



Women Inclusion and Decision Making at the Community Level in Bayelsa State

Okoh, Kelechi

**Department of Public Administration,
Federal Polytechnic of Oil and Gas Ekowe, Bayelsa State, Nigeria
Author's E-mail: kcokoh4christ@yahoo.com/Tel: 08065817812**

ABSTRACT

Traditional gender role perception has been in existence since time immemorial. This study explored women inclusion in community decision making; and the roles which women economic engagements and educational attainments have played in community decision making in Bayelsa State. Democratic theory was adopted as the theoretical framework of the study. The main thrust of democratic theory supports the inclusion of citizens in decision making based on some form of political equality. The study was an exploratory research which primarily adopted qualitative analysis approach for both the primary and secondary data that were employed. Through the use of in-depth interviews carried out with community leaders, relevant community members and women in Yenagoa, Oporoma and Nembe. The results of the study indicated that women occupied the bottom of ladder in the decision-making hierarchy at the community level in Bayelsa State. It was also discovered that notwithstanding the economic engagements and educational attainments of women, most communities in Bayelsa State still place women at the background in decision making based on age long gender role perception. The paper therefore concluded among others that the potentials of women, at the community levels in Bayelsa state, were yet to be maximally explored as a result of age long gender role perception, nevertheless, their economic engagements and educational attainments have been of great advantage to the communities at large. Recommendations made included: need for gender sensitisation in the communities, full inclusion of women in community decision making, provision of educational facilities for younger women and equitable sharing of government contracts between men and women among others.

Keywords: Community, Decision making, Economic engagements, Educational attainments, Women.

INTRODUCTION

The issue of traditional division of labours between the men and women have been in existence as far back as the primitive era. Certain roles like that of homemakers were particularly carried out only by the women, while others like that of breadwinners were exclusively reserved for the men (Kanji, Tan, & Toulmin, 2007; United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, 1997). This traditional division of labour had faced some changes in the recent time indicating the mix in the roles being played by both men and women.

These changes in the traditional division of labour between men and women are observed in the area of economic engagements and educational attainments which geared towards societal development (Human Rights Education and Monitoring Center, 2014). In this regard, the role of bread winner can be concurrently played, particularly in the event of inadequate presence of men or when death had claimed the man of the house, women often played the roles of bread winners in the family. Aside this concurrent role play, the overwhelming majority of life sustaining work, including; caring for the elderly, cooking, farming, fetching of water, maintaining a house, raising children; were mostly done by women (Ngara, & Ayabam, 2013). Furthermore, the economic engagements of women accounted

for two-third of the work in the world as well as about seventy-five percent of agricultural output in Africa. Many international conferences have been convened for the purpose of tapping the many potential resources of women for national development (Tayo, 2003). Education of women was declared to be paramount in this regard and for the empowerment of women in the society (Food and Agriculture Organisation of the UN, 2010).

Nonetheless, women are faced with unprecedented levels of hunger, internal displacement, involuntary pregnancies, and sexual violence among other experiences in Nigeria (CEDAW Coalition on Women, Peace and Security, 2017). In fact, women do not enjoy the same privileges that their male counterparts enjoy in Nigeria (Garba, 2016), they are gradually becoming stateless citizens on account of interstate marriages as their fathers' States believed that their husbands' States had adopted them while their husbands' States are not finding it easy to grant them their indigenous status (Kelly, 2019).

Amidst these unfavourable experiences, women in Bayelsa State are further faced with age long gender-based barriers including cultural and discriminatory practices like denial of access to attend school and non-inclusion in decision making at the community levels. If these cultural and discriminatory practices are not critically addressed, they could retard development at the communities and further worsen the poor state of development in the country at large.

Statement of the Problem

The unique nature of women can never be overemphasised. They have been described as peace makers (Emeh, 2014), being naturally gifted with the ability to plan, organise, direct and coordinate all resources at home front for the benefit of all members of the family and the society at large (Ngara & Ayabam, 2013). The educational attainments and economic engagements of women across the world are added opportunities for the overall development of the society (Adeniyi-Ogunyankin, 2014). This is because the educational attainment and economic engagements of a given people are keys to the level of development in their community (Ngara, & Ayabam, 2013; Tasli, 2007). Therefore, the inclusion of women in decision making would not only boost their psychology but would also serve as great gain to the community in general (Tasli, 2007).

