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Correspondence

Editor,
African - Diaspora Discourse, A-DD,
Institute of African and Diaspora Studies,
JP Clark Building,
University of Lagos.
08126519419.
add@iads.unilag.edu.ng

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FIVE

From the Woman Legislator to us All: Policy Making in the Lagos State House of Assembly, Nigeria

Kilelo, Helen
Moi University, Kenya

Abstract

This study sought to explore the substantive contribution of women in the Lagos State House of Assembly, Nigeria. A lot of research has been done on barriers to women's participation in governance, and advocacy on the need to bring them on board. However, little has been done on critically interrogating their policy contributions once they get to the State House of Assembly. Therefore, beyond the convention on activism of gender inclusion, this study sought to interrogate women's roles in policy formulation at the Lagos State House of Assembly. The specific objectives were: to analyze the nature of committees that women have served in the past and current Assembly; to explore on the strategies used by the women legislators in order to get support for their bills and motions; to identify the nature of policies that have been passed by women policy makers in the Lagos State House of Assembly in Nigeria and to identify the challenges faced by these women in their quest for policy formulation. This study is hinged on Nego Feminism. Both primary and secondary data were used. Primary data were obtained using a qualitative research approach. In-depth interviews were triangulated with archival data from the Hansard Reports (1999 to 2024) obtained from the Lagos State House of Assembly. Purposive sampling was adopted because of the nature of the respondents who are not easily available. Criterion sampling was used for female and male legislators in the current and past assemblies, Deputy Speaker, Clerk, Majority Leader, and political party representatives

amongst others who were then interviewed. Another criteria used was that preference was given to those who had served for more than one term. This study is unique because it takes into consideration the contributions of the women legislators in the current and past assemblies based on the perceptions of both male and female. The data were collected until saturation was achieved. In a nutshell, the findings are as follows: women legislators mainly chair “motherly committees”; women members of the State House of Assembly depend on “he’s for she’s”, social relationships and collaborations within and outside the Assembly with other actors such as NGOs are important; the policies formulated are largely welfare based and challenges are based on the numbers and time constraints. The study concludes that women’s contribution in the policy formulation exercise is largely a collaborative task that cuts across the different genders, coopts different stakeholders and extends beyond passing bills and motions.

Keywords: *Lagos State House of Assembly, Women Legislators, Bill, Motions, Policy Formulation*

Introduction

Nigeria acquired its independence in the year 1960. However, federalism was adopted in 1954 to handle the economic, political and cultural diversity of the population (Okudolo & Onah, 2019). This was achieved through the Lyttleton Constitution of 1954 (Ibid). Nigeria is therefore a Federal Republic consisting of 36 states with the Federal Capital Territory (FTC) being in Abuja. Each State elects 3 senators apart from Abuja where only one senator is elected (Demarest, 2021). The Assembly has a bicameral parliament with an Upper Chamber (Senate) and Lower Chamber (House). With single member districts, 360 representatives and 109 senators are elected every 4 years (Ibid). May 29th 1999 was significant because this is when a democratic government was

inaugurated (Kehinde & Omotoso, 2016) after a 16 year period of military rule (Ette & Akpan-Obong, 2023).

According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union (2023), Nigeria has a women's representation of 3.9 percent and 2.8 percent in the House of representatives and Senate respectively. Since the year 1999, following a transition from military to democratic rule, women participation in governance remains largely invisible with those who venture being considered as 'outliers' (Ette & Akpan-Obong, 2023) whether in the Federal, State or local government level (Tayo et al, 2021). Kelly (2019) states that a patronage-based and sexist political culture together with economic and household gender inequalities are the main challenges that affect women's engagement in politics in Nigeria. Funk and Robinson (2014) state that if women are not in the legislature, the "representativeness" of the Assembly is put into question.

As a result, gender quotas have been adopted in many countries worldwide in a bid to increase women's representation. However, research has shown that there are mixed findings in as far as engendering the legislature and policy formulation is concerned (Clayton, 2021). Further research shows that gender quotas do not necessarily lead to substantive gains especially for women (Weeks & Masala, 2022; Bouka, et al (2019). Yadav (2023) also points out that the workability of gender quotas depends on historical, political, social, cultural factors and the status of the women amongst others. This study sought to critically interrogate the substantive contribution of women in the Lagos State House of Assembly. Nigeria has no gender quota policy in place. (Ette & Akpan, 2023). Thereafter, recommendations for policy makers, practitioners and the government have been presented.

