

Women Political Leaders in Africa

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Abstract

This paper is titled Women Political Leaders in Africa. It traces the history of women in political leadership positions and the roles they played in redefining the politics of their respective countries from the pre-colonial, through the colonial to the post-colonial periods. It argues that although women played important roles in the development of their various countries in times past and fought along their male counterparts in the struggle for independence, their number and status in leadership positions in African politics today do not reflect the numerous roles they played. Therefore, enhancing their status would go a long way towards overcoming population, food, and political problems and would boost economic growth and political development.

The study employs a historical approach and uses books, journal articles and internet materials for its data collection. It concludes that Africa will attain the peaceful, inclusive, buoyant and just society it requires if more women like their male counterparts are encouraged to take up leadership positions and be part of the decision making that directly affect the population. It recommends that the continent would do better if more women are given their rightful positions in the decision making and implementation in their respective countries; more women should be encouraged to take up those courses reserved for men to enable them challenge and change the discriminatory attitudes and practices that limit their political activities in Africa.

Key words: Women, political, leader, Africa.

1. Introduction

The men and women in Africa have had their places in the order of things in their various communities, irrespective of the country of their origin. They had responsibilities that cut across the sexes; men as well as women played each other's roles right from the ancient times. This was responsible for the peaceful, resilient and inclusive communities found all over Africa before the white man came.

In the traditional African societies, powerful queens dotted the various African countries, such as the Queens of Ethiopia, Queen mothers such as Yaa Asantewa of Ghana, Queen Amina of Kano, Queen Mothers in old Oyo empire, the Umu Adas/Omus in Igbo land and lots of others. Women leaders in Africa had gone to great lengths to defend the rights of their people and to facilitate development. In effect, African women do have the capacity to contribute to the development and create a positive influence in their communities and in the lives of their people, but the fact is that they are far from the

corridors of power and decision making. Irrespective of their achievements and contributions in the past. It has been discovered that women are few when it comes to political leadership positions in Africa, and the few that get there struggle so much with negative economic, social and cultural stereotypes that are entrenched gender roles. (Jemila Abdulai, 2016)

The limited number of women in political positions or mere absence of women in leadership positions can account for the numerous reasons why Africa has been ravaged with poverty and backwardness because a greater number of her population have not been included in her decision making. According to (Nelly Gachanja, 2015) for significant progress to be made, women need to be involved indecision making which will affect them directly. The male dominated leadership have not helped matters since independence, they have kept on rehearsing and acting the white man's script handed over to them during the colonial period, and thus, Africa has lagged behind other continents of the world in the midst of her abundant human and mineral resources. Africa is among the 3rd world countries without any meaningful development. Their contact with the Europeans and her educated large populations has not also brought about the needed peace, progress and development required in Africa.

African nations are among the world's poorest countries, the scenes of protracted wars, with dilapidated infrastructures and undeveloped due to the kind of leaders and leadership styles handed down by the Europeans. Leaders that have drowned themselves in selfishness and worn out of ideas. Leaders such as the tyrant Charles Taylor, the late autocratic Sani Abacha, President Robert Mugabe; the curiously long-lasting Equatorial Guinea's Theodore Obiang, Angola's José Eduardo dos Santos and many others dotting the African landscape have not in any way helped matters in the development and peace of the African continent (Bim Adewunmi, 2013). The study therefore looks back on the roles women played during the pre-colonial, colonial and the post-colonial periods and to find out if they were marginalized or subordinated by their male folks. Although there has been efforts by non-governmental organizations to address women's marginalization, this study however limits this issue within the context of African women because of its traditional and cultural similarities.

2. Statement of the problem

Women in the present dispensation have been feeling cheated and subordinated by their men folks, as if they want leadership positions given to them on a platter. They have refused to look back into history to draw inspiration from what those who went before them achieved and how they got the powers they used, hence the haranguing and ranting for subordination, discrimination and oppression by their male folks in the political arena.