Nevertheless, the inclusion of women in community decision making still remained a challenge due to age long tradition that encouraged cultural and discriminatory practices against the women. Among these practices is patriarchal culture which assigned subordination and limited roles to them (Ukwuagu, 2016; International Labour Office, 2012; Hoare & Gell, 2009; United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, 1997). Alluding to this, Garba (2016:33) noted that patriarchal culture was particularly a tool which placed men in the position of domination but the women in the position of subordination; and thereby keeping the women under the control of their fathers when they were girls; and under the control of their husbands when they were married. Lending credence to this, Hoare & Gell (2009) observed that wherever women, whether educated, economically engaged or not, were discriminated against, they are simply being made unfit to contribute their quotas towards development.

It is therefore interesting to note that the cultural and discriminatory practices have suppressed the unique abilities and foresight of women to initiate local action projects for resiliency and community building among other developmental strides (Fatile, Ejalonibu, & Aliu, 2017; Meikle, 2015; Emeh, 2014). Lending credence to this, Moberg (2016) added that efficient approach to poverty alleviation, better public service delivery, improved infrastructure maintenance, social cohesion, greater voice and more accountable governments among others would be missing when women were excluded in community decision making. It is therefore seemed that poor state of development is one of the consequences of discriminatory practices against in community decision making (Tayo, 2003).

In a bid to address the cultural and discriminatory practices against women, several international human rights mechanisms have been put in place. Among these mechanisms is Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which recognises the entitlement of all persons to non-discrimination, including on the basis of sex (Human Rights Education and Monitoring Center, 2014). This also reflected in Beijing platform for Action which asserted that the inclusion of women in decision making is both a demand for democracy and a necessary condition for the interests of women to be adequately taken into consideration (United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women, 2005).

Research Questions

In order to resolve the research problems, the following research questions were raised for the study.

- 1) How has been the inclusion of women in community decision making in Bayelsa state?
- 2) What roles have women economic engagements and educational attainments played in community decision making in Bayelsa State?

Objectives of the Study

The general aim of this study was to investigate women inclusion and decision making at the community level in Bayelsa State. Specifically, the paper sought to:

- 1) Explore the inclusion of women in community decision making in Bayelsa State.
- 2) Understand the roles which women economic engagements and educational attainments have played in community decision making in Bayelsa State.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Concept of Community

There is profusion of opinions about what constitutes the term community. Different scholars have different perception of community. Njunwa (2010:16) “defined community as the group of people who share the same characteristics” noting that the “characteristics and behaviour of communities differs from one community to another depending on their historical background”. Similarly, Greater Shepparton (2010) stated that communities are built through networks which are connections established around a common interest or place like school, the workplace, sporting club or community organisation.

To MacQueen, et al. (2001) community can be viewed as a group of people with diverse elements but are linked by social ties, share common perspective and engage in joint action in geographical locations or settings. It should however be noted that the emphasis placed on certain characteristics in this definition by different individuals usually differ.

Atere & Kassim (2003) defined community as group of people in a given geographical area with community spirit or belonging and due to daily interaction meet their basic physical and social needs of one another. Also, Kanji, Tan, & Toulmin (2007) noted that there are similarities in the sex roles in various communities.

Schutte (2016) remarked that there is a fair measure of consensus among scholars that the word community refers to a group of people within a particular geographical area; such as a target group or a target population.

In this paper, community is seen as a group of people who live together in a specific locality and share a common way of life.

The Concept of Women

Abubakar (2017) wrote that women are mothers, sisters, daughters and wives. While Fatile, et al. (2017) defined women as the female gender, the opposite of men or male gender, and helpers to the male gender. This idea points towards the traditionally assigned role of the women in terms of marriage. Garba (2016) wrote that women particularly in Nigeria are mostly represented in families “as grandmothers, mothers, wives, daughters, sisters, daughters-in law, mothers-in law, aunts, sisters-in law, nieces or maids” (Garba, 2016:37). Noting that they do not enjoy the same privileges that their male counterparts enjoy.

