of rural women. It imbued in the rural women the qualities like the enjoyment of social economic power, self-confidence, political awareness and affirmation of identity. However, there is still a long way to go to make women empowered and politically active and participatory. The mere enactment of legislation and affirmative actions are not the solution. Representation is an important indicator of the social and political status of women. Generally, women tend to be under-represented in positions closely identified with power and predominate in administrative and service occupations as indicated by the findings. Adequate representation of women in governance is crucial to ensure that governments have more women representative in the communities they serve.

Recommendations

Having reviewed the various means through which the mass media can be channelled towards mobilisation of rural women for equitable political representation and participation, the following recommendations are hereby made:

- Participation of women in local governance should be enhanced in all three essential areas: as voters, policy-makers and as members of decision-making bodies. There is need for policies that involve empowering women to develop strategies that combine the empowerment of communities and rural women.
- In order to be able to identify the needs of the community and to boost equitable representation in governance, there is need to encourage the involvement of the community and community organizations in local governance. This will help in developing capacity of women and institutions for effective political participation and contribute to the improved economic and social outcomes in the form of poverty reduction, sustainable development and more balanced gender relations in Nigeria.
- The dominant ideology in governance should not be male-biased because under such circumstances, transformation is unlikely to take place. Male-dominated hierarchical power often purposefully excludes women's participation or devalues their contributions, creating a disabling environment for women's advancement. These

intangible informal institutional values, norms, structures, and processes are difficult to recognize and often constitute a greater barrier than formal rules.

- For women to benefit, leadership needs to become actively involved in the social transformation of patriarchal norms and values and must include women's perspectives on and participation in the transformation process. Women in leadership positions likewise need to challenge the rules and not to play by them.
- There is need for collaboration with local universities, research institutions, academia, media and women's movement in undertaking in-depth research on gender issues, challenges and coping strategies including the issues of political representation and participation and documentation of the research findings for a database of local knowledge on the subject. Such indigenous knowledge can be very useful for designing, formulating and implementing gender-sensitive policies and evaluating their impact on participation. It can also be used for identifying training needs and developing training material, besides sharing with women the contributions of their female colleagues, successful practices and lessons for improved participation.
- Fostering a more inclusive and transformative type of politics means creating a more generalized political participation. Political participation is therefore a continuing process. It is necessary to create an environment that will facilitate the election, appointment or promotion of a sufficient number of women to decision-making positions. The goal of a sufficient number refers more to a situation where it is no longer remarkable for women to be put in positions of power, rather than a specific target of say 20% or 30%. Yet this environment is not simply for producing women leaders but also to develop a new and active citizenry among women.
- A strong political will on the part of government and the leadership of political parties, business, trade and labour unions, academia and other social institutions is critical in achieving an environment conducive to promoting women's political participation. The mass media can be used to make women aware of their contribution and to expose gender inequalities. Furthermore, media work is also important to combat negative stereotypes. National institutions in many countries implement broad-based public information campaigns concerning the decentralization process. Differing starting points of women and men and between different groups of women and men, must be taken into consideration when developing strategies for public information and education. This can be done through assistance to public information campaigns through local radio stations, theatre groups or trained multipliers can be an effective tool to demonstrate to women the relevance of decentralization for their daily lives.
- Relevant issues to address are the roles and functions of local authorities as well as central government, opportunities for women to participate in local government development and decision-making processes, and the rights and responsibilities of citizens.

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