3. Objective

The general objective of this research is to find out the numerous women in history who had political leadership positions that made them turn the story of their nations around.

The specific objectives are:

- (a) Find out the contributions of such women and how they played these all important roles from the pre-colonial, colonial and the post-colonial periods.

- (b) Trace the origin of subordination of women in Africa. (c) Proffer solutions

4. Methodology

The study is historically descriptive in approach and uses books, journal articles, newspapers and internet sources as secondary data.

5. Conceptual Clarification

Leaders

According to the Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary (6th edition), a leader is a person who leads a group of people especially the head of a country or an organization. From the Webster Universal Dictionary and Thesaurus (2010) a leader is a person who goes first, the inspiration or head of a movement, such as a political party, a person whose example is followed.

This could explain why Achebe, (1983:3) sees “leaders as role models”. People look up to them and copy their actions, behavior and even mannerism”. Women leaders, just as the men in the pre-colonial, colonial and the present period are role models when they are placed at the top more especially when they do well in their careers.

Politics

As Human beings and political beings for that matter, politics exist as we relate with each other. According to (Nwachukwu and Nwachukwu, 2018:83) “politics is about consensus and conflict that occur at every level of the society, between nations, states, trade unions, business associates and families” Easton (1981) conceptualized politics as the authoritative distribution of values for society as a whole. This accounts for the reason why Laswell (1936) defines politics as “who gets what, when and how” This definition is appropriate to women Political leaders in Africa because, when women climb to that height, they will partake in sharing and distribution of values and resources to the society. They automatically join the political elites who hold the powers, order and direct the course of events, but when they are not encouraged to attain that height, those discriminatory laws, traditions and cultures that had debarred them will continue to be promulgated.

6. Theoretical Perspective

Historically, women all over the world have been subjected to domination by their male counterparts. According to (Anifowose, 2004:206), in America and English common laws, a married woman could not hold personal property. A woman’s personal properties belonged to her husband just as they belonged to her father before her marriage. She could not enter into any binding contract with her own name nor make a will. The harshness of

this traditional legal norms were reduced in the 18th and 19th C. by changes in the legislation. At the beginning of the 20th C, women continued to suffer discrimination in various ways which was supported by law. Half of all the adult women were denied the right to vote in national elections in every country including Switzerland and the US with the oldest egalitarian systems in the world.

According to a Saturday Review, an English periodical in (Perry Chase et al, 2007:

Pg.577-578), “It is not the interest of state ...to encourage the existence of women who are other than entirely dependent on men as well for subsistence as for protection and love... Married life is a woman’s profession”. In the 1870s, a member of the House of Commons wondered what will become, not merely of women’s influence, but of her supervision of all those duties and surroundings which make a happy home...if they are to see women coming forward and taking part in government of the country.

According to (Anifowose, 2004:206) women most of the times feel unconcerned on issues of political involvement, such as holding public office, attending election campaigns, voting and exposing oneself to political stimuli at the lower level than men. This is as a result of the social, economic and political circumstances associated with participation.

John Locke (1690:339), also had argued that “all men are by nature equal” he never recommended that women be allowed to vote. (Jean Jacque Rousseau, 1954:111-112) opined that “the lot of your sex (women) will always be to govern ours, but only as a wife and mothers, not as citizens”. The declaration of American independence asserted that all men are created equal but its principal author, Jefferson boldly claimed that women must always be barred from public deliberations and offices to avoid falling standard of morals. Hence, women had always been given the back seat in the order of things be it politics or economics so that men will not desire them.