Ngara, & Ayabam (2013) figuratively described women as the currency for cementing political alliances among different ethnic groups. The emphasis of this view was also on marriages.

Furthermore, Emeh (2014) described women as agents of peace and that they are naturally regarded as peace makers during restive times. Contributing on the role of women in national security, Ngara & Ayabam (2013) asserted that the women are naturally gifted with the ability to plan, organise, direct and coordinate all resources at home front for the benefit of all members of the family, and to promote the peace and stability of the home which consequently promotes national development. Similarly, Tayo (2003) stated that many International conferences have been convened primarily in recognition of the universal plight of women and their potentials as untapped human resources for national development. Tasli (2007) remarked that women are essentially involved in reproduction, production

and community management, simply referred to as the “triple role” of women. Meikle (2015) suggested the need for society to tap into the unique abilities of women to initiate local action projects and for community resiliency. Adeniyi-Ogunyankin (2014) remarked that women are mostly underrepresented in decision making even in countries with democratic credentials. Tasli (2007) noted that the women can also resort to survival concern which does not necessarily challenge the prevailing gender inequality.

In this study, women specifically refer to the female gender.

Theoretical Framework

Democratic theory appeared to be relevant as the theoretical framework of analysis for this study. The idea of democracy is traceable to the Greek City-States, with central theme suggesting the inclusion of all citizens in decision-making (Public Participation: Theoretical Perspectives and Application in Contexts of Poverty and Inequality). Lending credence to this, Carpentier (2011) asserted that the concern of democracy was all about the inclusion of the people in the political decision making processes. Affirming that the inclusion of the people in the political process was not only key in democracy, Carpentier (2011) added that it also ensured political equality among the people. The inclusion of the people in decision is therefore key in the idea of democracy.

Any deliberate effort towards the inclusion of the people in decision making at any level of the society is a step in fulfilling the idea of democracy (Adeniyi-Ogunyankin, 2014). Similarly, Carpentier (2011) noted that democracy is a way to address practices that are disruptive to political equality. The adoption of democratic theory is appropriate as it supports a more modern way of life where men and women are equally allowed to be included in decision making process (Garba, 2016).

This study was therefore guided by democratic theory in an attempt to examine women inclusion and decision making at the community level in Bayelsa State.

Women in Decision Making

Defining decision making, Harris (2012) wrote that decision making basically had to do with the study of identifying and choosing from among options available in addressing an issue based on the values and preferences of the decision maker(s). Decision maker(s) as indicated in this submission refers to those who are involved or included in the decision making process. Alluding to the term inclusion in relation to decision making, Moberg (2016) described it as a way of making of those who are without power to gain power. Lending credence to this, Njunwa (2010) observed that inclusion is viewed as means by some, while, to others it is an end, even as there are those who viewed it as both means and end. In the same vein, Moberg (2016) not only described inclusion as a grounded process but also as a politically rich outcome.

Moberg (2016) stated that as means, inclusion in decision making is a way to use community resources to achieve set objective, while as an end, inclusion in decision making served as a longer-term process to develop community capabilities as well as enable inhabitants to play a more active role in community development. Furthermore, André, Martin, & Lanmafankpotin (2012) wrote that inclusion suggested a general sense of being involved with others in carrying out a given activity.

To Carpentier (2011) the process of inclusion in decision making could either be partial or full. Partial inclusion is a situation where decision makers influence one another in the process of decision making but the final determining power actually rests with one party only within the decision making process, while full inclusion is a situation where each of the decision makers has equal power to determine the outcome of decisions.

Inclusion in decision making has benefit that goes with it. Moberg (2016) identified the benefit of inclusion in decision making as more efficient poverty alleviation, better public service delivery, improved infrastructure maintenance, social cohesion, greater voice and more accountable governments among others. Alluding to this, Adeniyi-Ogunyankin (2014) posited that the inclusion of women in decision making is a fundamental human right cum an issue of social justice. Optimistically, Tasli (2007) declared that the inclusion of women in decision making would particularly boost the psychology of the women and at the same time serve as great gain to both women and men in general.

