GENDER ISSUES AND LEADERSHIP EFFECTIVENESS IN NIGERIA LABOUR UNION ACTIVITIES: AN APPRAISAL

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ABSTRACT
Organizations are realizing that, in order to adequately address human resource concerns, they must develop long-term as well as short term solutions to gender and leadership issues. This paper on the subject of Gender issues and Leadership Effectiveness attempts to appraise the issue of leadership effectiveness and gender in Nigeria union activities. It specifically looks at the current definitions of Gender, leadership and look at some common theories that relate to leadership effectiveness. It also highlighted resolutions of the 3rd NLC gender conference held in 2008. This paper will shows that there is virtually no empirical evidence that suggests that simply by being male, one has the corner on the —leadership market, especially when it concerns Union activities. And it is my hope that this paper leads to more in-depth study on gender issues and leadership effectiveness in employment relations.

KEYWORDS: Gender, Organization, Leadership, Trade union, Effectiveness.

INTRODUCTION
Women the world over share a common feature; they are marginalized in the sphere of public life. Although they account for roughly one half of every country’s population, women are yet to be proportionately represented in public life anywhere
in the world Nwankwo (1996:1). Awareness of gender as a central feature of all aspects of everyday life and society has become more and more widespread.

Every leader has a different style and a different approach to the job, but what about gender and leadership do men and women have different leadership styles? Gender and leadership is a subject that is concerned with two main questions: (1) what are the determinants of male/female differences in who assumes leadership positions and in leadership behaviour? and (2) How is leadership a gendered concept?

The idea of ‘gender’ was for the first time brought about in the 1970s by a group of feminists. The underlying factor was to use the notion of gender as a parameter for appreciating the fact that women do not relate to men in much the same way in all circumstances in every culture; and more importantly, that the position of women in society varies considerably. The concept of gender presupposes a social construct as against biological circumstance of men and women. Sometimes the phrase “sex-gender relations” is used; this reminds us that there is a link between biological differences between men and women and the social assumption about masculinity and femininity Rowbotham, (1992: 12).

Allan Flanders defines industrial relations as a study of the institutions of job regulations. He argues that the only aspect of business enterprise with which industrial relations is concerned is the employment relation between the enterprise and its employees. Trade unions are associations that represent the collective interests of their employees- members in bargaining and negotiating with large employers. Trade unions generally seek to obtain higher wages, reduced working hours and improved working conditions for employees. In addition, trade unions seek to improve workplace safety and to obtain increased benefits, such as health insurance, pensions and disability insurance for employees. Unions also look to protect the employment security of their members, largely by negotiating to implement seniority rules and to eliminate “at –will” employment contracts under which non-union employees traditionally have been subject to dismissal without cause.

Appropriately social sciences research is reflecting this increasing concern with gender, especially in the field of work and organization. Sociologically gender is
basic to the foundation of every existing social order. It is constructed through situational and institutional processes. In other words, gender is not a mere comparison of males and females but of ‘maleness’ and ‘femaleness’ which are socially constructed. The perception of gender in an organization varies from one organization to another and from one individual to another. In some organizations there are some vital positions that are not given to the female gender and there are some meant only for the female gender as a result of the demand and criteria for that position.

In Nigeria, there has been a gross inequality between men and women, especially in political representation, economic management and general leadership. The male gender dominates in government and socioeconomic spheres, thereby holding the reigns of power relations and exerting sole authority over resource allocation and control Akinboye (2004 ; 20).

**TRADE UNIONS IN NIGERIA**

Pole (1981: 7) as quoted in Dafe Otobo (1995) views trade unionism as:

- Moral institutions in (the sense of focusing on such ideals as ‘brotherhood of man’ more than just distribution of wealth, justice and so on),

- Part of a revolutionary tradition, the role of social consciousness in determining the economic, political, and social action in the transformation of capitalist society to a socialist one as reflected in the writing of Karl Marx and others.

- The psychological or defensive reaction to early conditions of industrialism, the influence of harsh industrialism on the formative period of unions and thus outlook on perception of members regarding jobs, skills and ‘outsiders’

- Institutions shaped by economic forces and essentially, business, or welfare in outlook (the economic conditions) and
Political organizations in the two senses of being part of the democratic process and of reflecting strategic changes in the balance of power between working people, employers and government.

We can see that trade unions are associations of employees who work towards the interest of their members by making sure that their rights are duly given them in the industrial relations system.

Trade Union in Nigeria started as a voluntary organization of the working people and it was aimed at securing improvements in the wages and working conditions of their members. In Nigeria trade union movement was formed in 1912. Government and business always seek to limit the aim and purpose of trade unions. In terms of the Nigeria Trade Union Act (Section 1 of the Trade union Act of 1973, as amended in 2005) the aim and purpose of a union is restricted to the representation of workers in the regulation of wages and working conditions within industry. A trade union is concerned with all aspects of the lives of workers, not simply employment conditions. A trade union is concerned about the political life of the country, the economy, the social position of worker (education, health care, welfare). Acting together with community, students and social movements, the trade union is a major centre of people’s power.

