WOMEN’S PLACE IN INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

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Abstract:
The issue of women inequality in Nigeria in particular and Africa in general has been debated since the introduction of western formal education during the colonial period. Starting from the late 1950s and early 1960s, when many African countries acquired their political independence, this debate has taken a new dimension in local as well as international for a. what is really the place of women’s class and gender status in international organizations. The women as a group are the mothers and life-blood of the entire humanity, both in the past, Present and future. Women are the molders of characters to the new born babies, the first teacher, sustainers and maintainers of every household. This paper is an attempt to state the place of women in international organization arising from the following areas. The emergence of women in international organization, framework for the analysis, historical precursor, women’s major role of place in international organization and women’s organizations: types and methods. The activities of women in international organization started first as movements (such as feminism) and later, metamorphosed into organizations with clear-cut structures and objectives. This paper explores the role of women in international organization from a historiographic perspective. The problems imposed by the fact of analyzing women’s role in international organizations would lead us into a clarification of the auspice under which the issue is to be tackled. This necessitates a provision of an analytical frame work for the paper next will be historical antecedents to the role of women in international organizations. This gives way to the proper outline of the role of women in international organization. The last lap will be the summing up of the paper, in which the problems of women’s role in international organizations shall be considered while making some policy suggestion based on the fact of the case.

KEY WORDS: women inequality, historical precursor, international organizations, framework for the analysis

INTRODUCTION
The emergence of women in international organizations is relatively recent, tracing the origin of international organizations to the Delian and Hanseatic League of the 4th century B.C and 17th century A.D respectively, event to the 19th century, justification emerges for the above statement. On the most part, international organizations that existed in this period of history were political in focus; acting as for the harmonization of divergent interests of the nation state of each epoch. Under this arrangement, the universal suffrage (franchise) was not extended to women and as this forms the basis of political participation, it means that women were automatically left out of political dispensation of these times, this equally meant that women’s right were not recognized. However, we should understand that this political misanthropy towards women is a mere reflection of the entire traditional religious and sociocultural apathy and prejudice targeted against women as the “weaker sex”

The role of women in international organizations comes as a reaction against, and challenge to the profound political, cultural, social and economic misogyny of the world system. Three great forces ideology, demography and technology starting from the 18th century, helped to alter the legal and customary discrimination against women. First in point of time was the ideological force of liberalism, which engineered the American and French revolutions that proclaimed the quality of men, and by implications, women too. Demographic and technological changes affected women’s status as they needed to bear less children as a result of declining child morality rate and increasing life expectancy brought about by technological innovations. The growing factory system of the industrial revolution increased
wealth and employment. With more time on their hands, women roses to pick up these jobs thereby enhancing first, their economic status and secondly, the social standing

FRAME WORK FOR THE ANALYSIS

The question of the role of women in international organization can be tackled from two perspectives. First, it is possible to evaluate the role of women in contemporary international governmental organizations (IGOs). This will entail an assessment of the particular and functions, duties and achievement of women in organizations such as United Nations, organization of African unity (OAU), ECOWAS or other international governmental organizations, secondly, the issue can equally be evaluated from the standpoint of women international organizations i.e. organizations that are women-focused and women-centered. Such organization would be concerned with issues such as women’s emancipation, empowerment, feminism, gender issues etc. this class of organization belong to international organizations of the kind known as non-governmental organization (NGO). However, it is pertinent to point out that there exist some women-centered organizations that are governmentally sponsored, for instance, the United Nations Commission on the status of women (1946).

In the respect of the first level of analysis, it is difficult to measure or assess in specific terms, the role of women in international organizations. This difficulty arises from the fact that international governmental organizations transcend (even if in theory) the distinction in terms of sex. Thus, it is not possible to isolate specific role of women as distinct from that of the entire body. These organizations are composed of actors that are representatives of states in the international organizational system whose primary objective is to achieve the optimum and maximum advantage for their client states in interstate bargaining. This being the case, this study is going to sidestep this approach.

Another perspective of analyzing the role of women in international organizations is by focusing on the specific women’s organization at the international level, IN THEIR efforts to champion the causes of women. It is possible, under this perspective, to evaluate the role, functions, duties and achievements of women as an international pressure group.

This paper is going to adopt a method that bestrides both levels of analysis but with a special inclination to the latter as that would afford us a more conducive pedestal to crisscross the panoply of women’s activities in the international milieu. This bi-faceted method would enable us answer question as to what the contentions of women all over the world are; what they have done about their common plight; their modus operandi; how they have fared so far; the future of their role in international organizations. To crown up the analysis, we will attempt a synopsis of the types nature of women’s organization.