Background Information on the Lagos State House of Assembly

Nigeria constitutes 36 House of Assemblies. According to the 1999 constitution section 90 a state house of Assembly should not have more than 40 and not less than 24 legislators. The Lagos State House of Assembly is a unicameral House consisting of 40 legislators representing 20 Local Governments and a total of 37 Local Council Development Areas in the State (Lagos Legislators, 2013). The first legislative assembly was inaugurated on 2nd October 1979. Section 104 also states that a House of Assembly should sit for at least 181 days in a year. The gallery sessions take place on Monday's, Tuesday's and Thursdays. Lagos State House of Assembly is unique in the sense that they passed "A Law to Provide for the Preservation and Promotion of the Use of Yoruba Language in Lagos State and for Connected Purposes (2018)". On Thursdays' deliberations in the floor of the House are carried out in Yoruba. In addition, in the train stations, information is communicated in both English and Yoruba. Lagos State is also unique in the sense that it has had one predominant party since 1999.

Problem Statement

A lot of research has been done on barriers to women's participation in governance and advocating on the need to bring them on board (Ette & Akpan-Obong, 2023; Hadjis, 2013; amongst others). However, little has been done on critically interrogating their policy contribution once they get to the State House of Assembly. More of the research on their policy contribution has been done at the National Assembly level in Africa e.g (Andzenge, (2014); Abdelgawad and Hassan, (2019) amongst others. Therefore, beyond the convention on activism of gender inclusion, this study seeks to interrogate women's role in policy formulation at the Lagos State House of Assembly. This is the gap that this study sought to fill.

Research Objectives

The core objective of this study was to assess women's representation in governance with specific reference to Lagos State House of Assembly, Nigeria. The specific objectives were as follows:

1. To analyze the nature of committees that women have served in the past and current Assembly.
2. To explore on the strategies used by the women legislators in order to get support for their bills and motions;
3. To identify the nature of policies that have been passed by women policy makers in the Lagos state House of Assembly in Nigeria and
4. To identify the challenges faced by women in their quest for policy formulation.

Conceptual Clarification

In the context of this study, the following terms have been used: woman legislator, political representation and participation. Woman legislator refers to the women who have been elected to serve in the State House of Assembly representing different Local Governments. Political representation has been borrowed from Hanna Pitkin's elaboration of 4 forms of representation more so substantive representation that highlights the issues that women legislators present for policymaking. Participation in this context refers to the different roles of elected women in the State House of Assembly.

Literature Review

The literature reviewed in this section is drawn both from theoretical and empirical data. A lot of literature has

concentrated on studying legislatures at the national level as opposed to the sub-national level. For example, (Morse, 2021) researches on Cameroon's National Assembly between 1973 and 2019 in terms of changes in the orientation and structure; Lindberg (2010) examines how Members of Parliament cope with accountability pressures and demands from their constituents; Abdelgawad & Hassan (2019) look into the Egyptian Assembly and the Women's legislative agenda amongst others in Africa.

Kitchen (2017) in "A Study of Women Legislators and Women's Economic Development", examined the correlation between the percentage of women in the national legislatures with economic development measured using the number of women in the workforce, the number of women with a bank account and examining the Gender Development Index of the following states: Africa (Botswana, Rwanda and Kenya) and in Latin America (Colombia, Bolivia and Chile. This was done over a 20 year period between 1997 and 2017 using regression models and correlation analyses for data sourced from Interparliamentary Union and World Bank. The results were mixed in the sense that in Africa there was a positive correlation whereas in Latin America the relationship between the number of women in the National Assemblies and the economic development of women was negative.