As (Lane 1958:116-117) put it, women are less well informed about issues and less able to identify public figures, less able to be exposed to several points of view, less likely to be concerned with issues in elections. Women seemed to have accepted their positions because only a few women raised their voices in protest. At Independence, when women in most countries of the world established women’s movements in protest against discriminatory practices and also changed women’s attitudes about themselves and society, women like Mrs. Margaret Thatcher became Great Britain’s first female Prime Minister in 1979. The Republic of Ireland voted into office Mrs Mary Robinson as a female President. In the third world nations like India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Phillipine and Israel, women have also occupied top most political leadership positions (Lane, 1958:116-117)

In Africa, despite the traditional and cultural constraints, women have made tremendous progress in the economic and political developments of their various countries. Today, increasing number of women are getting into professions and top positions that previously were male domain. Women are now pilots, engineers, accountants, surveyors, lawyers, professors, vice-chancellors, doctors etc they also occupy leading positions in banks, insurance companies, industries and commerce. The problem is that, these numbers do not in any way represent the population of women nor does it equal their male counterparts and so do not achieve the parity most advocated for in all spheres of endeavor.

7. Women in the Traditional African Societies

The role and position of the African women from the beginning cannot be over emphasized. Their roles transcended economic, social and political arenas. According to (Oyewunmi, 2010:85-87)

Biological sex did not determine African women's social role status in a fixed and permanent manner, instead they maintained that gender was socially and historically constructed in a manner that allowed men and women to fulfil their traditionally sanctioned functions in such a way that did not represent subordination of either male or female. Women contributed as well as the men in the various African societies to the development of their societies by acquiring power, wealth, influence and statuses needed to influence or direct the course of their societies.

(Ezenwaji, 2002:245) also posit that "in pre-Islam and pre-colonial Nigeria, women under took responsibilities and worked alongside of men in the families and communities. Therefore, the feminine quality of feebleness and brittleness often ascribed to women were not innate but acquired through the advent of alien religious and political structures of the European imperialism". It is fascinating to learn that women, like men led wars of military expansion, provided resources needed for prosecuting war and were involved in war and peace making in their various communities. For instance, Madam Tinubu of Abeokuta and Iyalode Efunsetan Aniwura of Ibadan used their economic, social statuses and influence to prosecute wars in their respective towns and loaned material resources to the war chiefs. Iyalode Aniwura allowed her slaves to join the Ibadan army which needed more soldiers to put down rebellious vassal states in 1893. As war removed men from the farm, women took over the production of food needed to feed the soldiers scattered in the military camps. (Bolanle Awe: 153).

Buttressing the above points, (Magbaily, 1999) posits that:

Men dominated the politics in Africa during the pre-colonial period, but women played active roles in politics, government and the economy in their various countries and communities.

In Sierra-Leone, among the Mende and Sherbro people, by the 19th C, women like Madame Yoko was head of town. In Sotho, South Africa, daughters of sub-rulers formed women regiment who fought in the army. The great Amazons (celibate female soldiers) from Dahomey, were known throughout Africa and the world for their invincibility in wars. Led by She-Dong-Hong-Beh of Abomey, the Amazons were trained in military to defend and protect the king. In 1851, she led the army of 6000 women against the Egbas in Abeokuta. Women led migrations, formed cities and conquered Kingdoms in the Chad and Niger areas".

Other queens of Africa worthy of mention include Queen Ndate Yalla of Senegal. Queen Nzingi Mbandi of Ndogo- the revolutionary ruler of Angola was described as powerful and ruthless (Avoseh Manton Timoth, 2016)

In the pre-colonial Nigerian society, Queen Amina of Zauzzau (Zaria) and her thirty-four year reign in the 16th C was characterized by aggressive empire building, inter-state wars and rivalries in the central Sudan. Queen Amina, because of her military campaign did not live in the capital city for a stretch of 30 days which led to the redrawing of the political map of Zaria.

