

Politics Participation of Women through Inclusive Library Programs in Public Libraries of Northern Nigeria

Maimuna Izah Ph.D

National Institute for Legislative and Democratic Studies, Abuja

Abstract

The purpose of the study is to examine the Political Participation of Women through Inclusive Library Programs. The purposive sampling method was used. 8 public librarians in Northern Nigeria were selected as participant for the study. A semi-structured interview method was used to collect data. The semi- structured interview consisted of open- ended questions, which guided the interview process. The study revealed that all the participants, except one, said they did not organize programs to support women participation in politics. The study discovered that the major challenges encountered in organizing such programs are, inadequate funding of the libraries; difficulties in convincing the women to attend programs, among others. In addition, the participants advised that Seminars, workshops, discussions groups, women to women meetings should be organized with the collaboration of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and Association of Women Librarians in Nigeria (AWLIN) to sensitize women in the community to support women in politics and encourage their fellow women to participate in politics. It is recommended that Public librarians should create more awareness amongst themselves on the importance of inclusive library programs, services and environment in order to cater for the needs of their diverse community especially women

Keywords: Political Participation, Public Libraries, Women, Inclusive Library Programs, Northern Nigeria

Introduction

Nigeria has been recording under-representation of women in both elective and appointive positions. This is a growing concern to many Nigerians. The 1979 Nigerian constitution guaranteed the rights of women to participate in politics. However, the last decade has witnessed an increase in women's participation; however, this is only when increase in participation is measured with standards like the number of women who vote in elections; the number of public offices held by women; the number of women – related policies implemented by the government, etc. Still there is a noticeable level of under-representation of women in politics when compared with their male counterparts (Agbalajobi, 2013). Accordingly, Women's representation across Nigeria's six regions, or geopolitical zones, varies, with southern states performing significantly better than northern states. Nkereuwen (2023).

Public libraries have for long been regarded as powerful agents of social change and empowerment and their role in advancing women's rights and empowerment is of utmost importance. As repositories of knowledge and diverse perspectives, libraries

play a vital role in promoting gender equality and empowering women in various aspects of life by fostering and supporting their economic empowerment and entrepreneurship through workshops, seminars, and providing them with resources on entrepreneurship in order to learn valuable skills. Libraries serve as catalysts for women's empowerment, enabling them to break barriers, challenge stereotypes, and realize their full potential in society. The transformative impact of libraries in empowering women is a testament to their capacity to foster inclusivity. Libraries that foster inclusivity aimed at integrating the needs of all members in the community by promoting and facilitating library and programs and services to users with special needs. It is therefore imperative for libraries to interrogate issues related to women in politics with the view to enhance inclusive support for women to participate and contest elections

Conceptual Clarification

According to IFLA/UNESCO (2008)) a public library serves as the local gateway to knowledge, providing the essential foundation for lifelong learning, independent decision-making, cultural development, and social cohesion within a community. It offers all its services free of cost and opens its doors for free and equal use by all members of the community, regardless of age, gender, religion, language, or educational background

The universal definition of inclusion conveys the idea of equal rights and opportunities for participation in the political process by all, regardless of income, age, gender, sexual orientation, ability, group, culture, ethnicity, religion, and location/special setting(rural/urban or riverine/upland. The study recognizes the universal definition but limits it to women (NILDS, 2022). An inclusive Library environment is one that welcomes and identifies the perspectives of its users and staff. It is not only a matter of providing access to information and resources, but also of creating a culture of belonging, equity, and social justice. Inclusive Library Services are services that respect and respond to the needs, preferences, and identities of all library users regardless of their age, race, sex or gender.

Problem Statement

Women Constitute 49.47% of Nigeria's population. There have been significantly under-represented in political positions, and there is a low percentage of women in governance at national, state and local levels. Despite the efforts made by government, non- governmental and international organizations towards ensuring increased participation and representation of women in politics and governance, available data reveals that women's representation in governance is less than 7%. Thus without the active participation of women and the incorporation of women's perspective in all levels of decision-making, the goals of equality, development and peace cannot be achieved (Akiyode; Afolabi and Arogundade (2003) cited by Suleiman, 2017). Addressing these issues and concerns are crucial, if these issues are not handled it will

continue to deter inclusive political, socio-economic and human development of Nigerian women. Hence, Libraries, especially public libraries serve as community hubs, they foster social interactions and engagement to support women participation in politics and governance by promoting their social inclusion

Objectives

1. To find out if there are inclusive library environment, programs and services in public libraries in Northern Nigeria that support women participating in politics and if they have organized programs to support women participating in politics.
2. To determine how public libraries in Northern Nigeria can be supportive in organizing inclusive library programs to support women participating in politics.
3. To identify the challenges encountered by public libraries in Northern Nigeria in providing/organizing inclusive library programs to support women participating in politics.