Outside Africa, Hellwege & Bryant (2019) in an article entitled "Working Mothers Represent: How Children Affect the Legislative Agenda of Women in Congress" did a study on how motherhood influences the women legislative agenda in Congress. They found that from the 3 categories of women in Congress i.e women with children below 18, those with children above 18 and those with no children that those with children under 18, did pass the most bills on children and family followed by those with children over 18 and lastly those without children. This study covered the

period 1973-2013 and controlled for the following variables ie ideology, seniority and districts that are women friendly. However this study did not look at the specific nature of the policies besides their titles, the relation between working mothers and working fathers and how other variables would relate to motherhood such as ethnicity and race.

Literature points to the fact that although women in politics prioritize on bills that relate to women and children in some cases, in other cases this may not be the case depending on the context and other factors such as corruption and therefore results are mixed. This study therefore sought to look at the Lagos State House of Assembly which is unique by virtue of the fact that it operates under a Federal system with single member districts and with no gender quotas.

Theoretical Framework: Nego Feminism

This study is hinged on Nego Feminism. This is a framework that was propounded by Nnaemeka (2003). Nego feminism represents a “no-ego” feminism that is founded on negotiation. Negotiation in this setting involves balance, compromise, give and take, cope with or go around it.

In the case of feminism, this theory implies that the women are able to know which patriarchal contours to deal with and the best way, time and place to do it (Ibid, 2003). This is hinged on cultural imperatives and global and local exigencies that keep shifting.

This framework was the most ideal for this study as the process of policy formulation in the assemblies involves lobbying and negotiations. In Lagos State House of Assembly, the women have not had a critical mass to pass a legislation on their own. This has necessitated them to negotiate with the male legislators while

handling the patriarchal undertones that come with legislations that go against culture.

Theoretical Framework-Using an African Indigenous Lens.

In addition to Nego-feminism, this study proposes the use of an African indigenous lens by using Yoruba adages on complementarity. Cultural adages that have been used emphasize on the need of men and women working together towards their common good while recognizing that when they work together they complement each other as opposed to competing with each other. For example, the following adages are useful in this study:

Àgbájo owó la fin so àyà, owó kan kò gbé erù dé orì (we beat the chest with a clenched fist, one hand cannot lift a heavy load onto the head). This is a social relationship principle where individuals or groups are meant to complement each other, in roles and functions.

Kí á fi òtún we òsì, òsì we òtún ni owó fin mó (it is in using the right to wash the left and vice versa that the hands get cleaned). Others include the following:

Aisi nibe lai ba won dasi Ohun a ba jijo wo, gigun ni n gun (Anything that is collectively done yields positive results)

Methodology

This study was conducted in Lagos State House of Assembly. It was anchored on the philosophy of constructivism whereby knowledge is created as opposed to being discovered (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013) Both primary and secondary data was used. Primary data was obtained using a qualitative research approach. In-depth interviews were triangulated with archival

data from Hansard reports between (1999 to 2024) obtained from the Lagos State House of Assembly as reflected in the Table 1 below. Bills and motions sponsored (both Substantive and Matters of Urgent Public Importance) especially for women legislators were taken into consideration. Purposive sampling was adopted because of the nature of the respondents who are not easily available. Criterion sampling was used to sample women and men legislators in the current and past assemblies, Deputy Speaker, Clerk, Majority Leader, and political party representatives amongst others who were then interviewed. Another criteria used was that preference was given to those who had served for more than one term. Out of the sample of legislators, only two had served for one term. This study is therefore unique because it takes into consideration the contributions of the women legislators in the current and past assemblies based on the perceptions of both male and female legislators. The data was collected until saturation was achieved. The sampling procedure was iterative in that after the first set of interviews, other participants were selected based on new emerging questions. Two academics who are authorities in the area of gender and politics in Nigeria were also interviewed. Informed consent was sought from all the participants and they were assured of confidentiality and anonymity. All other ethical considerations were adhered to. The data was transcribed, coded and analyzed thematically based on the issues that were emerging.

Data sources

Data	Description	Session
In-depth interviews	This were carried out with those who have served in the current and past Lagos State House of Assembly. Some were face to face whereas	The current (10 th Assembly or any other

	others were on Google meet.	
Hansard Reports	Information on debates surrounding bills, motions and resolutions.	From mainly 1999-2024 (25 years)
Policy Documents	Bills and laws passed that have been spearheaded by women.	
Public Websites	Of the National and State Governments: blogs and other social media platforms.	
Gallery sessions	The researcher attended several gallery sessions in the current Assembly (10 th Assembly) between April and July 2024.	

