

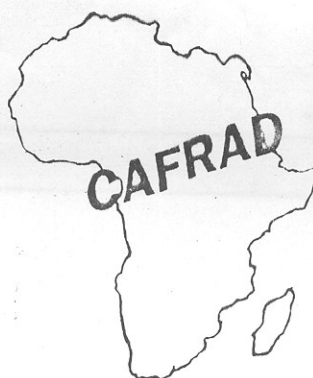
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Women's Acces to the Nigerian Higher Civil Service : Problems and Prospects

By

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Abstract

This study examines the access of women to the Nigerian Higher Civil Service. This study was conducted among 52 sampled women senior civil servants in Borno, Kano and Lagos States. The analysis of primary data in this study is based on views of 52 respondents. Secondary data involved the use of government publications and text-books.

In the context of this study, the low representation of women in the higher civil service was traced to lower educational attainment of women, societal prejudices against women, women's multiple roles and low interaction among women.

In order to make the higher civil service accessible to women, the study makes a number of recommendations. For example, it suggests lower concessionary scores for Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board Examination for women. In addition, the study suggests the softening of the cultural stereotyped ideology which gives ascendancy to men in decision-making in and outside the home. Similarly, the need for improved interaction among women for beneficial networking is also considered desirable.

Introduction

It is universally accepted that the "raison d'être" of government, any government is the good life for citizens. The enhancement of the conditions of the good life for citizens within a nation which could be defined as development include the following :

- reduction if not elimination of inequality, unemployment, poverty, disease and ignorance ;
- the guarantee of basic freedoms including the freedom to participate meaningfully in the policy process.

It is within this context that the Nigerian civil service (Federal and State) assume the vital role in effectuating the socio-economic objectives of the country. The civil service is the mill through which public policies are processed. Considering the vital role of the civil service in national development, one would have expected adequate representation of men and women in this vital organ. However, available data (primary and secondary) shows that men dominate this vital organ both at the lower and higher echelons. It is the intention of this paper to examine the access of women to the Nigerian Higher Civil Service. What are the constraints to women's entry to higher echelons of the civil service ? Are they behavioural ? Are they cultural ? What can be done to guarantee women's entry. Answers to these questions will form the central thrust of this paper.

For the purpose of this paper, higher civil servants would be referred to as senior public managers i.e. the first three levels of career officials in government ministries and departments. The political officials such as the Director-Generals are excluded. This definitional restriction is imposed by the frequent changes which characterise the appointment and termination of political heads of government ministries. Inclusion of political appointees within the first three levels of authority could lead to the production of incoherent data.

Methodology

The study employs primary and secondary data in analysing the subject under discussion. Primary data was obtained through the distribution of self-administered questionnaires to 52 women senior civil servants drawn from 13 randomly government ministries and extra-ministerial departments at Federal and State levels. A limitation is inherent in this study. The limitation is on the use of three states out of thirty states in Nigeria. The use of three states as samples are based on the following considerations :

- largeness of Nigeria;
- availability of financial resources;
- time constraints.

However, based on our knowledge of Nigeria's geographical spread, the following states in Nigeria were chosen as samples :

- Borno (North East of Nigeria)
- Kano (North West of Nigeria)
- Lagos (South West of Nigeria)

Borno and Kano have been chosen to represent states with the least touch with western values especially the impact of modernization. These states could be regarded to have resisted more to change. Lagos state represents states that have been most touched by modernisation.

Our secondary data was collected from government publications, official gazettes and files, and work of notable authors.

Women in Federal Civil Service Employment

In this section, we identified the general trend of women's employment (lower and higher levels) in the Federal Civil Service. However, it was found out that women's employment vis-à-vis men is generally low. Women's share from total employment in this sector ranged between 9.7% in 1973 to 11.2% in 1979 (see table I). The minimal showing of women in formal employment in this sector was also maintained in the 1980's. As shown in Table I, between 1980 and 1989, women's employment only increased over the 1970's share by about 1.6%. However, the employment of women generally improved in the 1990's. In 1990 women's employment rose from 15.6% to 24.5% in 1991. It is clear from the foregoing discussions that men generally dominate employment in this sector.