THE CONCEPT OF GENDER

Gender, according to Hannan (2001) refers to the social attributes and opportunities associated with being male and female and the relationships between women and men; girls and boys as well as the relations between women and women and those between men and men. These attributes, opportunities and relationships are socially constructed and are learned through socialization process. They are context/time specific and changeable. Hannan further states that gender determines what is expected, allowed and valued in a woman or a man in a given context. ‘Gender’ as a concept is different from ‘sex’. While sex refers to the biological/physiological differences between a male and a female, gender refers to the roles, responsibilities, opportunities, privileges and expectations ascribed to males and females by the society. This implies that the society determines these and
expects men and women, boys and girls to behave in specified ways. In other words, what the society expects the man to be, the role he should play at home, in the market, office, government and so on is different from the roles the woman is expected to play. Gender looks at the status of women in comparison to that of men. Gender points to the differences between men and women as imposed by society. It is not inborn; rather it is learned and nurtured as part of the socialization process.

Gender refers to the socially-constructed roles and responsibilities of women and men. The concept of gender also includes the expectations held about the characteristics, aptitudes and likely behaviours of both women and men (femininity and masculinity). These roles and expectations are learned, changeable over time and variable within and between cultures. Gender analysis has increasingly revealed how women’s subordination is socially constructed and therefore able to change, as opposed to being biologically predetermined and therefore static Akinboye (2004: 190).

The term sex is used to refer to the classification of individuals as female or male based on their genetic makeup, anatomy and reproductive functions, Gender on the other hand is used to refer to the meanings that societies and individuals give to male and female categories Becker & Eagly (2004:59). These differences happen in most social contexts and, as it is seen in this paper: beyond social beliefs derived from gender behavioural stereotypes, individual-level studies seem to have found that there are differences in the way that women and men leaders lead.

Oakley (1972) clearly explicates the difference between “sex” and “gender”, Sex refers to the biological features that go with being male or female. It also refers to a natural division derived from the most basic physiological differences between males and females, in which these differences are genetically determined, largely universal and genetically constant. “Gender” refers to the social, cultural and psychological features that identify someone as a man or a as a woman, which are highly variable across cultures and are continually subject to change. Gender is not only about women; it refers to a structural relationship between the sexes, which are not accidental, or facts of nature but are reproduced institutionally through political processes and economic structure.
A feminist-sociological view maintains that the concept of “gender” refers to the socially and culturally constructed dimensions of one’s biological sex. Gender functions as a social category, similar to race-ethnicity and class, that “establishes, in large measure, our life chances and directs our social relations with others”. According to this definition, gender is a social structure which places women and men in different, and unequal, positions in society based on expectations, division of labor, and access to power and resources, thereby shaping the life experiences of men and women.

A gender dichotomous society is where women’s experience is assumed to be different from that of their male counterparts. The society’s cultural perception of women generally has been that they are of the weaker sex, inferior, contemptible, the scum of the earth and in a highly unenviable position The Guardian, (1999: 17). A woman’s lot in life could be seen as being extremely pitiable and pathetic when viewed against the backdrop of the statement above. They are seen as only providing moral support and nurture for their family. This assertion was supported by Obasanjo (1989:26), when he says that women by virtue of their physiology are “givers and nurtures of life” and that the social responsibilities, which come with these biological responsibilities (functions), make women a peculiar force in the overall national development. Their condition in the society, therefore would definitely affect the overall development of the country.

**THE CONCEPT OF LEADERSHIP**

The concept- leadership has much to do with human collectivity, a society, group or organization without which the concept is useless.

Leadership is defined as part of the organization that concerns itself with people. It is the human dimension. Koontz and O Donnel defined leadership as the act or process of influencing people so that they will strive willingly towards the achievement of group goals. Hannan and Scott see it as process by which people are directed, guided and influenced in choosing and achieving goals.

Leadership according to Ajayi (1998: 5) is the ability to persuade others to seek defined objectives enthusiastically. It is the human factor that binds a group together.
and motives group member’s towards set goals. Leadership transforms potential to reality. It is the ultimate instrument that brings to the front burner the potentials of an organization and those of its people.

Leadership is a means of directing. A leader’s actions are devoted to helping a group to attain its objectives. Leadership is the ability of management to induce subordinate to work towards group goals with confidence and keenness. Leadership also implies that the leader accepts responsibility for the achievement of the group objective and it is therefore essential for trust and co-operation from both sides to be in evidence all the time. Appleby (1994:190)

Leadership influences a process by effectively changing the behaviour of others. Leadership effectiveness is the acknowledged ability of a manager to guide a group towards goal accomplishment.

**Effective leadership** qualities and skill is a must, in order to have discipline and decorum at the work place. Leaders carry out the important tasks of chalking out strategies for the growth of the organization. Without the presence of leaders, there would not be any specific aim before the organization and this will naturally hamper its progress. Leaders can make employees more confident and train them in key areas for better results. The process of decision making becomes much easier and successful with a good leadership team. A sound leadership also makes employees feel secure about their jobs and very confident about their future in the company, thus increasing their productivity. A sense of unity and passion for work can be developed among workers only by effective leadership.