Source: Author, 2024

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Interviewees

The following people were interviewed: 5 women and 11 men ie (16) in Lagos State House of Assembly

1 Principal Officer

2 Academics

Total 19

Number of Women and Political Parties

Over the last 10 Assemblies, Lagos State House of Assembly has been predominantly masculine in nature. The 1st and 2nd Assemblies had a total of 36 members whereas the 3rd had 30. Thereafter, all the others have had 40 members. Secondly, Lagos

State since its inception has mainly been dominated by one political party. States with one party are mainly associated with rubber stamping whatever is brought to the floor of the House (Demarest, 2021). This is as presented below:

ASSEMBLY	DORMINANT PARTY	NUMBER OF WOMEN
1 st Assembly	All U.P.N	No women
2 nd Assembly	All U.P.N	No women
3 rd Assembly	SDP	2 women
4 th Assembly	38 AD 2 APP	3 women
5 th Assembly	All AD	2 women
6 th Assembly	38 CAN 2 PDP	6 women
7 th Assembly	All ACN	7 women
8 th Assembly	38 APC 1ACN 1PDP	4 women
9 th Assembly	All APC	3 women
10 th Assembly (Current Assembly)	39 APC 1 Labour Party	4 women

Source: Hansard Reports from 1979-2024

The 3rd Assembly was unique in the sense that initially, only one woman was elected then the second one came in through a by-election when a male legislator died. Right from the 1st Assembly, the dominant party has continued to change its name over the different electoral cycles and therefore, to date as can be seen above, majority of the legislators have been from one dominant party. Nigeria has had four democratic dispensations also referred to as “republics”: 1960-1966-1st Republic; 1979-1983-2nd Republic; 1992-1993-3rd Republic(which was interrupted by a coup) and 1999-present- 4th Republic (Dan-Azumi, 2024). Since

independence, the country has been a Multi-party state with predominantly two major parties which often consist of coalitions between different parties (Ibid).

Objective 1: Nature of Committees Served

The table below gives a picture of all the committees that the women in Lagos State House of Assembly have chaired. Other women have served as members in different committees. These committees can be referred to as “motherly committees” by virtue of the fact that they mainly concentrate on social welfare issues.

As Morse (2021) observes, in the Cameroon Assembly, the women are mostly relegated to the less influential and prestigious committees e.g education and cultural affairs amongst others. Other scholars have also alluded to the fact that women are often left out in the “power” committees (Funk & Robinson, 2014) or the “juicy “ committees (Demarest, 2021).

Committees Chaired by Women Legislators from the 3rd to 10th Assembly

Assembly	Number of Women Elected	Committees Chaired by Women Legislators
1st Assembly	None	No women elected
2nd Assembly	None	No women elected
3rd Assembly	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● House Services Committee
4th Assembly	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Committee on House Service Matters
5th Assembly	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Committee on Women Affairs, Poverty Alleviation and Job Creation

6th Assembly	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Committee on Home Affairs and Culture ▪ Committee on Women Affairs & Poverty Alleviation ▪ Committee on Science and Technology
7th Assembly	7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Committee on Establishment, Training, Pensions and Public Services ▪ Committee on Finance ▪ Committee on Women Affairs, Poverty Alleviation & Job Creation
10th Assembly	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Committee on Education (Ministry & Agency) ▪ Committee on Women Affairs, Poverty Alleviation & Job Creation ▪ Committee on Wealth Creation and Employment

Source: Hansard Reports from 1st-10th Assembly

NB. Data for the 8th and 9th Assembly was not available.

In a nutshell, the findings were as follows: women legislators mainly chair “motherly committees”; strategies used to garner support include: women members of the State Assembly depend on he’s for she’s, relying on social relationships and collaborations within and outside the Assembly with other actors such as NGOs is important; the policies formulated are largely welfare based and challenges are based on the numbers and time constraints. These are further discussed below.