Literature Review

Inclusive Library Environment Programs and Programs and Services in Public Libraries

Ezeabasili and Umeji (2021) define inclusive libraries as crucial community resources that cater for the diverse information needs of all community members. Their research highlights the benefits of inclusive services provided by libraries, including resources like Braille, Talking books, and screen readers. However, they also identify challenges faced by libraries in delivering inclusive services, they include a shortage of trained personnel, funding constraints, and outdated facilities, lack of accommodations for individuals with special needs.

IFLA (nd) provides an example of how libraries can support various projects or initiatives in their communities. They cite the Harry C. Moore Library of the University of Bahamas, which offers its physical space to host the 2018 International Women's Day Forum, organized by the Department of Gender and Family Affairs. Izah's (2022) study investigates the role of public libraries in providing information resources and services for women. The research aims to understand the programs organized by public libraries, the methods employed, and the challenges faced in empowering women and girls. The study reveals that the major programs organized by the public libraries focus on areas such as entrepreneurship, health management, literacy, and lifelong learning for women.

Role of Libraries in Supporting Women in Organizing Inclusive Service

Research indicates that libraries play a crucial role as trusted community hubs, fostering social connections and inclusivity. They serve diverse neighborhoods, both high and low-income, as well as rural and remote areas. With a longstanding

commitment to social inclusion, libraries offer a wide range of resources, programs, and services without financial barriers, which is especially significant in the light of rising living costs (Dalmer, 2022).

Public libraries offer a platform for women to voice their thoughts, ideas, and concerns. Libraries are often community gathering places where people can come together to participate in programs, events, and other activities. Public libraries serve as community centers where people can gather, share ideas, and engage in cultural and educational activities. They provide space for meetings, exhibits, performances, and other events that promote social interaction and civic engagements. Public libraries often serve as community hubs, providing meeting spaces for community groups, hosting events and workshops, and facilitating conversations on important topics.

Within the framework of a library and information center setting, it can be argued that there exist physical and virtual spaces for varieties of functions and operations at scheduled period (Zakari, 2019). Similarly, Adakawa and Al-Hassan (2020) stated that public libraries are shouldered with the responsibility of reaching out to people, providing inspiration, creative spaces and creating opportunities for dialogues among different communities. , Kulenoviv in Adakwa and Al-Hassan (2020).

Challenges in Participation of Women in Politics

According to Okafor and Ileyemi (2023), between 1999 and the present, only 157 women have been elected to the 469-member National Assembly (38 senators and 119 members of the House of Representatives). This is in sharp contrast to the 2,657 men (616 senators and 2,041 representatives) who were elected during the same period. In the February 2022 elections, out of the 92 women who ran for the Senate, only 3 were successful. Similarly, out of the 286 women who contested seats in the House of Representatives, only 15 emerged victorious.

The underrepresentation and low participation of women in Nigerian politics can be attributed to factors such as cultural stereotypes, misuse of religion, traditional practices, and patriarchal societal structures. These beliefs, along with ethnic and religious norms, have become self-fulfilling prophecies, greatly impacting women's perception and involvement in politics.

The challenges facing women are enormous; however, researchers have shown that there are likely factors responsible for the huge marginalization of Nigerian women in politics and reduced political participation of women. These are: patriarchy -refers to a society ruled and dominated by men over women; stigmatization: women aspirants who ventured into politics are looked upon as shameless and promiscuous; low level of education-the low participation of women in education is also part of the drawbacks; meeting schedules: the time scheduled for political party meetings are odd and is not conducive for women; financing: most Nigerian women who seek these positions could not afford meeting the financial obligations; political violence- female aspirants of various political parties cannot withstand political violence; religious and Cultural

barriers: both Christianity and Islam do not accord women many roles in public life, and same is obtainable in most cultural values, where women are seen culturally as quite submissive and image of virtue. (Oluyemi, n d).

Agbalayobi (2013) similarly highlights factors like gender roles, financial support, customs, lack of affirmative action, inadequate knowledge of women's political rights, and certain religious doctrines as hindrances to women's active participation in politics. Efforts have been made by both government and non-governmental organizations to increase women's participation in politics. The National Gender Policy (NGP) in Nigeria recommends a 35% affirmative action for inclusive representation of women in both elective and appointive public service positions. Additionally, international organizations have funded capacity-building programs to empower and mentor female politicians.