Also, Emeh (2014) argued that the inclusion of women in decision making will attract more developmental strides.

CEDAW Coalition on Women, Peace and Security (2017) noted that there are barriers against the inclusion of women in decision making. Some Feminist scholars believed that these barriers are historical given the long history of lopsided gender-based access to political activities (Meikle, 2015). Making his submission, Ukwuagu (2016) identified tradition and culture as part of the barriers against the inclusion of women in decision making. Supporting this, Garba (2016:33) wrote that “women remain under the control of their fathers and husbands; from when they are girls to when they get married.” The author described it as patriarchal culture which promote male domination and female subordination. Similarly, the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (1997) pointed out the tradition based inequality between the male and female genders as barriers to women in decision making. Hoare & Gell (2009) identified stereotypes and prejudices as part of the barriers against the inclusion of women in decision making. Kelly (2019) stated that though some commentators pointed to religion as one of the barriers against the inclusion of women in decision making, he added that others included a number of socio-economic, cultural and geographical issues.

Contributing, the International Labour Office (2012) identified unequal access to resources, discrimination, and gender norms as barriers against the inclusion of women in decision making. Differently, Emeh (2014) observed that disunity among the women was the greatest barrier against their inclusion in decision making. These views further show that indeed there are barriers against the inclusion of women in decision making.

Considering the consequences of the barriers against the inclusion of women in decision making, Emeh (2014) noted that the absence of women in decision-making renders them voiceless. Also, the United Nations Population Fund declared that gender inequality hinders individuals’ growth, development of countries, and the evolution of the communities (see Human Rights Education and Monitoring Center, 2014).

In the context of this study, women in decision making referred to the inclusion of women in determining what will be in the interest of the public.

Women Economic Engagements

The high burden carried by the women (Hoare & Gell, 2009) make the review of their economic engagements in and outside the home front very interesting. Tayo (2003) declared that women economic engagements accounted for two-third of the work in the world as well as about seventy-five percent of agricultural output in Africa. Connecting this to the family, the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, (1997) observed that conventional studies on the family have been based on the assumption of the couple’s complementary roles, whereby the man is assigned the role of breadwinner and the woman that of homemaker. However, Ngara, & Ayabam (2013) remarked that women in some cases have actually played the roles of bread winners in the family in the event of the death of the man of the house or inadequate presence of men.

According to the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the UN (2010), women economic engagements range from being cultivators on their farms or that of other people as unpaid or paid workers, employers or employees to being wage-labourers in (on-and-off) farm enterprises, alongside their key role as providers of unpaid care work in their households and communities. Also, the International Labour Office (2012) while acknowledging the resourcefulness of women economic engagements to family income and community development, also, pointed out they take on a disproportionate share of unpaid work at home even as entrepreneurs, farm and non-farm labourers, owners of family business and self-employed. Similarly, Ngara, & Ayabam (2013) commented that the overwhelming majority of the labour that sustain life; caring for the elderly, cooking, farming, fetching of water, maintaining a house, raising children; is done by women, and universally this work is accorded low status with no pay.

Igbongidi (2017) noted that all too often women are paid less than men for doing the same work. This view further suggests that men and women should receive equal treatment, and should not be discriminated against based on gender. Fatile, Ejalonibu, & Aliu (2017) declared that when women are economically engaged, it enhances the living standard of their family. And in extension, the societal development will receive boost. Supporting this, Tasli (2007) submitted that women who are wealthier are more likely to be considered for inclusion in community decision making.

However, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (2014) observed that women are limited in translating economic engagements into higher productivity and benefits because of their roles in providing unpaid household and care work, often compounded by cultural norms which limited their ability to seek for more opportunities outside the home fronts.

From the foregoing, it can be inferred that the women economic engagements have gone beyond the home front activities or even traditional farm work to include activities that are entrepreneurial related which put women in position to contribute to the development of the family and the society at large.