Objective 2: Strategies Used by Women Legislators

The following issues came up during the interviews as the main strategies through which women legislators are able to get others to support their bills:

Lobbying for support among He's for she's

The women legislators stated that to navigate through the process of presenting bills in the Assembly, they started by seeking support from male legislators who support the gender agenda. These are referred to as the "He's for she's".

"Nigerian women are not talking about equality again, they are just begging the male folks, "please believe in us as women, give us support and let us be heard." Anybody that believes in that principle, they will call the person, "He-for-she."

From social to legislative relationships

Secondly, another strategy used is extending social relationships to legislative ones. This is done by being available for social events such as birthdays and wedding anniversaries amongst others for fellow male legislators. This involves forging friendships that go beyond the floor of the House. When one is committed and available, it becomes easier to bring up a discussion on a bill that is coming up. This is however, not always guaranteed.

"And you know, lobbying could be in diverse ways. It goes beyond mere talking. It could be your character, your personality. You can even extend greetings in relation to their family. You're not giving money. You build friendships and support from there."

"Relationships over the years matters a lot. However, you might have breakfast together but once one gets to the floor of the

House, he may say that “I am not convinced”. Besides relationships, if a bill is not going to fly it will not fly”.

The other ways include: bringing on board other NGO’s and the Civil society to help drum support for certain gender sensitive bills e.g the Law on the protection against domestic violence. This is as stated below:

“We have the Civil Society organizations because they occasionally could be here to expose a motion that we could work on. I think from the civil society organization, they are partners in progress. It's been very encouraging from them”

Collaborations

Other laws and motions are passed in collaboration whereby both male and female legislators agree over certain issues e.g appropriation laws and a motion such as the one on “creation of an enabling business environment for the growth of industrialization” (2008)

“We all work together, especially for budget, we look for figures together, we exchange ideas”

“Most of the time we work together as a team. We do collaboration.”

The other form of collaboration was that of women legislators working hand in hand with their counterparts in the Executive and Federal Government e.g. in lobbying for the Protection Against Domestic Violence (2007) law.

Objective 3: Nature of Policies Passed and other Contributions

Research done among women legislators in various countries has shown that women legislators tend to promote “women friendly” laws (Verge, 2022; Hellwege & Bryant, 2019; even though in some cases there are exceptions.

“You know, while we appreciate the men and respect the fact that we’re all human beings, you know women have always had the short end of the stick for a very long time and I needed to start thinking about laws to make life easier for women and children”

The following laws have been championed by women legislators in Lagos State House of Assembly

- Protection Against Domestic Violence (2007)
- Child Rights Law (2007)
- Right and Entitlement of Victims & Protection of Witnesses Law (2022)
- Lagos State Domestic and Sexual Violence Agency in the Establishment of Sex Offenders Register.
- The Domestic Staff Service Providers Law 2019

This study also looked at their contributions in as far as motions are concerned. There are two types of motions that are presented in the floor of the House i.e substantive and matter of urgent public importance.

The following motions and concerns have so far been presented:

- Concerns raised on the Appropriation Bill, 2022 in relation to money set aside to deal with cervical cancer.
- Motion on the need to curb indecent public exposures and noise pollution by lounges and Night club operators in Lagos State.
- Motion: that the Commissioner for Works and Transport should look into the possibility of converting the Kabukabu operators to a legalized Mini cab team.
- Motion by Woman on enforcement of compulsory education for children in Lagos State (2008)
- Motion on an increase in the kidnapping of children and calling on school authorities and police force to be vigilant (2008)
- Motion on the appalling state of Public toilets in Lagos State.

Based on the laws and motions passed, it can be observed that women in Lagos State House of Assembly have continued to concentrate on welfare issues.

Other Contributions

Since the 4th Assembly, women legislators in the Lagos State House of Assembly have served in various capacities. As earlier mentioned, the 1st and 2nd Assembly did not have any women elected whereas the 3rd and 4th Assembly had women serving in the capacity of members. The Table below shows the different capacities in which women have served from the 4th to 10th Assembly. As can be observed, Lagos has had 2 women Deputy

Speakers, 4 Deputy Chief Whips, 1 Deputy Majority Leader and once, a Chief Whip.