Eyong (2020) emphasized the disparity in women's representation in Nigerian politics compared to other African countries like Rwanda and Senegal, where women hold significantly higher percentages of parliamentary seats. Eyong expressed concern over Nigeria's low representation of women in parliament, emphasizing the need for substantial improvement in women's political participation.

Building on similar observations, Badawi (2007) emphasizes the influence of cultural factors on the political development of women, which continues to hinder their prominent roles in Nigerian politics. She notes that many women reside in rural areas, limiting their access to crucial information. As early as 2007, Badawi advocated for libraries to play a more active role in mobilizing and supporting women in their political endeavors through inclusive library programs and services.

Methodology

The researcher adopted a qualitative research methodology. A case study research design was used for the study. The population consists of 8 heads of public libraries in selected States in Northern Nigeria who were selected as participants for the study. The states are: Kaduna, Kano, Nasarawa and Abuja. A purposive sampling method was used. The participants for this study were purposely selected because they are indigenes of the states and have been organizing programs for women in their libraries. A semi-structured interview method was used to collect the data in order to provide in-depth information and understanding of the participants' opinions and experiences. The semi- structured interviews consisted of open-ended questions.

Data Presentation

The data collected, in line with the objectives of the study was transcribed manually, and the transcribed interview reports were subjected to content analysis this involved underlining the phrases and sentences that best described the topics. The data presentation is as follows:

To find out if there are inclusive library environment, programs and services in their library to support women participating in politics and if they have organized a programs

All of the participants stated that they had the space, inclusive environment in their libraries. They had organized programs for women on other things like literacy, skill acquisition, health ,training on social media, use of computer, etc. but not on political participation. One participant opined that” it never occurred to me, it would be very educative for the women in this community”, similarly, another participant said, “you (the researcher) have given me an idea. I will start planning for a program as soon as possible”, another also said, “you are giving me a good idea, it is selling”. Out of the eight participants, one said that they have organized programs for women, as detailed by the participant: “Our women do not know much about politics. We organize programs for women. (Married women and girls) to spread awareness, we tell them that if there are no educated women who are in politics their conditions can never change, as there will be no women to represent them in National Assembly and the Government to present your interests as women. We tell them: How do you think women become commissioners? How do you think we have a female Special Adviser from this town (Tudun wada)? We advise them to be involved in “clean politics”. There are stereotypes and misinformation about women's participating in politics in our community; therefore, we spread awareness and the risk of spreading false information especially on women politicians and their supporters.

To determine how public libraries in Northern Nigeria can be supportive in organizing inclusive library programs and services to support women participating in politics.

The participants shed more light on this: “through sensitization, and enlightenment - to understand what politics is, which political parties have their interest in mind, if the political parties’ manifestoes are women’s priority and have interest in their (women) progress”. A participant said, “The women do not have voices and they are not empowered. The political parties just use them as ‘weapons’ to vote for them, they bargain with them, they bribe them with money and so on”. This participant captured that “public libraries should constantly motivate the women by organizing seminars very often. Telling them that the world is changing, and there are changes”. Public libraries can draw on their ability to reach the community members. The women specifically, and raise their awareness of how important it is for women to be involved in politics”.

Additionally, a respondent pointed out that “we librarians are supposed to be engaged, especially in raising awareness. Create programs like discussion programs. Public librarians should link up with non-governmental organizations (NGOs).to spread awareness and the risk of spreading stereotypes and misinformation for example, if a

woman dares go into politics, the society will turn against her as she will be seen as someone defying authority”.

Furthermore, a respondent said, “Most women have no idea of what it entails to join politics; they lack information on the importance of women participating in politics. Librarians have to join hands with organizations that are working with women. Librarians have to be gender sensitive. They need to go out, gather information that will create awareness, stimulate and disseminate information to the society on the importance of women joining politics and what their fellow women will benefit from that” A respondent further mentioned that “through the association of women librarians, known as Association of women librarians in Nigeria (AWLIN). As a platform, they can invite women who have excelled in life, such as Funmi Kuti to sensitize them to come out and participate in politics, especially women from the North, their religion and culture work against them. They should have women-to-women meetings in the libraries. For example, they can fix a day, maybe once in a month as women’s time in the library. Talk to them on how to support their fellow women. They can also help in stopping the spreading of negative stereotypes”. A respondent stressed that librarians should “go out and gather information that will create awareness and distribute to them. Most of them have no idea of what participation in politics is all about. They lack information about what it entails. Libraries should join hands with NGOs and any other organizations that are working with women”.