**LEADERSHIP THEORIES**

Interest in leadership increased during the early part of the twentieth century. Early leadership theories focused on what qualities distinguished leaders from followers, while subsequent theories looked at other variables such as situational factors and skill levels. While many different leadership theories have emerged, most can be classified as one of eight major types:

1. "Great Man" Theories:
Great Man theories assume that the capacity for leadership is inherent – that great leaders are born not made. These theories often portray great leaders as heroic, mythic and destined to rise to leadership when needed. The term "Great Man" was used because, at the time, leadership was thought of primarily as a male quality, especially in terms of military leadership. This theory was developed from an early research which included the study of great leaders. The early leaders came from the privileged class and held hereditary titles. Very few people from the lower class had the opportunity to take a lead. The Great Man theory was based on the idea that whenever there is a need of leadership, a Great Man would arise and solve the problems. When the Great Man theory was proposed, most of the leaders were males and therefore, the gender issues were not negotiable. Even the researchers were male, which was the reason for the name of the theory being 'Great Man Theory'.

2. Trait Theories:

Similar in some ways to "Great Man" theories, trait theories assume that people inherit certain qualities and traits that make them better suited for leadership. Trait theories often identify particular personality or behavioral characteristics shared by leaders. If particular traits are key features of leadership, then how do we explain people who possess those qualities but are not leaders? This question is one of the difficulties in using trait theories to explain leadership.

When this theory was produced, it was based on the study of the characteristics of successful leaders. The researchers also made an assumption that if people found these leadership traits, they would also become leaders. While researching, certain traits and characteristics were listed. John Gardner researched many leaders of North America and listed the attributes and characteristics of leaders. These traits are as follows:

- Intelligence and judgments based on actions
- Physical stamina and a vital driving force
- Task competency
- Better understanding of the followers and their demands
- Readiness to accept responsibilities
- Ability to deal with people
• Capability to motivate people
• Trustworthiness
• Conclusiveness
• Flexibility

These are some of the few qualities and attributes of leadership. When this theory was researched earlier, researchers believed that a leader has all the listed traits in him/her. The meaning of this theory is that the same leadership attributes are applicable for leadership on a battlefield and the leadership in a school. However, if a person has some of these traits and not all, then it is not possible for him to be a leader! Apart from this question, there was again the problem of gender in a leadership. Even if you make an exhaustive list of leadership traits, these attributes are defined taking into consideration a male leader.

3. Contingency Theories:
Contingency theories of leadership focus on particular variables related to the environment that might determine which particular style of leadership is best suited for the situation. According to this theory, no leadership style is best in all situations. Success depends upon a number of variables, including the leadership style, qualities of the followers and aspects of the situation.

4. Situational Theories:
Situational theories propose that leaders choose the best course of action based upon situational variables. Different styles of leadership may be more appropriate for certain types of decision-making. One of the relatively lesser known leadership theories is the situational leadership theory. The researchers found that leaders emerged as a result of different situations. Therefore, the researchers assumed that leadership qualities were developed depending on the situation. However, there are people who believe that there are different styles of leadership which changes the situation. There are three basic things in a situational leadership; the foremost thing is that the relationship between the followers and the leader must be healthy. The followers must like the leader and support him/her in his goals. The second thing is that the task which is to be accomplished must be known, and the leader should set the goals as per the task to be done. Along with the tasks to be accomplished, the
methods and standards to accomplish the task must also be specified in details, as this will make an impact on the followers. The third thing that is important is that the organization must confer the responsibilities of the task upon the leader, as this will strengthen the position of the leader.

5. Behavioural Theories:

After the trait theory, the researchers started exploring the behaviour of the leaders and made assumptions that the traits and the leadership qualities are not inherited, they can be learned and mastered by any person. Thus, this theory meant that leaders are not born, leaders can be made and so it became a famous management leadership theory and practice. In the behavior theory, you need to assess a successful leader along with the actions of that particular leader. As a successful leader is assessed, a leader with failure is also assessed, therefore, a second aspect of this theory was built. Apart from the leadership theories and styles which were proposed earlier, the basic leadership ideas remained the same. Behavioural theories of leadership are based upon the belief that great leaders are made, not born. Rooted in behaviorism, this leadership theory focuses on the actions of leaders not on mental qualities or internal states. According to this theory, people can learn to become leaders through teaching and observation.

6. Participative Theories:

Participative leadership theories suggest that the ideal leadership style is one that takes the input of others into account. These leaders encourage participation and contributions from group members and help group members feel more relevant and committed to the decision-making process. In participative theories, however, the leader retains the right to allow the input of others.

7. Management Theories:

Management theories (also known as "Transactional theories") focus on the role of supervision, organization and group performance. These theories base leadership on a system of rewards and punishments. Managerial theories are often used in
business; when employees are successful, they are rewarded; when they fail, they are reprimanded or punished.

