

# **Gender and Trade Unionism in South – South, Nigeria. An Empirical Analysis**

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**Abstract:** *The first generation trade unions that emerged during colonial period in Nigeria were male dominated and this continued till the post-colonial period. Apart from the natural excuse often made by women regarding their inability to combine domestic responsibilities, paid employment and active trade unionism without making a mess of everything, there has been the perpetuation of discrimination against women particularly in the manufacturing and allied industry. Hence this study seeks to analyse gender participation in trade union activities in some selected industrial unions in south-south geo-political zone of Nigeria. Two hypotheses were formulated and tested. T-test and multiple regression analysis were used for the analysis of the data generated for the study at 0.05 level of significance. The findings of this study shows that males are significantly favoured in the positions held in trade unions, among others. The study therefore suggests that government should initiate policy that will encourage women's participation in unionism in Nigeria.*

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Industrial relations systems have become a formidable tool of developing social and economic policies. Therefore, it is of more concern to the trade unions and their members, their employers, and more importantly, to the government. It is already widely known and accepted that women constitutes a powerful force for democratic change in Nigeria (Alalade, 2004). Women's participation in trade union activism therefore will enhance labour union's influence in the new Democratic process in Nigeria.

Be that as it may, in Nigeria of today, evidence abounds showing that the organization and management of trade unions seems to be a male affair (Yinusa, 1990, Milkman, 1990). According to Lawrence (2010), traditionally, women have no roles in the society. In Africa, they are regarded as second-class citizens by their customary practices. It is also assumed that they are unaware of their legal rights and even if they are, they are unable to claim them (Momoh, 2008).

Yinusa (1990) observed that women generally record low level of attendance at trade union meetings and another measure of trade union commitment, women participation in union activities has not been impressive. Though the issue of gender disparity is not pronounced in membership, recruitment, and funding of the unions, it however, continues to be an issue in management of affairs of the unions, it however, continues to be an issue in management of affairs of the unions. To Momoh (2008), the problem of women participation in trade unionism is not limited to Nigeria as it is a worldwide problem in the industrial set up. Evidence abound that most trade unions in the developed world are still in the hand of men (ILO, 1992).

Female workers participation in trade union structures is crucial because it is at that level that decisions of organizations affecting their members are taken. It is at that level too that members are represented in decision making (Dung, 2007). Membership is also mobilized to confront immediate problems within the trade nature should be taken seriously so as to raise the level of participants in politics of change outside the trade union structure.

## 2. CONCEPT OF GENDER

Gender is neither innate nor necessarily stable, it is acquired through interaction in social world and it changes over time (Momoh, 2008). It is a social construction that varies across cultures over time within a given culture relation to the other gender. Milkman (1990) perceives gender as “those non-physiological components of sex that are culturally regarded as appropriate to males and females.

According to Oakley (2011), there is a confusion between sex and gender and makes an attempt to distinguish the two terms. She sees sex, as a biological, which is both psychological and cultural. She goes further to support the above contention with a number of facts. First, anthropologists have reported wide variation in the way different cultures define gender. She further points out that every society use biological sex as criterion for the prescription of gender; although no two cultures would agree completely on what distinguishes one gender from the other. Basow (1992) views gender as subjective feelings of maleness or femaleness irrespective of one's sex.

## 3. CHALLENGES INHIBITING WOMEN INVOLVEMENT IN TRADE UNIONISM

According to Momoh (2008) Glass-ceiling is one of the challenges inhibiting women participation in trade unionism. The term stem from a metaphor for working women who operate in “glass-houses” whose behavior is not only scrutinized by individuals on every level of the organization; but whose success or failure might affect the status of such working women.

Morrison and Von Glinow (1990) state that glass ceiling is a concept popularized in the 1980s to describe a barrier so subtle, so transparent, and yet strong that it prevents women from moving up in the management hierarchy.