HISTORICAL PRECURSOR

The negative factors that have contributed to the near total subjugation of, and discrimination against women are well documented. We are quite aware of the andocentric tendencies of the western culture, rooted in the profound misogynism of the Greeks, which is even reflected in the bible (New Testament: of. Pauline letters) and which in turn, has served as a basis for their perpetuation throughout Christendom. This obnoxious religious and socio-cultural feminine bias of the African trado-cultural society is not easily overlooked. Throughout the world women were relegated to the “kitchen” existence and their integral personalities understood only by reference to their male counterparts.

The early modern-period did not bring any starting changes in the general attitude toward women. In the fifteenth century, Christine De Pisan wrote in defence of her sex, thus acting as the first harbinger of the modern feminist movement. In the sixteenth century Erasmus of Rotterdam was sympathetic toward the education of women, as were some other Renaissance authors such as Thomas Elyot and Sir Thomas More. However, general practice did not keep pace with theory. The vision of the early humanist was not fulfilled until centuries later.

Throughout the seventeenth, eighteenth centuries consciousness of women’s potential and of their plight continued to grow in France, writers such as Moliers, Poulian de la Baire, Voltaire and mercier wrote in favour of the emancipation of women. Diderot and Helvetius both recognized that women’s inferiority was created by society and by the absurdity of the education. Condorct strongly advocated their political emancipation. Unfortunately for the feminist movement, however, the anpoleonic code blocked the
emanation of French women and kept them legally and politically powerless throughout the nineteenth century. In England, Mary Wollstonecrafts, a vindiction of the rights of women (1792) was effective in sparking off the struggle for equal rights. So also was John Stuart Mills’s famous work, in the Subjection of women (1869). In the United State, the great leader in the fight for women’s right-lacy stone, Susan B Anthony, Elizabeth Cadysstanton, carrie Chapman Catt, and others-carried on the struggle through every available means, writing, lecturing, organizing political support and public demonstration.

Resistance to the libration of women came from all sides. Philosophers as diverse as Comte and Hegel failed to get the message that a new age was dawning and that the movement could not be stopped. Queen Victoria expressed her fury over the “mad wicked of women’s rights’ with all its attendant horrors”

Despite the opposition, the battle for women’s suffrage was won in most countries in the west; it now became axiomatic that equal rights to vote and to be elected to national office are fundamental to women’s status. Equality of franchise with men was fought for ardentely and for a long time by a dedicated minority against-heavy resistance the part of the “establishment”

The first country to grant women electoral equality with men were New Zealand (1893), Finland (1906), Norway (1913), and Denmark and Iceland (1915). With the exception of a few individuals states of the Australian Federation (1902) and united states (where Wyoming was the first to grant women the suffrage, in 1869), equality of votes for women came in most leading countries at the end or soon after World War I, the Netherlands and Soviet Union in 1917; Germany and Luxemburg in 1919; Austria, Czechoslovakia, Poland and Sweden in 1918. During the interwar period, electoral equality was extended to women in the union of South Africa (1930), Spai (1931), Brazil and Siam (now Thailand; 1932); Ceylon, Cuba, Turkey and Uruguay (1934); Burma and Romania (1935), and the Phillipines (1937); in the other state it came in the wake of World War II or else at the replacement of the old empires with new sovereign states.

The above historiography of women’s struggle for equality of franchise with men is of utmost importance to this study. This is because the extension of universal suffrage to women is the beginning of their active participation in politics. Before this, their role was more or less surrogate. Therefore, the history of women’s role in international organization coincides with their role in politics internationally.

However, at this early period of women’s political participation, their role was more or less isolated cases of individual braggadocio. A well orchestrated pattern of women’s organization did not mark step with the granting of political rights to women. A well coordinated and articulated pattern of women international organization did not emerge until the birth of the United nations organization at the Dumberton Oaks conference of July, 1946, was to further the cause of women’s political rights in all countries.

In December, 1952 the General Assembly adopted UN convention on the political rights of women, which was the first instrument of international law aimed at the granting and protection of women’s right on a world wide basis. In 1957, with Nigeria participating, the first ever international conference of women was convened (V.U. Nwигwe; 1990). Having arrived at the beginning of women’s international organizations and of their roles and participation in politics, we can now asses their role in international organizations.

THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

With the extension of political rights to women via the United Nations, the first victory in women’s libration was recorded. From this point on, women began a concerted effort at organized pressure movement against their social subjugation and oppression, economic exclusion and exploitation, and their legal and customary discrimination.