Queen Kambasa of Bonny began the Bonny wars of expansion after her enthronement at the formative period of the city states. She initiated the process of strengthening the tradition of succession and started the custom of placing the skull of the enemies at the shrine of Ikuba (the Bonny national god) as the symbol of victory at war. (Awe, 1996). According to Denzer, between the 18th and 19th C. Six women appeared on the list of Ilesa Kings, while three Princesses became Awujale (King) of Ijebu-Ode before 1760 among the Yoruba nation. The 5th Ewi (King) of Ado-Ekiti who reigned in the 16th C. was a woman named Yeyenirewa. Every Yoruba state had female hierarchy of chiefs headed by the *Iyalode* (the coordinator of market women), who was a member of the Alaafin council- a judiciary body in Yoruba land. The *Iyalode* was a female representative and spokesperson at the Alaafin council. Like other male chiefs, the *Iyalode* had a special insignia of office, a court, and wore traditional attire associated with power and affluence. She, like the Alaafin had her own drummers, praise singers, and hangers-on. She had the power to meet with women, listen to their grievances, and represent them at the council of chiefs. In the western Igboland, as (Chukwu, 2005) and (Nzegwu, 1994) aver, "A dual sex symmetrical system in which individual recognized their social and economic responsibilities was the characteristic feature before the advent of colonialism. The institution of the *Omu* allowed a woman to be king like her male counterpart with all the necessary respects and rights accorded the king. (Mba 1982:23) buttressing the same point agrees that like the obi;

The office of the *Omu* was confirmed to the royal lineage and was reserved for the menopausal women. Once installed, the *omu* possessed all the insignia of royalty such as sword, fan, and drum held by the Obi and she could not be disposed by the Obi

In some societies, women who were kings were considered as men and vice versa. The fluidity of gender relations meant that men and women could cross the line of biological sex with limited or no restrictions.

From the forgoing, the list of women and their political activities in Africa before colonialism cannot be exhausted as they abound all over the African region. The women were not hedged and hemmed around with discriminatory laws and feelings, they were not suppressed by the male folks. They were allowed to contribute in all spheres of life.

8. Women Political leaders in the colonial period

The majority of African countries attained independence from colonial rule in the early and mid- 1960s. The earlier independence struggle of the 1940s and 1950s remained peaceful in some parts of Africa, while in some other parts required armed struggle. But in the Portuguese colonies all over Africa, independence was only won after many years

of armed struggle, for instance, in Portuguese colonies of Guinea-Bissau, Cape Verde, Angola, Mozambique, Namibia etc, it was widely noted that African women were actively involved in these liberation wars (Gretchen Bauer et al, 2017), the efforts put up by women which were incorporated into the liberation movement differed from one country to the other and were not in any way less than the efforts made during the precolonial period. As (Bekele-Thomas and Kavumbi, 2018) had to report that in Kenya, women freedom fighters played a significant role in the push for independence. Whether women fighters like “Mekatilili wa Menza” from the Coast or the women Mau fighters, Kenyan women fought hard for the independence of Kenya in 1963. In Tangayika, women played a formidable role in the success of the Tanganyikan African National Union (TANU), and its women’s wing played important role in leading Tanzania to independence. The South African women resisted the policies of the European settlers under the British and Boer domination with the African National Congress (ANC) women’s league playing a central role. Sekou Toure incorporated women into the Party “Democratique de Guinea” for the struggle for independence. Like the Tanzanian women, Guinean women created the culture of anti-colonial resistance through their songs, dress, performance, dance and rallies. In Ghana, Kwameh Nkrumah relied heavily on women in the urban and rural areas for the struggle for independence and the post-colonial period. Zimbabwe’s ten thousand women, recruited into the armed wing of the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) and trained as guerrilla fighters participated actively in the various domestic activities such as providing food for the army and physically fought for freedom (Gretchen Bauer et al, 2017).