Women in Higher Civil Service in Nigeria

In this section, the actual representation of women in senior civil service positions is examined. As indicated in the preceeding section, the participation of women in general in the federal civil service is still very low when compared to men. Similarly, their participation in senior management positions in the civil service is still a rarity. Table 2 shows the number of women occupying senior management positions in the federal civil service between 1988 and 1991. As shown in Table 2, men dominate the key decision-making levels in Federal Civil Service where the socio-economic objectives of the nation are effectuated. Out of the total number of 4,243 top managers in the Federal Civil Service between 1988 and 1991, 3,763 or 88.6% were men while women numbered 480 or 11.3%. Our field survey also shows that women are under-represented. As shown in Table 3, out of the total number of 366 senior civil servants in five randomly selected federal government ministries/extra-governmental ministerial departments only 44 or 12% were women. In key ministries and departments where vital policies relating to labour employment, national planning are formulated and implemented, women are almost excluded in positions where they could influence the course of public policies. In the National Planning Commission where national plans are designed, women's numbers vis-à-vis men is also insignificant. Women constituted about 15.6% as senior officials in this agency. The under-representation of women in this vital government

agency has often resulted in gender-blind economic plans. The peculiar problems of women are not adequately addressed in the successive national plans. Neither are women involved in critical decision relating to economic adjustments. Despite this exclusion, women are expected to bear the burden of implementation of public policies in which their participation was/is minimal.

The picture in state ministries and departments as shown in Table 4 also indicates the relative powerlessness of women. The states in Nigeria are the next level of administration after the federal government. The states provide basic services to citizens which are taken to be the focus of development since their availability and access by the people to such services reduce the worst effects of corporate and individual poverty, enhance social justice, modify the social structure, raise the standard of living generally and bring closer to realisation the human potentials for development (Todaro, 1977). While women are almost excluded at the federal level where the exclusive issues relating to foreign affairs, national planning and revenue allocation are decided, women are equally excluded in decision-making levels in state public establishments which are involved in bringing about developmental changes in people's lives. Whether in the Northern or Southern states, the story is the same (See Table 4). In 18 selected state government ministries and extra-ministerial departments surveyed, out of the total number of 200 senior civil servants only 16 or 8% were women.

Constraints to Women's Entry to Higher Civil Service Positions

In the preceding sections, we observed that women are grossly under-represented in the higher civil service. What is responsible for this phenomenon? This section will attempt to provide answers to this crucial question.

Respondents were asked to indicate the constraints which hinder women's entry to higher civil service. The first major constraint identified by respondents (100%) as constraining women's entry is inaccessibility of the majority of women to higher education. Respondents (90.2%) noted that there are no policies which hinder women's access to higher education but the perpetuation of traditional beliefs and practices which give more importance to the education of men than that of women. Respondents observed that given the low educational attainment of women, they are everywhere absent in positions of authority in many civil service departments. The importance of higher education in upward mobility is underscored by the possession of higher educational qualifications by all the 52 women senior managers. 86.5% of respondents have Bachelors Degrees while 13.4% have Masters Degrees. These corps of women senior public officials were able to secure initial employment because of attainment of requisite qualifications without which they could not filter up.

At the lower levels, the Nigerian society especially in the South seems to be liberal towards women's education.

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As shown in Table 5, girls participation in primary education in the Southern states such as Anambra, Imo, Lagos and Oyo between 1989 and 1991 were almost equal with boys. However, in the North, there are glaring disparities in the levels of girls and boys' education. In the Northern states such as Borno and Kano, girls' participation ranged between 25% and 40%. At the higher level, women's participation is generally low when compared to men. Data in Table 6 shows the number and percentage of women who managed to reach the university level and who have therefore survived the discriminatory traditional practices since they started school. Women's participation in university education is generally low both in Northern and Southern Nigeria. As shown in Table 6, in the 1987/1988 academic session, women had an insignificant share of 25.8% of the total enrolment in selected Nigerian universities. On an individual basis, the percentage ranged from 13.2% for Kano to 34.2% for Maiduguri.

Inaccessibility of many women to in-service training was also identified by respondents (80%) as an impediment to women's access to the higher civil service. In most of the sampled ministries and departments employers are favourably disposed towards training of all employees regardless of gender. As shown in Table 7, the training need was cited by most of the respondents (90%) as an overriding criteria for their organisations. However, some respondents went further to indicate that a major impediment which has often prevented many women from taking advantage of in-service training is child-birth and child-rearing.

Findings from the survey shows that this problem is less among women who have past child-rearing age and common among nursing mothers. A respondent sums the situation thus :

Those who are nursing babies could not leave them to go on course even when there is a need for training.

Since many nursing mothers could not leave their infant children to attend courses, they are placed at a more disadvantaged position vis-à-vis men in enhancing their value to their organisations as well as get prepared for higher positions.