Women Education

Ugbor et al. (2017) believed that education, ordinarily, served as a proxy for information, cognitive skills, and values. Tayo (2003) defined education as the cornerstone in the development of human and materials resources of any society. Igbongidi (2017) wrote that education is a formal process of deliberately preparing individuals in the society for mature life through a display of good culture and learning based on experience. Jackson (2011) described education as engine of development as well as the transformers of society. Similarly, the Bayelsa State Ministry of Education viewed education as an instrument for the empowerment, irrespective of the citizens' gender, age, geographical location or terrain and tribe and to make the State economically vibrant and politically stable (Jackson, 2011).

Connecting the above views to women, Fatile, et al. (2017) viewed education as an essential tool that should be given to women in order to fulfil their role as full members of the society. From cultural view point, the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the UN (2010) submitted that some people viewed girls as transitory assets which do not deserve long-term investment, as they often leave their parents household upon marriage. They added that there are higher opportunity costs for educating girls as families tend to rely on them to help with household chores, such as cooking, cleaning and caring for younger siblings.

Also, the education of women cannot be over emphasised, the review however revealed certain challenges to women education which is basically tradition based. Ukwuagu (2016) stated that with men in decision making, women have little or no say even on the decisions that concern them. Hoare & Gell (2009) observed that all women are affected by these stereotypes, those with low levels of education and economic engagement will further be rendered unfit for inclusion in the process of decision making.

Tasli (2007) pointed out that the education of women is a precursor to be considered for their inclusion in community decision making. In this regard, the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the UN (2010) declared that education is paramount in the empowerment of women. Tayo (2003) remarked on the consequence of disparity in access to education between the male and female gender in a given country to include poor state of development. As a way out of this, Tasli (2007) submitted that serious education should be given to women in order to address the many unfavourable experiences facing them as well as for the overall development of the society.

Rate of Economic, Educational and Parliamentary Participation of Women

Available data revealed low inclusion of women from Bayelsa State in the parliamentary seats at the national level, despite high involvement in economic engagements and post-secondary education attainments in the state. Figure 2.1 portrays that notwithstanding the high rate of women economic engagements, the post-secondary educational attainment was a little lower, while the parliamentary seats had the lowest.

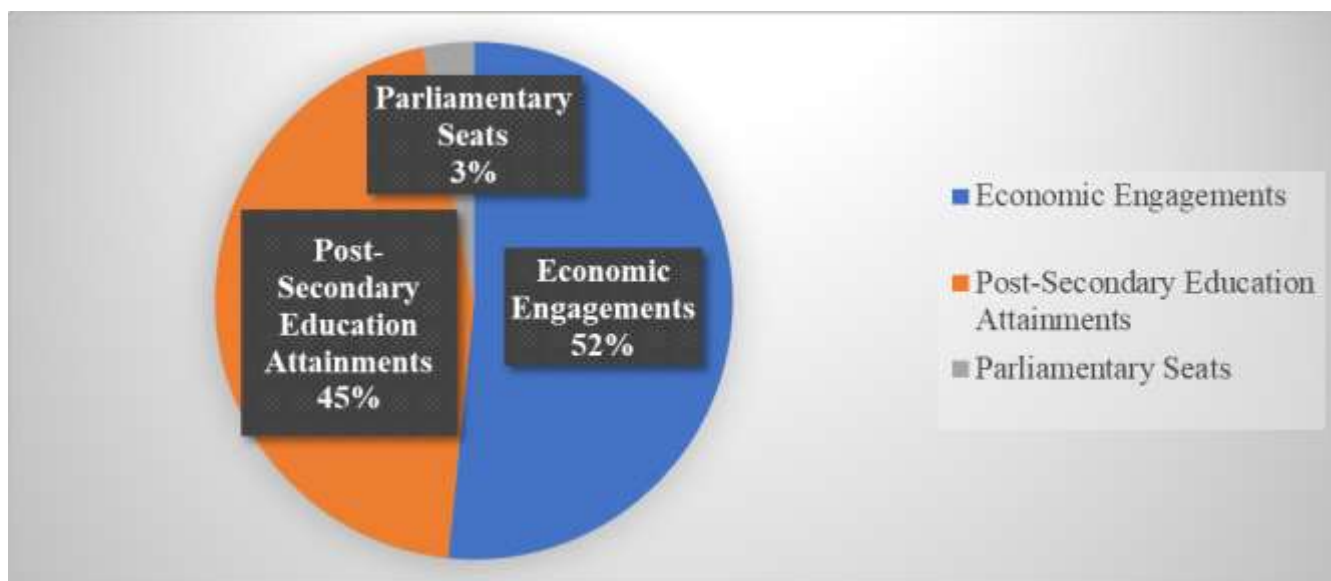


Figure 2.1: Economic, Parliamentary and Educational Participation Rate of Female in Bayelsa State (2015)

Source: Calculated from National Human Development Report (2015)

The figure above clearly shows that the women in Bayelsa state appeared to have lower inclusion in decision making especially at the national level.