8. Relationship Theories:

Relationship theories (also known as "Transformational theories") focus upon the connections formed between leaders and followers. Transformational leaders motivate and inspire people by helping group members see the importance and higher good of the task. These leaders focus on the performance of group members, but also want each person to fulfill his or her potential. Leaders with this style often have high ethical and moral standards. (psychology.about.com)

THEORETICAL PARADIGMS ON GENDER AND LEADERSHIP

THE TWO FACTOR THEORY

This is a body of idea that seeks to give a detailed explanation of the concept of leadership in organization. It is a clear departure from the other approaches in that it began empirically to investigate what leaders actually did. On this basis, Jack Denfeld Wood argues that leadership is made up of a task-oriented “masculine” side and a relationship-based “feminine” side. Through several studies, groups were examined to identify the basic aspects of leadership. The studies suggested many factors but fundamentally these factors can be reduced to two aspects - first, accomplishment of task and second, maintenance of relationship. In essence, it implies that an effective leadership in an organization needs to attend to these two and key fundamental factors. The need to attend to these factors could probably explain some noticeable split in organizations. For example, within the private sector particularly large manufacturing companies, the function reflects a split by sex. The “line” often has the highest proportion of men and the staff and support functions (i.e. administrative, human resources, public relation e.t.c.) and has the highest percentage of women. An incursion into several other organizations may reveal some similar split along sex as regards leadership needs of an organization.
The implication of the two factor theory is succinctly put as follows: - For men, this typically means to round out their leadership skills by recognizing and developing their relationship skills. For women, the opposite may be true to round out their leadership skill by recognizing and developing their assertive and decisive task orientation. This Day (1996: 16)

Scholars who study sex and gender issues usually take one of two approaches. They either focus on the similarities between men and women or the differences between them. Scholars who adhere to the similarities viewpoint seek to reveal that men and women are basically alike in their intellectual and social behaviours. Any differences that do occur are as a results of socialization, not biology (Bohan 2002, Yoder & Kahn, 2003 :) & Eagly, Wood &Johannesen-Schmidt, 2004). This viewpoint is also known as the beta bias. Scholars with this viewpoint carried out a number of researches that challenged the prevailing belief that women were different from (and inferior to) men.

The difference approach also called the alpha bias emphasizes the different between men and women. Historically, these differences have been thought to arise from essential qualities within the individual that are rooted in biology (Bohan 2002: 74-88, Yoder & Kahn, 2003: 281-290.). This concept is known as essentialism. These differences approach associates men with reason and civilization and women with emotion and nature (Hare-Mustin & Meracek 1990: 1-21). Women’s differences were often equated with men with “inferiority”. Men set the standard, while women were seen as deviations from that standard Strickland, (2000: 331-338).

GENDER AND ORGANIZATION

In the past, African women were like second class citizens, they are turned into a type of foot mats for their male counterparts who abuse, assault and trample upon them. Thus gender is the basic foundation of every existing social order ranging from the family, education, religion, politics and of course the economic institution in our society. It was constructed through situational and institutional processes. In other words, gender is not a mere compassion of males and females but of “maleness and
femaleness” which are socially constructed immediately a child born. The maleness and femaleness is not determined by the biological features but by the perception and the attitude towards the child which are socially determined by the parent.

Gender issue, which is a perception of the preference of sex in organizational setting and leadership, has been a contemporary one. Contemporary mainly because there still exists a division regarding what constitute gender- biological classification or psychological description bothering on personality or a combination of the two. In all societies, distinctions are often made between males and females. The distinctions are not peculiar to the human world alone, among species, non-human and pirates, these distinctions also exist. Among human beings however, genetic factors through inheritance play a minimal role as features of dominance and male hierarchies are most always learned. Studies from various points of the world have indicated that human are treated and subjugated as second class citizens.

Sociological research has found that organizations are gendered in many ways. Calling organizations gendered means that advantage and disadvantage, exploitation and control, action and emotion, meaning and identity, are patterned through and in terms of a distinction between male and female, masculine and feminine. Organizations profess themselves to be gender-neutral, for example, with their practice of filling an abstract job with a person who possesses the requisite qualifications. But when the “job description” for a leadership position includes 12-hour days, business meetings and social events on weekends, and little time for non-job-related obligations, many women cannot qualify because of their family responsibilities. The ostensibly gender-neutral job, then, is not.

The workplace is an important arena for gender inequality in our society because:

1. The workplace maintains sex differentiation by concentrating women and men in different setting and assigning them different duties.

2. Sex differentiation in job leads to unequal earnings, authority, and social status for women and men.

3. Interactions at work are subject to the expressions of inequality.
GENDER AND LEADERSHIP: AN APPRAISAL

The term "leaders" refers to persons holding formal positions of leadership in complex organizations in industry, government, education, politics, the arts, sciences, and professions. Interest in gender and leadership started in the United States in the early 1970s, when women slowly began to seek and gain entry into management.

Historically, gender precluded most females from becoming leaders in such organizations; as a result, the assumption that males were better suited than females for leadership roles was, until recently, rarely questioned. Since the early 1970s, the foundation of that assumption has been shaken by the large number of women who, according to Bass in Stogdill's Handbook of Leadership (1985: 37-55), have (1) been elected prime minister (in Britain, Canada, India, Pakistan, the Philippines, Norway, Sri Lanka, etc.) and to other high government offices; (2) been elevated to managerial positions in business organizations; and (3) earned Master Of Business Administration (MBA) degrees. In addition, the assumption that leaders are to be men have come under scrutiny by a growing body of scholarly writing on the subject of gender and leadership.