To identify the challenges encountered in providing/organizing inclusive library programs to support women participating in politics.

A participant mentioned that “because of their religion, norms of the society, the attitudes of the women towards attending programs is negative, they think you are encouraging them to participate in ‘dirty politics’ ” Another participant said that “most of the women are not civilized, they are not educated, whenever you are trying to encourage them to attend a program, they always feel that you are a politician and just using them for something like, to vote for them and that you are the beneficiary”. “So it is very difficult to convince them to come out and attend a program”. The entire participant said, “It is expensive to organize programs, they do not get much support from their States Governments.

Discussion of Findings

Inclusive library programs, services and environment provided to organize support women’s participation in politics

The findings revealed that all the participants, except one did not organize programs to support women participation in politics except one participant. They mentioned that their library had organized programs for the women on other things like literacy, skill acquisition, health, training on social media, use of computer .This findings corroborate with Izah (2020) study which revealed that the public libraries organized

training for women on entrepreneurship, health management , literacy and lifelong learning. The participant who gave his reasons for organizing the programs for the women and girls according to him most of the women are illiterate, and because of their religious belief and culture there is need to enlighten the women about the risk of believing in stereotypes, stigmatization and misinformation about women politicians and politics. However, one participant pointed out that librarians are not aware that their roles are more than just attending to users in the library, he advises that librarians need to come out of their office and know more about their community. Moreover, some participants observe that the researcher's question has given them idea to organize programs on the subject matter.

How public libraries in Nigeria can be more inclusive in supporting women participating in politics

The study revealed that most of the women in the communities, especially in the villages of the participants have no idea of what it entails to join politics or supporting their fellow women in politics. Moreover, they also lack information on the importance of women joining politics. The participants advised that Seminars, workshops, discussions groups, women to women meetings should be organized in collaboration with Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and Association of Women Librarians in Nigeria (AWLIN) be organized to sensitize women in the community to support women in politics and encourage their fellow women to participate in politics. The implication of librarians ignoring the women's ignorance of politics may result in missing of their rights, as pointed out by Eke, (2022) study that women's lack of adequate participation in legislative processes has negatively affected promotion and enforcement of their rights.

The challenges encountered in providing inclusive library programs to support women participating in politics

The study discovered that the major challenges encountered in organizing such programs are funding. This finding is in agreement with that of Igiomoh and Ogunwemimos' (n.d.) study where the findings revealed that funding and other supports for public libraries continued to decline. This confirms that public libraries in Nigeria are poorly funded. Other challenges are cultural and religious beliefs, stigmatization of women, the deceptions of politicians, among other factors; restriction of women from coming out to attend gatherings; especially political gatherings. This is in agreement with Suleiman (2017) study, which revealed that factors such as religious belief, stigmatization among others, limit women's political participation. This findings is also in consonance with Oluyemi ,(nd.) research that found out that female aspirants of different political parties cannot tolerate political violence; religious and cultural barriers, both Christianity and Islam do not accord women's many roles in public life, and same is obtainable in most cultural values, where women are seen culturally as quite submissive and image of virtue.

Conclusion

Public libraries have frequent and direct contact with the community. No other public sector can be better positioned than public libraries to cultivate an inclusive library environment. However, based on the findings of this study, it is evident that the public libraries are not quite conversant with the important issues that need their urgent attention such as the worrisome state of the low percentage of women participation in politics and in appointive positions in Nigeria. The findings confirm the necessity for public libraries to join hands with other stakeholders to create enabling environment that supports women political participation and assist women in reducing or removing the barriers that hamper women's political advancement

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are offered:

1. Librarians should create more awareness among themselves about the importance of an inclusive library programs and create an enabling environment to support women and address the barriers that hinder their inclusiveness and the needs of their diverse communities, in these case women must be taken into consideration.
2. Libraries should be key venues where brochures, posters, etc. of awareness campaign can be distributed and kept for consultation. The public libraries can also allow access to their educational resources on politics and resources about the importance of women to actively participate in politics, etc. There is the need for concerted efforts from libraries, especially public libraries, considering their functions, should all join the advocacy for increased women's participation in both elective and appointive position to build a more inclusive and equitable libraries.
3. Libraries should collaborate with Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), Government Authorities, Institutions, Association of Women Librarians in Nigeria (AWLIN) and other organizations to organize seminars, workshops, discussions etc. in order to spread awareness to women against all forms of stereotypes, train them on the importance of women participating in politics actively, etc. By doing that some of the organizations may take the responsibilities of the financial implications of organizing such programs.

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