METHODOLOGY

The study was an exploratory research and adopted a qualitative approach of conducting research. The choice of qualitative analysis method was deliberate as it enabled the researcher to make an in-depth study of the subject matter. Both primary and secondary data were explored in this study. Relevant scholarly publications were extensively sourced and used to compliment data from in-depth interviews. The processes of in-depth interview involve identifying and conducting intensive individual interviews with a small number of relevant stakeholders or respondents in order to explore their perspectives on the subject under investigation (Nweke & Nwoba, 2016:39; Umar, 2016:130).

Bayelsa State has eight local governments and a total population of one million seven hundred and four thousand, five hundred and fifteen. The male had eight hundred and seventy-four thousand, and eighty-three, while the female had eight hundred and thirty thousand, four hundred and thirty-two (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2009). Given the nature of the study, the simple random sampling technique was first used to sample three out of the eight local government areas. The selected local government areas were Yenagoa, Southern Ijaw and Nembe. Furthermore, fifteen participants were chosen through purposive sampling at the headquarters of the selected local government areas; Yenagoa, Oporoma and Nembe. The major variable of concern for the study were years of residency and age. The target groups include community leaders, relevant community members and women. Twenty-three women and twenty-two men, ages between twenty-five to seventy-five years were interviewed.

PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

It should be noted that this study is an exploratory research. The study carried out in-depth interview on a small sample size of forty-five respondents. The opinions of respondents were presented using qualitative analysis approach. Questions were raised on the structure of community government in Bayelsa state. The opinions of the respondents revealed that the structure of the community government was as followed: The Paramount ruler, the Council of Chiefs, the Community Development Committee, the Youth and the Women. The highest authority in the community was the Paramount ruler; the next in ranking was the Council of Chiefs; this was followed by the Community Development Committee which took charge of monetary and developmental issues while their decisions were subjected to approval by the Paramount ruler; next was the Youth who were the police of as well as handled anything that concerns enforcement in the community; then, the Women.

Questions were raised on the position of women in the community assembly. The respondents revealed that the women had their assembly (mostly) differently. In the women assembly, it was revealed that the women hold meeting from time to time to discuss matters that affect them and they usually express themselves through the women leader. Few communities, adopted the title of Queen and women chiefs. The women chiefs have their cabinets which only see to the affairs of women and were given powers over the women in some women matters. Serious issues were usually referred to the men chiefs.

Questions were raised on the differences between the women chiefs and the men chiefs. The opinions of the respondents revealed that the men chiefs have higher power than the women chiefs. Where the women chiefs were allowed to participate in community decision making, the men chiefs had upper hand. The women leaders were given limited role in the traditional council regarding the community decision making in general. They rather took instructions from the Council of chiefs. They function more like representatives of the women at the compound, family or clan, and the central or community level. The women leaders were also available as channels to reach other women in the community.

In fact, most of the respondents believed that the women were not yet matured for inclusion in the community decision making based on age long tradition. Relatedly, most of the respondents opined that women were not included in the community decision making because they were under their husbands, suggesting that their roles were in their homes and that they rather took instructions from their husbands.

Questions were raised on the differences in access to education between the men and the women. The responses by the respondents revealed that some families refused to send women to school believing that they needed to be available in the home in order to assist in home keeping. Furthermore, the responses revealed that the refusal to send women to the school was based on the assumptions of their child-bearing role and that sending women to school could expose them into immorality.