Unions looking for ways to be more effective and better able to represent the growing number of women union members would do well to pay attention to the question of gender and leadership. Research suggests that the women bring to leadership characteristics associated with what has become known as "transformational" leadership—an approach to leadership that is being increasingly promoted as a key ingredient to union renewal. These characteristics include being concerned with union members at a personal level, involving others in decision-making, being more concerned about collective than individual achievements, finding new and creative ways of dealing with problems, seeking out a diversity of opinions, and, most importantly, collectively developing a vision of the union's future and finding ways to build commitment to that vision. Clark (2000: 168-186)

In other words, building and developing women’s leadership should be embraced as a way forward for unions that want to grow in size and strength, and build power through membership involvement and the active inclusion of women and other equality-seeking groups.
Briskin points out that while it is a common finding that women lead differently than men, it cannot be said that all women lead the same way, nor can it be said that all women lead in the way they claim. “Some hold that to succeed in the labour movement women have to be every bit as tough as the men. They have to be as strong as the most macho male leaders . . . Some women prefer a more charismatic style of leadership. Others value supportiveness and encouragement. Some are competitive with other women while others view women as natural allies and friends.” (Briskin, 2006: 364 citing Eaton, S. (1993), “Women in Trade Union Leadership, How More Women can Become Leaders of Today’s and Tomorrow’s Unions”, in G. Adler and D. Suarez (eds.), Union Voices, Labour’s Responses to Crisis (Albany, State University of NY Press) pp. 193-194.)

Briskin also notes that “gender . . . is not the only social identity which shapes leadership practice.” (Briskin, 2006: 364) Race-based gender expectations can play an important role, for example. Unfortunately, there is very little research on the leadership styles of different equity-seeking groups, despite the fact that people from these groups make-up an increasingly larger proportion of union members.

In Nigeria, the differentiation in gender roles and responsibilities usually translates to inequality and not complementarily. This then results in a kind of hierarchy in which it is men and men’s activities and attributes that are more highly valued and subsequently men are given a greater status than women and girls. What eventually happens is that the society dictates male domination and female subordination, men are superior to women, men are stronger and are to make decisions while women are passive and are not free to make decisions even when those things to be decided concern women directly.

Furthermore, due to the patriarchal nature of the society, male children were valued more than the female Agee (1996: 26). As such they were raised with a hope for achievements in public life and were given more encouragement and grooming to face the eventualities of life. On the contrary, female children were trained for the domestic sphere, marriage and motherhood. The patriarchal nature of the society
also led to a situation in which men resented women’s leadership. Akinboye(2004; 29)

In 2005, a year-long study conducted by Caliper, a Princeton, New Jersey-based management consulting firm, and Aurora, a London-based organization that advances women, identified a number of characteristics that distinguish women leaders from men when it comes to qualities of leadership: Women leaders are more assertive and persuasive, have a stronger need to get things done and are more willing to take risks than male leaders....Women leaders were also found to be more empathetic and flexible, as well as stronger in interpersonal skills than their male counterparts....enabling them to read situations accurately and take information in from all sides....These women leaders are able to bring others around to their point of view....because they genuinely understand and care about where others are coming from....so that the people they are leading feel more understood, supported and valued. (Linda Lowen, About.com guide)

The Caliper study findings are summarized into four specific statements about women's leadership qualities:

1. Women leaders are more persuasive than their male counterparts.
2. When feeling the sting of rejection, women leaders learn from adversity and carry on with an "I'll show you" attitude.
3. Women leaders demonstrate an inclusive, team-building leadership style of problem solving and decision making.
4. Women leaders are more likely to ignore rules and take risks.

In her book Why the Best Man for the Job is a Woman: The Unique Female Qualities of Leadership, author Esther Wachs Book examines the careers of fourteen top female executives - among them Meg Whitman, President and CEO of eBay - to learn what makes them so successful. What she discovers echoes the Caliper study, including a willingness to reinvent the rules; an ability to sell their visions; the determination to turn challenges into opportunities; and a focus on 'high touch' in a high tech business world.
This evidence - that the leadership style of women is not simply unique but possibly at odds with what men practice - begs the question: Do these qualities have value in the marketplace? Is this type of leadership welcome by society and by the public and private sector? Indeed attitudes towards leadership are changing. On the topic of gender and leadership some researchers found that men are more autocratic and that they tend to tell employees exactly how a job should be done. Women were found to be more democratic and inter-personally oriented. Employees who have female leaders are more likely to get rewarded after good performance than when they had a male leader.

**WHY DO WOMEN LEADERS LEAD DIFFERENTLY?**

Briskin suggests that two factors significantly contribute to the making of women union leaders: (1) the discrimination they experience in the workplace, the community, at home and in the union, and, (2) the practice of forming both formal and informal women constituencies within unions in response to that discrimination. Discrimination contributes to women’s leadership development in several ways.