Conflict in multiple roles was also given by some respondents as a factor militating against advancement of women to the higher civil service. About 40% indicated that the multiple roles of women as caretakers at home and office workers tend to divide women's attention in different directions with negative consequences on performance at work and promotion. A respondent sums the negative impact of some of the multiple roles thus :

Child-bearing and rearing affects career progress and promotion.

Absence of child care facilities was also cited by 89.4% of respondents as a significant barrier to women's entry to the higher civil service. It was pointed by respondents that some women are qualified and who would have opted for civil service employment but could not do so because they could not leave their children at home. Those who managed to get employed cannot avail themselves of opportunities to take care of their children while at work.

The plight of women employees is underscored in Table 8. As shown in Table 8, nearly all necessary support facilities for nursing mothers are not available in respondents' organisations. 88.4% of respondents indicated the non-availability of kindergarten schools in their organisations. 84.6% of respondents also stated the non-existence of nursery schools while 76.4% revealed the absence of day care centres. Health care delivery system ranked highest with 86.5% of respondents indicating its availability in their organisations. Given the inavailability of support facilities in many organisations, many women have to take their children to day care centres and to schools often far removed from their work places. This factor as respondents noted often result in low productivity of women employees which is often reflected in the negative annual evaluation reports of women employees.

Cultural stereotyped ideology of women as the weaker sex was also identified as a barrier to women's upward mobility in the civil service (80%). A respondent stated that this ideology demotivates women from seeking self-development and also encourage women's acceptance of the status quo. Hostile attitudes of men towards women was also given as another barrier to the upward mobility of women (61.7%). About 61.7% of respondents indicated that the male dominated work environment is inhospitable to women thereby undermining their ineffectiveness. Some respondents in this category noted that women are resisted by men in work organisations thereby causing the failure of some women in official assignments.

A respondent clearly stated that :

Some subordinate men who have traditional prejudice against women make things difficult for women in superior positions. They are out to sabotage her efforts so that she can fail in her assignments.

The fear of men sharing power with women was also cited as an obstacle to women's entry to the higher civil service (83.7%). This situation was cited by respondents as being responsible for men's hostility towards the advancement of women. Some respondents stated that the fear of sharing power with women often make some men aggressive towards women while others employ all kinds of intrigues to undermine women. Others also stated that this fear is sometimes manifested in quarrels with women and also efforts to bring women down. Some respondents also stated that men fear sharing power with women because acceptance of women would lead to their overthrow in positions of authority. The effect of men sharing power with women in positions of authority is aptly summed up by this respondent :

The fear of men sharing power with women has often resulted into many problems faced by women at work.

Respondents (83.7%) noted that these socio-cultural discriminations often

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hamper women's effectiveness on assignments which are often recorded against women as non-performance.

Poor networking among women civil servants was also cited by respondents (80%) as a constraint to women's mobility. This factor as a respondent put it encourages men to perpetuate the imbalance at the top. This lack of networking among women was also described by a respondent as responsible for lack of courage among women to seek topmost positions in the civil service. Women therefore have to fight lonely battles which are often not easy.

Prospects For Enhancement of Women's Participation in the Higher Civil Service

In the preceeding sections, we identified the critical problems which militate against access of women to the higher civil service. This include lower enrolment of women in higher institutions, multiple role conflicts, dearth of support facilities for women employees and low interaction among women. In order to ensure access of women to the higher civil service, women should be given greater access to education especially at the higher levels. Parents should be encouraged to allow their daughters to further their education at the higher levels. Parents should be made aware that investment in women's education is as profitable as men's education. Women's enrolment can be further encouraged through lower concessionary scores for Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board Examinations until such time when women's enrolment would have been equal with men.

Government as the largest employer of labour in Nigeria should provide the leadership example by providing support facilities such as day care centres and nursery schools for its employees. These support facilities if handled by capable hands would likely enhance the effectiveness of working mothers as well as encourage employment of women.

The cultural stereotyped ideology which gives ascendancy to men in authority and decision-making in and outside the home and which is transferred to the work environment should be softened to ensure equal access of women to topmost positions in the civil service. Government should ensure that egalitarian principles form the basis of early socialisation of children. This can be achieved through mass mobilisation campaigns about the need to break traditional attitudes and stereotypes of women's roles and inequality with men. Towards this end, government should enlist the support of the mass media and the religious organisations.

Women civil servants should exhibit more positive role modelling by interacting more with women colleagues so that upcoming women can emulate this and interact with their colleagues. This would go a long way in reducing isolation and ensure a beneficial networking and support for recruitment and promotion of women in higher positions.