On a worldwide basis, the problems of women are part and parcel of the traditional legacy. It is not a mere aspect of a particular culture of development. It is rather systematic syndrome that is symptomatic of the chauvinistic and a largely paternal world system.

As we have observed before, women’s role in international organization is a kind of reactionary movement. It comes as a reaction against social injustice and trado-cultural exploitation and oppression. Historically, women have suffered at the hands of the society. “The oppression and subjugation of women
is unquestionably the most significant social problems that the world faces today. This is because women are almost everywhere relegated to secondary status; they are routinely denied legal and economic rights; they constantly suffer violence at the hands of domineering males. In fact, in almost every situation where a people are oppressed, the women suffer more. There is a perennial gender bias in all facets of sociopolitical and economic life of the state; are there people who are hungry? In most poor populations, women suffer more greatly than the men (Corson-Finerty, 1990; p. 76). Are there workers who are underpaid? In many parts of the world women are routine paid less than men for the same work. Many employers prefer to hire women, feeling that they are more docile labour force, and that they will accept lower pay and worse standards than men. Is there a world literacy problem? Over 60 percent of the 800 million literates in the world are females, and their number of increasing faster than that of men (Corson-Finnerty, 1990; p.77)

Women’s role in international organization is founded on the premise that unless development programmes are women oriented in focus, they would be totally drained out by men (Richard Holloway, 1991; p.5). as Paul Harrison sums it up, “women suffer by being part of an oppressed group, and they suffer at the hands of men in that group” (1993; 206)

With these throng of woes in global spectrum it is quite easy to imagine why women should form pressure group blocks at the international arena. There some supreme and ultimate ambition is the total emancipation of women from all forms of prejudice, oppression and subjugation. Equality of opportunities with the menfolk was a constant refrain of their initial fighting slogan. Armed with the instruments of lobbying, litigation and public demonstration, they have stirred the world conscience. A turning point in the struggle foe women’s liberation was reached in the UN declaration of the years between 1975 and 1985 as the United Nation decade for the advancement of women. The decade made the knowledge of women’s experiences possible, prodding virtually every development body United Nations agencies, national government, and private organizations to develop projects and programs that would improve the economic and social position of women. The implicit assumption behind many of these programs was that women’s main problems in the third world were insufficient participation in an otherwise benevolent process of growth and development. Increasing women’s participation and improving their shares in resources, land, employment and income relative to men were seen as both necessary and sufficient to effect dramatic improvements in their living conditions.

The UN decade for the advancement of women created a nebulous impact on women-focused activities and programs and provided an enabling condition for women’s international organization to sprout. One of such organization is the development alternatives with women for a new era (DAWN) which started in Bangalore, India in August, 1984, (Gita Sen and Caren Grown, 1992; p:9). what occupied participants at the DAWN foundation conference was need to advocate alternative development processes that would give principal emphasis to the basic survival needs of the majority of the world’s people (Ibid. p.9).

The process of outreach and engagement has taken different forms. numerous conference and seminars were held in all five continents after the banglore meeting to allow as many views and experience as possible to be debated and incorporated. In banglore, the founding group also planned a related series of activities for the U.N. sponsored Non – Government form held in Nairobi, Kenya, in July 1985. DAWN.s panel and workshops at the forum on the effects of growth – oriented development, the economic, political, and cultural crisis, and alternative vision and methods for women’s movement-provided an arena for continued debate discussion, and elaborate of these issues.

A larger number of women’s movements (encompassing individual organizations, and coalition) have sprung up during the decade. These cover a multitude of issues and purposes but share a concern and identification with women’s causes. Such organization include Association of African Women for research and development (AAWORD) the pacific and Asia women economist interested in women’s issues group (India). The centre for women’s development studies (New Delhi), the international women’s Tribune centre (New York), the international centre for research on women (Washington D.C), the Mediterranean women’s studies institute (Athens), women and development consultancy services LTD (Nairobi). The institute for social studies (the Hague).
All these organizations and many more, have a wide range of programs and activities that are women-centered and women focused. Their spectrum of activities is already at women centered development in order to bridge the wide gap between men and women in socioeconomic and political rights and participation. According to a DAWN’s observation at the end of the UN decade for women the status of a great majority of women (especially in the third world) worsened considerably throughout the decades. This implies the the objectives of the decade had a reverse effect to economic resources, income and employment has worsened. Their burdens of work have increased and their relative and even absolute health nutrition and educational status has declined (Gita Sen and Caren Grown, 1997; p.98). Salient areas in which women have registered their campaign can be summarized thus:

**Equality:** women’s rights, feminism, equal opportunity, human rights, discrimination and legal status of women

**Development:** appropriate technology, rural women, community development, international cooperation, water, corporate and credit, etc.