For one thing, discrimination motivates women to get involved in the union and eventually pursue leadership positions. “Negative experiences, usually of inequity, sexism and discrimination against women by employers, were powerful triggers to women becoming active as workplace representatives,” according to research by Golgan and Ledwith (2000: 242-257) as quoted in Briskin, (2006:369), discrimination also moulds how women behave as leaders. Briskin cites the work of Kanter who argued that “apparent sex differences in the behaviour of organizational leaders are in fact a product of the differing structural positions of the sexes within organizations. Because women are more often in position of little power or opportunity for advancement, they behave in ways that reflect their lack of power.” (Kanter (1977) as quoted by Eagly and Johnson.)

Differences in leadership styles cannot be explained only by the fact that women are victims of discrimination, however. “Victimization” may “shape patterns of union women’s leadership,” writes Briskin, but, just as important, is “women’s pro-active resistance and organizing” through women-only union education and union women’s committees. “Indeed, the convergence in discourse and practices in women’s
committees and women-only education with transformational leadership is striking.”
Briskin (2006: 371)

Women’s leadership, then, does not just come about “naturally.” It is not a product of
women’s nature or biological role. Rather, it grows from women’s particular position
in the workplace, the union, the home and the community. And it grows from the fact
that women react to their particular circumstances by coming together in women’s
groups and activities and by organizing actively for change.

BARRIERS FOR WOMEN IN UNION LEADERSHIP

Despite various legislations, attitudinal change and dispositions towards full
integration of women into Trade Union activities, not much success has been
recorded . It is obvious that women’ responses still need to be improved upon.
(Omolara, 2009: 13)
The following are the identified barriers by the ILO:

- Women do not understand or appreciate how unions can benefit them;
- Women fear reprisals from employers (including losing their jobs) for joining
unions;
- Women do not have time to join or participate in union activities because of
conflicting family responsibilities, and childcare facilities are lacking or too
expensive.
- Women often lack the confidence to join unions or to aspire to leadership
positions;
- Religious and cultural norms and traditions prevent women from joining;
- Women face oppositions from their spouses or families; when they decide to
be active unionists
- The male-dominated culture or activities of the union or hostile reactions from
male members discourage women from joining;
- Stereotyped ideas persist about women’s abilities, preferences and roles;
- Unions are not sensitive to the needs of women workers;
- Membership dues are a problem especially for poor working women;
Women are more likely than men to be in atypical forms of work or in the informal sector where they are difficult to reach and organize.

There may be legal constraints to some groups of women workers joining unions;

Entrenched union rules and structures are not conducive to women’s participation and advancement to leadership positions;

Informal procedures in the unions for nominations or appointments rely on established male networks.

Other identified barriers to women participation union activities are:

- Religion – some religious affiliations have beliefs that prevent women from working and thus reduce the probability of joining and participating in trade unionism. Also while in employment, some religions affiliations forbid women from interacting with males who are not their husbands are family relations.

- Male union environment – the prevalent notion is that working in a union is a 24r hour a day job. While men occupying the existing union structures find it easy to perpetuate some prejudices, values and stereotypes unfavourable to women.

- Limited experience and training - some unions have evolved electoral guidelines, which stress union experience and training, prerequisites that women lack.

- Long and unusual work hours – responsibilities of trade unionists, either elected or appointed involve long, sudden unusual hours and traveling, which female workers may not be able to cope with.

- Marital status, a married woman may find it harder to participate in trade union activities than a single or divorced woman.

Moreover, fewer women have the experience for high office in trade union activities and as such Nigerians are not ready to elect a woman to high office. Even women who are active in labour politics get held back by men. Thus women face discrimination in all areas; labour activities are no exception.

There exist a corpus of literature on the trade union movement in Nigeria and its unique position in the industrial relations system, but with reference to the active involvement of women. In the time past, there have been some detailed scholarly works on the industrial relations process with no reference to participation of women. This has given credence to the assertion that in spite of changes in societal outlook
of the capabilities of the Nigerian woman and her significant contribution to the development process, issues in the socio-economic development in Nigeria are rarely treated from the gender point of view.

There is therefore an urgent need for studies which uses gender as a socio-economic variable in understanding developments in the political economy. It is in this sense that this analysis which treats women as a theme central to the understanding of issues in labour unionism in Nigeria is significant. Its expositions of the constraints militating against the female trade unionist in her bid to participate actively in the process of creating through the labour movement, a society conductive for the industrial growth of Nigeria is crucial to understanding her role in nation building in recent years.

According to Vickers, the legislations by governments in form of the provisions of sections 90 and 144 of the Nigeria labour Act and Labour Code of 1974, women’s interest in the collective bargaining system has been adequately catered for. However, when compared with their counterparts from other nations, women in Nigeria do not take active part in the leadership of labour unions. If at all, women participation is minimal.

While a few women have been able to achieve this feat in unions with large number of females such as the Nigeria Association of nurses and Midwives, there are few women in leadership positions of other unions. However, several studies on women in black Africa and indeed Nigeria have revealed that although there have been increased participation of women in wage labour in the past three decades; they have not significantly improved their involvement in union affairs, especially in leadership roles. A larger proportion display total indifference to trade union matters. Thus while women traders have acted collectively in the past to protect their interest, the same can hardly be said of the female wage workers.