According to Ikpe (1997:258) Olajumoke Obasa formed the Lagos Women’s League as a pressure group for better sanitary conditions and women’s education in 1901. The group also addressed the problems of infant mortality and under aged hawkers. In 1930s, she led a protest against the order for rent payment for stalls in Ebute Ero. Likewise Mrs Olufunmilayo Ransome Kuti founded Abeokuta Ladies Club (ALC) which metamorphosed into Abeokuta Women’s Union (AWU) in 1946 with the aims of alleviating and eradicating the causes of hardship and to abolish the Sole Native Authority (SNA) (Ikpe, 1997:259). Among the Igbos, the (*Okwei /Omu*) prevented the imposition of the British sterling on the trading groups of eastern Nigeria and this made the British firms pay for the production of silver coin and currency notes. In 1929, the Aba women protested against the colonial policies, such as the fall in produce prices; introduction of a new system of buying produce by weight and not by measure; direct taxes etc in eastern Nigeria. (Fayomi and Ajayi). At the upper echelons of politics, a few women like Margaret Ekpo won election on her own merit into the Eastern House of Assembly in 1953/54 and attended constitutional conferences. Others in this category includes Mrs Kuti, Mrs Young and Mrs Femi-Pearse (Ikpe, 1997:259).

The list of women and their accomplishments all over Africa is endless, this goes a long way to prove that they have never been left behind their male folk in leadership issues right from the pre-colonial times. They fought alongside their male counterparts in the struggle for independence, but as Fayomi and Ajayi has averred

Once independence was won, female combatants often discovered that the equality created in the camps would not be sustained outside the camps. After the first years of independence in Zimbabwe, women made up only 7.3 percent of the parliament. The women

made up of 1.86 percent of councillors at the district level. The number of women in leadership position continued dwindling until 2013 and 2018 when Zimbabwe implemented a temporary quota for its senate.

Confirming the above, (Ikpe, 1997:259) admits that despite the immense contributions, women party functionaries were treated only as adjuncts, their activities being confined to the women's wings. They were not adequately rewarded as their men folk. They remained de facto women-voter catchers for their parties.

(Anunobi, 1997) posits that "since political independence, women have been excluded from most of the important political positions in many African countries. For instance, there were no women heads of state up to 2005, and as of the mid 1980s, women held 6% of the legislative positions in Africa. At cabinet level or equivalent positions, only 2% were held by women. In half of African countries, there was no woman at the cabinet level. Women were better represented at local levels of government than at the top position. It was after colonialism that the position of women deteriorated below expectation, the reason being that colonialism and its effects were still so much around the leaders.

9. The colonial legacy

An alteration was precipitated by the imposition of colonial rule, which led to the introduction of sex/gender hierarchies that are unnecessary to the various African nations. By erecting male-dominated administrative and economic structures, the British gradually phased out nearly all political power exercised by women before the imposition of colonialism. Many women chieftaincy titles went into extinction as the Lugardian administrative arrangement of indirect rule was consolidated. The British did not see women as important elements in the new administrative and political arrangements. Instead, they introduced to the African colonies the Victorian idea that a woman's place is in the home as mother and wife (Awe & Denzer)

Colonial rule undermined the economic status and role of women by putting in place a male-dominated capitalist structure. The mines, civil service, railway and other colonial ventures were all male-dominated. Some female-specific industries such as dying among Abeokuta women for instance, suffered enormously as a result of prejudiced nature of colonial government towards female dominated economic activities (Toyin et al, 2010). In Uganda, women farmers started cotton cultivation, but in 1973, the British administrator in charge of agriculture declared that "cotton growing cannot be left to women and old people" (Freeman, 1993:21), thus, as new technologies were introduced for cotton growing, they were taught to men, ultimately, driving women out of that occupation.

Commercialization of agriculture which began under colonialism led to the granting of government titles to the land-the transfer of farmland from women to male ownership and families moved from subsistence agriculture to commercial agriculture. As commercial plantations were developed by foreigners, farming became more dependent on the state for more credit and technical training, women became frozen out of such aids in the early decades of independence (Enebulele, 1985: 187-194). Women were considered unsuitable for the rigour of public life, hence they were not allowed to vote, to contest elections, to sit in parliament or to be employed in the civil service. The British administrator worked in a government in which there were no women at any level, and

therefore, they did not find women involved in government in southern Nigeria. (Chukwu, 2005:86-87) Buttressing the above points posits that the British indirect rule system formalized male institutions and authorities in Northern Nigeria and created and empowered them in other places where they are non-existent. For instance, the institution of warrant chiefs were created and empowered in the eastern Nigeria. In the western Igbo, where corporate dual systems had existed, the male office of the Obi was transformed into salaried position, while the *Omu* was ignored. Eventually, the institution of the Omuship ceased to exist in 1888 when *Omu* Nwangboka, the last *Omu* of Onitsha died, salaried men (warrant chiefs) who were imposed on Igbo-land dominated the new bureaucratic structure. Under the indirect rule system, native courts were created which outdated the usual village assembly-the sovereign body of each autonomous polity. In the new political structure, kinship ties and dual sex political system were nullified.