Questions were raised on role of age long tradition on the access of women to education. The responses revealed that the Ijaw society was actually matrilineal in the past, and that the mothers had far more control over the children than the fathers. In certain community (like Nembe), the uncle assumed the responsibility of training the children of their sisters. However, it was reported that because Western education did not support the system whereby the child name was not that of the father. The uncle who was responsible for the training of the child was at this time in a cross road; to train a child that would not bear his name or not to train the child. The father too could not train the child because if he did, he had less control over the child.

Questions were raised on the benefits of giving women access to education. The respondents opined that with education, women were quite outstanding in the society. Also, the responses revealed that some families, in the olden days, that did risk sending women to the school actually benefited for doing so. Most of the respondents believed that education had become a criterion in the screening of women candidates for position of leadership in the communities as against initial period when there was no such screening. Other respondents opined that education had helped to bridge the gender inequality as far as access to education in the past was concerned in the community.

Questions were raised on the role of educational attainment and economic engagements of women in the community decision making. The responses revealed that the economic engagements and educational attainments of more women have greatly brightened the possibility of women inclusion in community decision making. Some respondents opined that more women were now economically and educationally influential in Bayelsa State. While other respondents opined that notwithstanding the increasing prominence in economic life and educational attainments of some women, the current realities clearly indicated that the women still lag behind and that most of the communities still place women at the background in decision making. The responses suggested that the communities were in transitory period and therefore gradually adjusting to democratic move.

Similarly, responses from the respondents suggested that influential educated women usually attract contract for themselves into the community even as some respondents noted that government contracts were mostly awarded to the men while the women might be given sub contracts. Questions were raised regarding the role of homemaker and breadwinner between men and the women, the responses revealed that the women were increasingly becoming both as they are really active in most

occupations with exception in the role that might prove physically difficult for the women like the cutting of timber, climbing and cutting of palm trees.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The study aimed to explore the inclusion of women and decision making at the community level in Bayelsa state. For in-depth understanding, the structure of community government was examined and the results revealed that the structure of the community government were: The Paramount ruler, the Council of Chiefs, the Community Development Committee, the Youth and the Women. The highest authority in the community was the Paramount ruler; the next in ranking was the Council of Chiefs; this was followed by the Community Development Committee which took charge of monetary and developmental issues while their decisions were subjected to approval by the Paramount ruler; next was the Youth who were the police of as well as handled anything that concerns enforcement in the community; then, the Women. By implication, it suggested that the women were placed at the bottom in the hierarchy of government at the community level in Bayelsa state.

In fact, most of the respondents believed that the women were not yet matured for inclusion in the community decision making based on age long tradition. Relatedly, most of the respondents believed that women were not included in the community decision making because they were under their husbands, suggesting that their roles were in their homes and that they rather took instructions from their husbands. The emphasis of the finding was that the men were the head who took the lead, while the women have to follow or back up the men.

The results also revealed that the men and women had their assemblies (mostly) differently. In the women assembly for instance, it was revealed that the women hold meeting from time to time to discuss matters that affect them and they usually express themselves through the women leader. The position of the women leader was the highest position any woman could attain in most communities. Few communities, nevertheless, adopted the title of Queen and women chiefs. The women chiefs have their cabinets but were not part of the (male dominated) community cabinets, they only see to the affairs of women and were given powers over the women in some women matters. Serious issues were usually referred to the men chiefs.

Furthermore, the findings of this study suggested that the men chiefs have higher power than the women chiefs. In few places where the women chiefs participated in community decision making, the men chiefs had upper hand. The women leaders were given limited role in the traditional council regarding the community decision making in general. They rather took instructions from the Council of chiefs. They function more like representatives of the women at the compound, family or clan, and the central or community level. The women leaders were also available as channels to reach other women in the community.

These results have support in the work of Ukwuagu (2016) which noted that tradition and culture do not support women participation in decision making; and that Bayelsa State is very patriarchal making the women not to question decisions taken by the all men decision making bodies. Similarly, this is consistent with the position of Kelly (2019) when he indicated that women in Nigeria are sometimes given nominal roles with little actual power in governance. Also, Kelly (2019) remarked that the inclusion of women in governance even at the national level is below men overall.