Green (1994) notes that women experience both “access discrimination and treatment” discrimination in organizations. Moreover, Morrison and Von Glinow (1990) elaborates on the differences in access and treatments that exist. They came up with three theoretical explanations for those discrepancies between the experiences of male and female, and they are as follows: actual difference, systemic barriers, and discrimination.

The centralization of authority in the unions implies that those in leadership position do often use this vintage position to allocate resources (Odey & Young 2008). In this sense, men, who had occupied union leadership position have use this to perpetuate not only their positions, but their prejudices, values and stereotypes that discriminate against women.

Union politics of representation is greatly influences by informal or non-union structures and networks (Alalade, 2004). Union decisions take place at town meetings, company clubs and bars and at odds hours that make it difficult for women to attend. The Gender unit of the Nigerian Labour Congress has also catalogued some of the challenges facing women in the trade union movement in Nigeria and this includes; lack of budgetary allocation for the commission and gender unit; most unions do not have gender officers; unions' constitution do not have incorporate gender perspectives nor provide constitutional cover for the operations of women activities; gender issues are not regarded as priority areas for collective bargaining; low understanding of gender issues amongst members; and adequate number of full time Trade Unionists mostly at the lower cadre (Dung, 2007).

## 4. ACTUAL DIFFERENCES

The explanation for the access and treatment differences experienced by women in organizations is that notion that women are actually different from their male co-workers and that difference are causal agents leading to differential access and treatment. Powel (1990) in his review of the literature comparing the organizational behavior of male and female managers, came up with the following findings as cited in Momoh (2008):

*Sex differences are absent in task oriented behavior, effectiveness ratings of actual manager and subordinates responses to actual managers, stereotypical differences in some types of managerial behavior and in some ratings of manager in laboratory studies favour male managers (p.69).*

This view supports the no differences' view of sex differences in management.

## **5. SYSTEMIC BARRIERS**

A second general explanation for the differential experiences of women in organization is that certain characteristics of the organizational system and structure impeded women from achieving the status and treatment received by men. Three types of systemic barriers have been investigated in the research literature.

First, there is a compelling evidence that women experience limited access to our exclusive from informal communication networks. According to Ibara (1993), limited network access produces multiple disadvantages, which include: restricted knowledge of what is going on in their organizations and difficulty in forming alliances which, in turn, are associated with limited mobility and glass-ceiling effects.

Nwankwo (1986) is of the view that the barrier to establishing cross-gender mentorship is lack of access to information networks, socialization practices, and norms regarding cross-gender relationships.

A third systemic explanation is that, in many organizations, males represent the vast majority of employees especially among the rank of management as well as in trade unionism. Ligen and Youtz (1986) and Lawrence (2010) perceive that women in trade unionism and managerial positions are often “token” or highly visible representatives of their gender minority.

## **6. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

There are many legal provisions, national and international proclamations in favour of equal rights in matters which relate to social, political and economic benefits, without regard to any form of discrimination on account of any unjustified criteria of race, class or gender. Yet women continued to suffer deprivations in many sectors of the economy. Hence, this study sought to analyse gender participations in trade unionism in some selected industrial unions in south-south Nigeria.

## **7. RESEARCH HYPOTHESES**

The study is meant to test the following hypotheses:

1. There is no significant difference in position held between males and females in trade union activities of selected industrial unions in south-south Nigeria.
2. There is no significant difference between male and female perception in trade unions in South-South Nigeria.

## **8. SCOPE OF THE STUDY**

There are twenty-nine industrial unions in south-south Nigeria. Since all members of industrial unions cannot be studied due to limited time and resources, members of selected industrial unions four states (Cross River, Akwa-Ibom, Rivers and Edo) were used for this study.

Purposively, unions, which have a large proportion of female members, were used as stated below:

1. Nigerian Union of Teachers
2. National Association of Nigerian Nurses and Midwives
3. Nigeria Civil Service Union
4. Nigerian Union of Local Government Employees
5. Non-Academic Staff Union of Education and Associated Institutions.