Conclusion

This study examined the extent of women's participation in the higher civil service. It was found out that the number of women in higher civil service positions is negligible. The major factors which impede women's access to the higher civil service include lower attainment of higher education, socio-cultural discrimination against women, multiple role conflicts, dearth of support facilities and low interaction among women. Much still needs to be done by government and women themselves in order to improve their access to the higher civil service in Nigeria.

References :

1. Todaro, M.P. Economics for a Developing World. Longman, London 1977 pp 161 - 164.

TABLE 1
WOMEN IN FEDERAL CIVIL SERVICE EMPLOYMENT

YEAR	TOTAL NO EMPLOYED	MALES		FEMALES	
		NO	%	NO	%
1973	100,048	90,440	90.3	9,608	9.7
1974	122,914	108,796	88.5	14,118	11.5
1975	121,335	109,280	90.1	12,055	9.9
1976	131,971	119,061	90.2	12,910	9.8
1977	121,883	110,441	90.6	11,442	9.4
1978	187,677	165,567	88.2	22,110	11.8
1979	197,319	175,204	88.8	22,115	11.2
1980	231,802	202,789	87.4	29,013	12.6
1981	256,334	224,341	87.5	31,993	12.5
1982	266,345	232,374	87.2	33,971	12.8
1983	292,985	253,396	86.5	39,589	13.5
1984	285,479	250,182	87.6	35,297	12.4
1985	255,156	222,983	87.4	32,173	12.6
1986	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
1987	255,881	223,388	87.3	32,493	12.6
1988	255,579	222,802	87.1	32,777	12.8
1989	273,346	236,678	86.5	36,668	13.4
TOTAL	3,356,054	2,947,722	87.8	408,332	12.1

- Sources :
- (i) Federal Civil Service Manpower Statistics 1983. Federal Government Printer Lagos, 1986 p: 32.
 - (ii) Federal Civil Service Manpower Statistics December 1991. Office of Publications and Management Services, The Presidency 1991 p: 1

TABLE 5
PRIMARY SCHOOL ENROLMENT BY SEX 1989 - 1991

	1989			1990			1991		
	M+F	F	%	M+F	F	%	M+F	F	%
Anambra	937,930	448,5878	47.8	910,807	424,749	46.6	632,718	313,819	49.5
Borno	577,180	236,288	40.9	514,287	201,117	39.1	456,078	178,109	39.0
Imo	973,496	477,375	49.0	1,054,601	508,212	48.1	1,054,522	513,820	48.1
Kano	1,170,477	409,329	34.9	893,717	317,956	35.5	101,683	35,559	34.9
Lagos	856,438	429,832	50.1	871,512	434,934	49.9	857,488	447,930	52.2
Oyo	1,142,096	580,506	50.8	1,207,470	603,179	49.9	1,195,425	597,712	4.9
Total	5,657,617	2,581,917	45.6	5,452,394	249,019	45.6	5,213,114	2,086,949	40.0

Source : Statistics Branch, Federal Ministry Of Education, Victoria Island, Lagos.

TABLE 6
ENROLMENT IN SELECTED NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES
FOR FIRST DEGREE COURSES BY SEX
(1987 / 1988 ACADEMIC SESSION)

S/NO	Institution	Total No. Of Students	Males		Females	
			No	%	No	%
1.	IBADAN	9,430	6,804	72.1	2,625	27.8
2.	LAGOS	10,535	7,561	71.7	2,974	28.2
3.	NSUKKA	11,547	8,862	76.7	2,685	23.2
4.	KANO	3,203	2,775	86.6	428	13.3
5.	MAIDUGURI	6,723	4,419	65.7	2,304	34.2
6.	SOKOTO	2,981	2,536	85.0	445	14.9
Total		44,419	32,958	74.1	11,461	25.8

Source : National University Commission, Nigeria Annual Report January 1988 - December 1988.

TABLE 7
ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS FOR TRAINING
IN SAMPLED ESTABLISHMENTS

Requirements	Total No of Respondents	Frequency	%
Age	52	3	5.7
Gender	52	0	0
Promotion	52	2	3.8
Training	52	47	90.3

Source : Field Survey, August 1992.

TABLE 8
FACILITIES AVAILABLE TO WOMEN IN SELECTED
MINISTRIES AND EXTRA-MINISTERIAL DEPARTMENTS

Type of Facility	Total No of respondents	Available	
		Frequency	%
Day Care Centres	52	12	23.0
Health Delivery System	52	45	86.5
Kindergarten	52	6	11.5
Nurseries	52	8	15.3

Source : Field Survey, August 1992.

males	%
	27.8
	28.2
	23.2
	13.3
	34.2
	14.9
	25.8

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