Relatedly, this study also set out to understand the roles which the economic engagements and educational attainments of women have played in community decision making in Bayelsa State. The findings were both historical and revealing as recollection of the past showed that there were differences in access to education between the men and the women. It was revealed that some families refused to send women to school believing that they needed to be available in the home in order to assist in home keeping. It was also discovered that there was assumption that the women should not be sent to school because of their child-bearing role. Also, there was assumption that education could expose women into immorality.

The findings also revealed that the Ijaw society was actually matrilineal in the past, and that the mothers had far more control over the children than the fathers. In certain community (like Nembe), the uncle assumed the responsibility of training the children of their sisters. However, it was reported that because Western education did not support the system whereby the child name was not that of the father. The uncle who was responsible for the training of the child was at this time in a cross road; to

train a child that would not bear his name or not to train the child. The father too could not train the child because if he did, he had less control over the child.

Nevertheless, the results clearly suggested that with education, women were quite outstanding in the society. Also, the study revealed that some families, in the olden days, that did risk sending women to the school actually benefited for doing so. Results from the interviews showed that education had become a criterion in the screening of women candidates for the position of leadership in the communities as against initial period when there was no such screening. Other respondent opined that education had helped to bridge the gender inequality as far as access to education in the past was concerned in the community.

Results from the interviews suggested that influential educated women usually attract contract for themselves into the community even as some respondents noted that government contracts were mostly awarded to the men while the women might be given sub contracts. In this sense, women economic engagements and educational attainments appeared to be helpful in attracting development to their communities. Regarding homemaker and breadwinner roles, the findings suggest that the women were really active in most occupation; the exception was regarding certain occupations that might prove physically difficult for the women like the cutting of timber, climbing and cutting of palm trees.

The findings also suggested that the communities are in transitory period and were therefore gradually adjusting to democratic move. It was observed that even as more women are now economically and educationally influential in Bayelsa State, most of the communities still place women at the background in decision making. Though, the economic engagements and educational attainments of more women have greatly brightened the possibility of women inclusion in community decision making in the future, the current realities clearly indicated that the women still lag behind in community decision making despite their increasing prominence in economic life and educational attainments.

The results above were in line with the position of Garba (2016) when he stated that the patriarchal culture in Nigeria was largely responsible for the non-inclusion of women in decision making. Similarly, the finding was in line with Kelly (2019) when he stated that levels of education and economic development would brighten the possible inclusion of women in governance.

CONCLUSION

This study generally set out to investigate women inclusion and decision making at the community level in Bayelsa state. The intention of the study was to specifically explore the inclusion of women in community decision making in Bayelsa State. It also sought to understand the roles which women economic engagements and educational attainments have played in community decision making in Bayelsa State.

Democratic theory was adopted as its theoretical framework. The main thrust of democratic theory supports the participation of citizens in decision making based on some form of political equality. The study was an exploratory research and adopted qualitative analysis approach for both the primary and secondary data that were employed. Through the use of in-depth interviews carried out with community leaders, relevant community members and women in Yenagoa, Oporoma and Nembe, the study discovered that women are more passive in the decision-making process at the community level in Bayelsa State. It was also discovered that although women play key role in both education and economy, their inclusion in community decision making remains negligible as most communities in Bayelsa State still place them at the background in decision making. This fact was conditioned by age long perception of what the roles of women should be in the community.

The paper therefore concluded that the potentials of women were yet to be maximally explored for the ultimate development of the communities as well as the state as a whole. The partial inclusion of the women in community decision making notwithstanding, the roles of women economic engagements and educational attainments have made the future bright for their inclusion in community decision making.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Following the findings in this study, recommendations made were as followed:

1. There should be serious gender sensitisation on how to maximise developmental opportunities within and around the community. The focus of this sensitisation should be on the way to improve the general well-being of the community.
2. The community should support full inclusion of women in decision making as this will benefit both the men and the women. This will become a formidable teamwork that will make the community developmental plan to work better.
3. Educational facilities and skills acquisition centres should be provided for the younger women in the community to build their personality and capacity on income generation activities.
4. The jobs coming into the community should be shared in a way that women are adequately considered. The women believed that jobs identified as men's work could easily be handled by them.
5. Women should be included in the programmes that promotes their economic engagements and educational attainments.

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