## **9. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This study was carried out using a survey research design to enhance and allow the researcher to analyze gender participation in trade unions in some selected industrial unions in south-south Nigeria. The targeted populations were financial members of the five selected industrial unions in Cross River, Akwa-Ibom, Rivers and Edo State, Nigeria. However, Delta and Bayelsa States were left out because they have similar structural organizations and administration like Rivers State.

A total of 986 respondent comprising 469 men and 17 women constituted the sample population for the study. The proportionate stratified random sampling technique was used for the study, in

which the sampled size was based on 20% of each of the selected trade unions. Gender participation in Trade Union Activities Questionnaire (GPTUAQ) was used which was validated through the content validity. A total number of 1,174 questionnaires were administered; 994 were retrieved and 8 were not properly filled.

T-test and multiple regression analysis were used for the analysis of the data generated for the study at 0.05 level of significance.

### 10. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The following discussion is based on the hypotheses as well as research questions formulated for this study.

**Table1.** Sample Distribution of Respondents' position in union  $N = 986$ .

Position	Respondents	Percentage %
Member	584	59.2
Committee Member	115	11.7
Executive	9	0.9
Leader	29	2.9
No Response	249	25.3

From the table above 59.2% of the respondents are ordinary members while 11.7% are committee members, 3.6% are in leadership and executive positions in the union.

*Hypothesis1.* There is no significant difference in position held between males and females in trade union activities.

**Table2.** A t-test table showing sex and positions held in trade union between males and females.

Sex	N	X	SD	T	P
Male	469	1.05	0.89		
Female	514	0.89	0.74	3.118	0.02

\*  $P < 0.05$

From table 2 above, the computed value is 3.118 and significant at  $< 0.05$ . the hypothesis is rejected which shows that males are significantly more favoured in the position held in union. This confirmed the low level involvement of women participation in trade union activities.

This finding is in agreement with the view of Green (1994) who affirms that women workers have always been less unitized than men.

*Hypothesis2.* There is no significant difference between female perceptions in trade unionism in the selected industrial unions in south-south, Nigeria.

**Table3.** A t-test table showing male and female perception of women participation in trade unionism

Variable	Sex	N	Mean	SD	Mean difference	T	df	p
Perception on participation	Male	469	31.51	5.79	0.19	0.487	9.81	0.625
	Female	519	31.32	6.40				

\*  $> 0.05$  not significant result

It is clear from the analysis that P values are greater than 0.05, meaning that the result is sufficient. The table above shows that there is no significant difference ( $P > 0.05$ ) at 0.05 level between male and female in their perception of women participation in trade unions.

This finding supports the view of Morison, White and Val Velsor (1987), on glass ceiling as applied to women as a group who are kept from advancing higher because they are women. This is an issue inhibiting the level of participation of men and women in trade union activities in Nigeria. Supporting this view, Issa (1995) maintains that the glass ceiling, where it exists, hinders not only individuals but also the society as a whole. It effectively cuts our pool or potential women corporate leaders by eliminating over one-half of our working population.

More so, influence of gender inequalities also manifest in systemic barriers by recognizing differential experiences on the part of women in trade union activities. This implies that the males

are more experienced in trade unions activities, thus differentiating the role of women by establishing certain areas of less stereotypical functions for the women to perform than the men who are regarded as experts in more complex roles (Momoh, 2008). Thus, the predominance of males as manifest in the gender inequalities in trade unionism can place system pressure on the women.

## **11. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

For women to improve their standing in the trade union movement, trade union organizations must discourage the formulation of purely male chapters which only help to isolate women to looking at gender issues, instead, they must ensure that the rules and regulations favour active participation of female in unions' activities.

The policy makers should affirm a policy that will encourage positive actions on women participation in trade unionism. The union officials should set apart some executive positions in which women members can contest for and hold those positions.

Trade union training designed to increase the political consciousness of women should be promoted.

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