The point to stress is that women who constitute about 40 percent of the Nigerian working population are not adequately active in the leadership of the trade union movement, both at the national and state levels. Various scholars have blamed the women for their apathy to labour unionism without tackling the constraints confronting them.
Moreover the patriarchal structure of unions is seen as major constraint inhibiting effective participation of women in the trade union movement. This is in the sense that trade union are structured and functioned on the basis of male dominance. In other words, the legislations establishing unions, their functions, their times of meeting, activities often are tailored to match men only. Therefore, since they are not established with the intention of having women “bossing them” women find it difficult to play very active roles in them. This is what Parpart (1988) labels the ‘patriarchal ideology’ of the unions which negates women’s participation. In looking at the Nigerian situation, Ubeku shares this view by arguing that societal norms do not exactly encourage a woman to be a leader of men in the struggle for improvement in the conditions of employment. Again there is the existence of subtle intimidation of the female members of trade unions by their male counterparts. These intimidation couples with the fear of the ‘wrath’ of men have been mentioned as basic components of the patriarchalism of trade unions.

While it is acknowledged that Africa is mainly a patriarchal society; the strong barrier of patriarchy was broken when Africa men eventually began to accept women as colleagues and partners in the work place. With this innovation, one would have assumed a much easier ride to labour unions political power by women. While residues of union patriarchy exist in terms of the timing of their meetings and their rowdy nature, the real barrier lies in the lack of the determination of women towards union matters.

Another factor seen as impeding the participation of women in labour unionism is the conflict of role between their traditional/domestic roles and the demands of formal employment. This factor especially as it concerns the role prescribed by tradition for women is often seen as a peculiarly African problem. Ubeku was partially referring to the relative traditional subjugation of women in labour matters when he sees traditional norms as militating against women participation in labour matters. The issue is that traditional African society sees the women within the realm of domesticity; hence the woman is measured only by her prowess in child bearing/rearing and in the domestic front. This being the case, the man is the only one saddled with the economic demands of the family outside the immediate family environment.
In the councils of high administrators, men are expected to be independent and assertive. But when women display that propensity, they are thought to be tough and bitchy. A successful woman must be strong, she not only experience the same stresses that men experience in the 20th century, she is accused of being masculine, of pushing too hard of not needing the same income as a man because she has a husband to support her Olajumoke, (1984: 94).

WHAT CAN UNIONS DO TO ENCOURAGE WOMEN LEADERSHIP?

If women’s leadership is a good thing for union women and for unions more generally because of the transformational leadership which it provides, what then can unions do to encourage more of it? Briskin suggests that women leadership is effectively developed through women-only education, provided such education is transformational in design rather than based exclusively on the “deficit” model (education that assumes women are running on a deficit of skills and has as its primary focus skills-development, such as assertiveness training and training in union procedures). Briskin (2006: 371)

It is also essential for unions to support efforts by women to organize as a women’s constituency.

“Constituency organizing, sometimes called self- or separate organizing, and the caucuses and committees which emerge from it, also offer a space for the alternative socialization of women unionists which supports not only their entrance into union leadership, but also the development of transformational practices.” Briskin (2006: 372)

Most importantly, “The collectivity which emerges out of such organizing encourages women leaders to maintain transformational leadership practices inside the mainstream labour movement in the face of often conflicting pressures, and simultaneously demands accountability from them.” Briskin (2006:373).

Building strong women constituencies within unions also allows the development of women leadership to be about more than getting more women into leadership
Organized women’s constituencies help keep the pressure on both women and men leaders to lead in a way that addresses the particular concerns of unions members in the workplace, as well as in the union. Organized women’s constituencies can also provide an on-going support for union that is inclusive of other equity-seeking groups, which inevitably will include large numbers of women.

Consequently, the role of women in labour market is highly undermined, women are less opposed than men to have opportunities for promotion for career advancement, cases where they are employed, restrictions are given to them and sometimes it was discovered that women especially in the banking sector are used as instruments to attract customers and to maintain their high capital base.

Akinboye noted that in Nigeria today less than 5% of managers in strategic sectors are women. The traits that have often been seen in successful managers are masculinity, aggressiveness, competitiveness, firmness and justice; and these traits have been traditionally viewed as being absent among Nigerian women. Though experience has shown that this is a wrong notion Akinboye(2004; 54).

Removing cultural and other barriers through appropriate legislation by government is significantly related to active participation of women in trade union activities in Nigeria. The level of women’s participation in trade unions can be raised by educating them to become increasingly aware of their rights and obligation as workers. There is need for psychological re-orientation of the female worker as to the need to take active part in union meetings as a way to collectively protect their interests.

Women professional associations such as the Federation of Women Lawyers, National Association of Academic Women should be encouraged to liaise with the National Council of Nigerian Women and various ministries in charge of women matters. Likewise, the formation of such welfare women groups as the Army Officers Wives Association, Police Officers Wives Association, although reinforces the status of women as second class role play could be encouraged albeit with the aim of breaking the conception of women as reserve physical and mental resources to be called up only in times of emergency.
Another way forward lies in re-educating the male to accept that real equality for women in the union game can only be achieved at their expense. Planning of union meeting days and times of meeting and other features of union executive itinerary which at present are mostly tailored to fit men should be reviewed.