**Peace:** disarmament, nuclear war testing;

**Employment:** career development, working conditions, trade unions, women in management, women’s unpaid work etc

**Health:** mental health, traditional health practices, family planning, pregnancy and child BIRTH, REPRODUCTIVE Technologies and vocational training:

**Education:** women’s studies, literacy, occupational and vocational training

**Family:** motherhood, single-parent families etc emergency situation; racism, apartheid, political prisoners, violence against women, hunger, other areas include refugees and migrants, and older women.

**WOMEN’S ORGANIZATION: TYPES AND METHODS.**

The strategic role of women organization networks can be seen from two perspectives. Developing the political will for the major changes need in most societies requires organizations that have the strength to push for those changes, and the mass potential of women of women’s network in this area is great. Second, the particular perspective of poor women gives centrality to the fulfillment of basic survival needs as the priority issue; they are therefore the most committed, militant and energetic actors once avenues for action emerge (Gita Sen and Caren Grown, 1997; p.89).

Their overall strength drives from their flexibility and unity of purpose while their weakness may stem from the lack of clear organizational structures. Many of these organizations are large, mass-based, nonviolent in their methods, and extremely courageous in the actions undertaken. Such organization are dynamised by the issues mass support, and energy of the activities of individuals, smaller groups and coalitions that are involved in them, between the organization and the movements stand networks and coalitions, some of which are permanent and others temporary. Their goals range from direct political action to exchanges of research and information.

International organizations have developed a range of methods for reaching marginalized women and have made significant contribution in recent times. However, some problems have been distinguished in the organizational framework of women international groups. According to Gita Sen et al; many women’s organization have been wary of viewing large public policy issues as within their purview. This is explained by the tendency for feminist movement to concern itself with only aspects of life that are only partially susceptible to institutional regulations. The second problem arises in the non-hierarchical and non formal organizational structures of feminist groups in a world increasing becoming formalized and hierarchical. This means that the capacity for representation is not much. The resultant amorphousness and in cohesiveness of such organization do not make them credible. Another problem stems from the tendency for women to be influenced by decision makers in more subtle ways than they understand. This results in loss of focus by which the vision escapes the group as they pursue irrelevancies.

There is need for women to forge formidable organization in order to enhance their bargaining status. Such organizations should follow the rules of formal organization with clear cut objectives and principles or rule of action.

**CONCLUSION**

Obviously, the answers to the questions posed at the beginning of this paper have been expounded completely. The achievement of women at the international level is quite phenomenal. The recent Beijing
Conference seriously underlines this fact. There is now an added valor to women’s struggles. A new gusts and impetus was given to this enterprise via the Beijing conference of 1996.

At the recent Lisbon Encounter on the role of women in an interdependent world (5-7, April 1993) a participant opined that “the role of women in an independent world is perhaps beyond the equality of the sexes, which is just, and beyond complimentarily, which is often neccessary… their role is to hold everything together with love… perhaps we can also participate in a progress that is not an imitation”. In developing this role further, women possess a great potential for participating in harmonizing relations by playing key roles in conflict management and resolutions especially In the current spate of global critical disorder.

The very nature of women marks them out for playing peaceful roles in the society. Stressing this, Prof. G.O. Olusanya states that women are naturally disposed to peace and stability; they are our mothers, our wives and our lovers and if we accept Emerson’s dictum that “men are what their mothers make them” this point comes very clear to understanding. Their unique role of bringing up children provides them the opportunity for raising a new breed, a harmonious society free from prejudices, hatred mistrust and suspicion; women have a greater capacity for compassion and sympathy as well as revulsion for violence, bloodshed and disorder. Being less prone to aggression women are there for better place to eradicate or at least reduce prejudice mistrust, hatred, inequity, oppression and exploitation, each of this constitute a threat to peace, in effect therefore, women in their international concerns ought not to lose sight of this God-given talent for making peace and should use it to better the lot of mankind.

In line with this naturally disposed rule, we want to see women engage in the theme of “preventive diplomacy” as a veritable strategy of conflict/crises aversion currently, the theme of women activity centers on empowerment more than emancipation, we can therefore conclude that women have achieved some success in their roles internationally but they should not end at that; the present and the future conditions hold a lot of work for them to which they must pay due regards.

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