Assembly	Year	Capacity Served
4 th Assembly	1999-2003	Deputy Speaker
5 th Assembly	2003-2007	Deputy Chief Whip
6 th Assembly	2007-2011	Deputy Chief Whip
7 th Assembly	2011-2015	Deputy Majority Leader
8 th Assembly	2015-2019	Deputy Chief Whip
9 th Assembly	2019-2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Chief Whip ● Deputy Chief Whip
10 th Assembly	2023-2027	Deputy Speaker

Source: Research, Records & Archives Directorate, Lagos State House of Assembly.

In addition to the above, women have also actively participated in: In votes and proceedings in the plenary session; contributions at the committee level however, there are no Hansard reports to show their contribution at this level and in other oversight functions were members are expected to vet appointees of the Governor.

Contestations

Based on the Hansard reports for the different Assemblies, there were several proposals that were brought by the women members of the assembly but these were strongly opposed by the men. They include: proposed bill on barring Female Genital Mutilation; debates on Section 26 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria on registration of citizens. This clause does not include men who have married Nigerian women as its considered a taboo for a man to settle where the wife comes from and thirdly, a clause on marital rape in Domestic Violence bill.

As can be seen below, culture and religion constitute two key aspects that determine the kind bills that are passed.

“My second point has to do with “Marital Rape.” You will agree with me that our customs and religion stands. Our religion does not support what we have here because it looks foreign to say that, I would not have control over the wife I married after paying her bride price and I have also performed all the conjugal rites expected of me. We need to look at this”

Objective 4: Challenges Faced by the women Legislators

There were two main challenges that were identified by the women members of the State Assembly. Firstly, is the issue of lack of a critical mass to pass certain laws. As has been earlier stated, the maximum number of women that have been voted into the Assembly are 7. This in essence means that the women cannot pass any bill without co-opting the men whereas the men can as they have the numbers.

Secondly, some bills take too long to be passed especially when they are not in tandem with the cultural-religious set up e.g the Law on protection against Domestic Violence.

“Oh, definitely, especially when there are gender issues. You know I remember with the domestic violence law, it took me four years to pass it into law”

Recommendations

This study has helped to reveal that in the Lagos State House of Assembly, culture and religion are two important factors that determine the kind of laws that are passed. There is no formal structure that prevents women from vying. However, it is important for one to look at the informal rules that would affect

the whole process of bringing more women on board and having them pass the necessary policies that are gender sensitive. In the context of Lagos, law has no capacity to challenge culture. The society has to evolve over time. Therefore, the following recommendations can be made;

Firstly, there is need to make use of indigenous systems to promote complementarity and collaboration in the policy making process in the State House of Assembly. These include: the use of proverbs, sayings, aphorisms and idiomatic expressions. Besides, there is the IFA (the knowledge systems of the Yoruba people that guides their thinking and actions). More specifically, *Ifa Osameji* emphasizes on the need to involve a woman in everything one does. Under *Ifa* indigenous knowledge, there are about 200 verses on the power of the woman and the need for men to respect women and collaborate with them.

Secondly, religion is an important factor that can also be harnessed. In both Christianity and Islam, verses that emphasize the need for men and women to work together to achieve a common goal can be used to show why its important to bring more women on board to work hand in hand with the male legislators.

Thirdly, education is also very important in determining behavior change. Gender realities can be emphasized and brought out in the curriculum for children to embrace at an early age.

In addition, the family is an important agent of socialization and can also help to promote these values.

Finally, legislation that helps to bring more women on board can be passed but this should be in tandem with the cultural-religious context.

Areas for Further Research

Further research needs to be extended to the Executive to establish the number of women that have served as Deputy Governors, Secretary General and Commissioners amongst others and their role in as far as policy formulation in as far as Executive bills are concerned, their impact to the communities and other gender sensitive initiatives e.g by the office of the female Deputy Governors during their time.

Secondly, there is need to look more closely at women's representation in the committees and their roles.

Conclusion

The study concludes that women's contribution in the policy formulation exercise is largely a collaborative task that cuts across the different genders, coopts different stakeholders and extends beyond passing bills and motions.

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