Also some trade union education needed to be introduced in the form of seminars and conference which should highlight successful women trade unionists as models who are enlightened, liberated, being able to know her rights and obligation and how to fight for them without being confrontational to the authorities.

According to the ILO, Unions should evolve strategies that will consistently encourage equal representation of both men and women in leadership positions because of the following reasons:

- Women account for an increasing proportion of the workforce;
- To be credible and strong, unions must address the priority concerns of its current and potential members; and women concerns are numerous.
- To be credible to women, unions must demonstrate that gender equality is an integral part of their own policies and structures;
- Growing number of women workers are standing up for their rights and seeking support for their rights;
- Women members are positively changing the way unions work and improving the image and influence of unions;
- The promotion of gender equality helps unions strengthen and reaffirm their key role as agents of social change;
- The promotion of gender equality provides common grounds for unions to forge alliances with other social actors.

“According to the ILO “Unions are still not ‘women-friendly and the inclusion of gender perspectives in all trade union policies and programmes far from being achieved”

“Unions can – and must – take up the challenge of transforming the labour market through equality and justice. While it is true that women have been swelling the ranks of the unions, more action is required to ensure their access to union leadership positions.
The quantity of female representation at the National Delegates Conference, the National Executive Council (NEC), the Central Working Committee (CWC) and the National Administrative Council (NAC) of unions needs to be improved upon to reflect the provision of the affirmative action and to give women their much earned voice in their union activities. The number needed should be made explicit and adhered to.

**RESOLUTIONS OF THE 3**<sup>RD</sup> **NLC GENDER CONFERENCE HELD AT HAMDALA HOTEL, KADUNA ON THE 10**<sup>TH</sup> **AND 11**<sup>TH</sup> **MARCH 2008.**

To ensure proper functioning of the National Women Commission, the NLC should allocate 2% of its monthly income to the Commission and the Commission should hold its quarterly statutory meetings financed by NLC. This should commence immediately but subsequently reflected in the NLC Constitution.

That unions have till the end of 2010 to fully implement the NLC Gender Equity Policy and that the National Women Commission should be empowered to pay advocacy visits to all the industrial unions to assess level of implementation and to report outcome at the NLC National Delegates Conference in 2011.

That the NLC and affiliate unions should implement the 30% women representation in leadership positions at all levels including all activities and that union that failed to nominate 30% of women delegates to the NLC National Delegate Conference should be prevented from participating in such conferences or activities.

To increase women participation in decision making structures, unions should adopt the position of the NLC where the Chairperson of the NWC is an automatic Vice President of NLC by making the Chairpersons of the women committee of the unions automatic Vice President and the Gender Desk Officers members of all the organs of the unions.

There is the need to review and update the Gender Equity Policy to include

(i) New Challenges
CONCLUSION

There are significant evidences that women and men have different approaches to union leadership. These differences do not arise from differences in their “nature.” Rather, they arise from the fact that women experience discrimination in all aspects of their lives. The discrimination they face as leaders forces them to adopt a style of leadership that is more collaborative and therefore in keeping with the stereotypical view of how women should behave. Moreover, women leaders adopt a more consultative and inclusive approach to leadership because such an approach allows them to compensate or counter-act their lack of power in union structures.

The evidence also shows that the characteristics and qualities of women leadership are similar to those associated with transformational leadership. Increasingly, such leadership is regarded as what is necessary for unions to be more effective. For example, transformational leadership is more likely to build strong support for the union among both union members and staff.

Unions that accept the critical importance of women leaders, not just for women but all union members, can encourage more women leadership by supporting women-only education and by giving women in the union opportunities to organize into women’s groups. Such groups create pressure on women and men leaders to lead in an inclusive and transformational way to the benefit of all members and the union as a whole.

Union activities in Nigeria has largely been male affair, there is no serious participation by women. Despite the role, aspirations and achievements of trade unions in Nigeria there is disparity in gender participation in union activities all over the world. Union activities tend to be dominated by men, while the women take the back seat. Most of the positions in the union are always taken by men, while women always play a supportive role instead of being found in the forefront like men.
Nigerian culture also tends to limit women participation. The Nigerian culture is unlike the western world, where women are to be seen and heard anywhere. This is confirmed by the low level of participation of women even in politics in the country. Cultural barriers affect the participation of women in union activities. Government legislation, society, lack of awareness of the role of women in union activities affect the participation of women in labour activities. Personality clash involved in union activities, hooliganism involved in union activities and patriarchal structure of the labour union affect the participation of women in union activities. Conflict of roles between traditional/domestic roles and the demands of formal employment affect the participation of women in union activities, lack of women department that can encourage the participation of women in union activities. Finally Legislation by government which is only aimed at protecting women at the place of work and fear of loosing their jobs as a result of union activities affect the participation of women in union activities.

THANK YOU.
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