Consequently, women organizations and their leadership such as the *Ekwe*, *Omu* or *Iyamba* institutions ceased to be politically active and women were not considered for appointments as warrant chiefs. (Chukwu, 2005).

Women faced significant discrimination on remuneration during employment due to government position that most men have dependent relatives while women do not. It was not until 1958 that females possessing WAEC who were recruited to government departments were paid the same salaries as their male counter parts (Ibibio Magazine, 1971). The economic and social policies imposed by the colonial state virtually excluded women from employment, and both consciously and unconsciously inclined African gender roles to imitate European and particularly Victorian concepts of masculinity and femininity. (Collins et al, 2007:318-319).

In many instances, these colonial views of gender enabled African men to increase their control over women and this culminated in economic dependency and crises. Economic and political structural changes introduced by colonial powers, and later imposed by international lending and development agencies, have further widened the gap in African countries. Unrecognized as full partners in the family or the society, women have been denied access to education, job training, employment, health care, ownership and political power. The sources of status and autonomy that women had were undermined by the European expansion into Africa who also strengthened the elements of indigenous male dominance. Since independence, Africa's male leaders have continued to add laminations to the male controlled structures they inherited from their colonial masters, more so with the support of investors and donors whose development assistance mostly went to men. (Collins et al, 2007 & Anunobi, 2002:45). We have seen that colonialism is the bandit that has robbed women of their freedom and position and created this defeatist psychological idea that women are to remain behind while the men should be in the fore front of politics in Africa.

10. Women in leadership positions in the post-colonial period

Through series of international conferences, the drive to promote women in decisionmaking positions world-wide gained momentum three decades ago. According to (Gumisai Mutume, 2004), further impetus came from the fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing, China, in 1995 which called for at least 30 percent representation by women in national governments. In a UN submit held in New York in September

2000, world leaders promised to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women as effective ways to combat poverty, hunger, disease and to encourage growth that is true sustainable". At that meeting, world leaders accepted the seven point goals tagged "the Millennium Development Goals" of which gender equality stood out. Since then, the participation of African women in politics has increased. Women now engage themselves in a variety of organizations from local government, to legislatures, and the executive. Today, Africa is a leader in women's parliamentary representation globally (Alli Mari Tripp, 2012). African countries have the world's highest rates of representation which was achieved through the use of quotas. For instance, Rwanda records the world's highest ratio of women in parliament. In 2003 and today, Rwandan women hold about 64% of legislative seats. In Sub-Saharan Africa, Women's representation in national parliaments equals the world average of about 15 percent. Despite being one of the poorest regions in the world, the level of women's representation in parliament in sub-Saharan Africa is higher than in many wealthier countries of the world (UNIFEM Report, 2002).

According to (Sow, 2016) Sub-Saharan Africa has achieved some of the most dramatic developments in the world in the past 20 years. The number of female legislators on the continent rose from 9.8 percent in 1995 to 23.2 percent today, and Rwanda, with 63.8 percent female representation in legislature, is the world's leading nation. Seychelles (43.8 percent), Senegal (42.7 percent), South Africa (41.7 percent), Namibia (41.3 percent), and Mozambique (39.6 percent). As for Nigeria, while the trend has been improving for other countries, the reverse is the case" the Good-luck Jonathan's administration was credited for appointing women to one-third of cabinet positions, but the Buhari led administration only gave six ministerial slots to women which account for 16 percent of the total. Whereas women represented 9 percent in 2007, the figure fell to 7percent in 2011 and 5.6 percent in the present Buhari led administration. While Nigeria is sliding down, other African countries are continuing to rise in the global ranking. (Sow, 2016).

Women participation in political leadership in Africa is also evident in the areas of top leadership positions. For instance, African women have served as elected or interim presidents beginning from Ellen Johnson Sirleaf who became the first elected female President of Liberia in 2005. Others include Ameenah Firdaus Gurib-Fakim, the president of Mauritius in 2015, Sylvie Kinigi was the acting president of Burundi from 1993-1994; Ivy Matsepe-Casaburi (2005-2008) acting president of South Africa after the resignation of Thabo Mbeki; Rose Francine Rogombe served as interim president of Gabon in 2009 and became the president after the demise of President Bongo of Gabon. Joyce Hilda Panda, the first female president of Malawi following the death of Binoju wa Mutharika from 2012-2014 while Catherine Samba-Panza acted as head of state of Central African Republic in 2014. (Aili Mari Tripp, 2012 and Janeth, 2015). In the other service areas, there has been nine female prime ministers in Africa since 1993, twelve female vice presidents since 1975 and there has been female vice presidents in Mauritius, Zimbabwe, Gambia and Djibouti. Others in South Africa, Malawi and Burundi.

At the regional levels, African women hold 50 percent of the African Union

Parliamentary Seats. The likes of Gertrude Mongella served as the first president of Pan

African Parliament in July 2012, South Africa's Nkosazana Dhlamini-Zuma took over leadership of the African Union Commission. At the local level, the African women are not left behind as women make up 60 percent of local government positions in Lesotho and Seychelles, 43 percent of the members of local council or municipal assemblies in Namibia and over one third of local government seats in Mauritania, Mozambique, Tanzania and Uganda. (Aili Mari Tripp, 2012)

From the available literature, it has been discovered that:

- Women have the capacity and capability if given the opportunity to lead.
- The number of women throughout history that has reached the top can never be compared to the men in leadership positions all over Africa. The number of women are heavier at the lower level of politics than at the higher levels, even before colonialism.
- Women are prevented from participating in politics because of illiteracy, if they are not informed, they cannot compete with their male folk.
- If women are empowered and encouraged to the top, they have a lot to contribute since they are the trainers of men and women from cradle.
- For development to take place in Africa, more women must climb to the top cadre as they constitute larger proportion of the population and so should not be left out on issues of decision making that border on their lives as a people.
- The quota system of representation should be applied to enable more women to get to the top.
- The key to accomplishing women's status is to ensure that women have greater influence on social, economic and political issues, particularly in the areas that affect them most.

11. Conclusion

This paper has explored the activities of women beginning from the pre-colonial through the colonial and post-colonial times. It also looked at colonialism as the main factor that led to the destruction of women's rights in Africa. From all the literature reviewed, it is obvious that the African women had never lagged behind their male counterparts when it comes to political activities in her environment. That she has always fought alongside the males until colonialism was introduced which drove women from the main stream politics to mere onlookers. Women are struggling hard to assume their rightful positions since independence and are leading in many countries of Africa but the number of women remains insignificant compared with their male counterparts. If this phenomena continues, the needed change advocated for will fore ever elude the female folk.

Recommendations

This paper therefore recommend:

- That more women should be encouraged from all levels of government to participate in politics. For women to achieve political leadership in Africa will require the collective action of women from the grass roots to the national and international levels as well as overcoming gender stereotypes and discrimination
- A lot more women should support and embrace education to pave the way for their participation in leadership
- The 30% seats advocated for in 1995 at Beijing should be implemented by all African countries to enable women reach the top political positions.
- The quota system that has been used in Rwanda and other African states should be implemented by the other African states to increase their participation in politics.
- Women all over Africa should work harder and take up those courses and professions that are reserved for men. They should not wait to be given leadership posts on a platter of gold. They should pull their weights in competition like their male folks

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