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PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN TRADE UNION ACTIVITIES A MYTH OR REALITY: CROSS RIVER STATE OF NIGERIA EXPERIENCE

GODWIN A. UGAL
*Department of Sociology,
University of Calabar, Nigeria*

By

&

OGAR, MARIA O.
*Faculty of Law,
University of Calabar, Nigeria*

ABSTRACT

The study was designed to uncover the myth and reality of women participation in union activities in Calabar, Cross River State of Nigeria. The sample consisted of 427 subjects (100 from all female associations and 327 from mixed unionism). A t test, ANOVA as well as means and SDS were computed. A t test results show a significant difference between an all female association (union) and mixed unions in their concern for gender gap especially as it affects training. Others like promotion, employment and over concern for gender gap (welfare services), were insignificant. Results also showed that the proportion of women on managerial cadre that take part in union activities were insignificant compared to their numerical strength in the labour force. The same results was obtained for their participation and holding of executive offices in Trade Unions, be it in all female associations or mixed unions.

INTRODUCTION

Trade Union movement in any organization allows workers usually through their elected representatives to participate in the determination of the policies under which work is carried out the recognition of this interest by both parties not only formalizes the labour management relationship but also shows that the relationship has to be sustained as long as production or work continues to exist.

The first organized trade union in Nigeria in 1912 was composed of workers in salaried employment. It was known as the Nigeria Civil Service Union (NCUS). This

union viewed itself as an "Elite organization", concerned with efficiency in the civil service and intensified Nigerianization of the service. The main goal was therefore, to make the civil service a purely Nigeria affair with no foreign participation.

As Yesufu (1982) aptly puts it; "it is important to note that the union was thus not formed by a group of dissatisfied workers who wanted a platform from which to fight for the amelioration of grievances or for the improvement of specific conditions of employment but for Nigerianization and general condition of service."

Ananaba (1989) too posited that civil service union was "hardly a trade union as Trade Unions are known today; It was more or less a petition writing body which was heard only when crisis was developing or an important official was retiring or proceeding on transfer or assuming duty." Since the inception of industrial relations practice in 1912 in Nigeria, the labour force was completely dominated by men. As a result, the activities of industrial unions concentrated on issues that concern the male worker only.

Human resource constitute the bed rock of productivity and development of the economy; individuals are at the core of production and development process. Industrial Relations is therefore, the process by which the relationship between actors in the work environment are guided so that higher productivity and development is achieved. Over the years however, the participation of women in the formal labour force has been growing by leaps and bounds. The full impact of this increase in the proportion of women workers is yet to be felt in the activities of labour union. For instance the executive cadres of the unions are still largely dominated by men. More importantly is the fact that women's' specific issues/needs such as participation, gender gap, provision of social welfare facilities, and promotion are receiving little or no attention in the collective bargaining process. The result is that increase in productivity, a good proportion of which has to be achieved by women, is seriously affected by this situation since the trade unions never fight for women's issues. It is therefore, clear that women would have to become more involved in union activities if the union, contrary to the present practices, are to become sensitive to their specific needs, be more ready to protect their rights and more willing to accommodate their problems. It is in the recognition of this fact that the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) the umbrella body of the registered trade unions in Nigeria recently changed its regulations to enable its member unions accommodate and organize a women's wing. For most individual unions which are made up of mainly male were not interested in women's issues and their participation in union activities.

As Pittin (1984) rightly pointed out there was an attempt to expel the NLC's women wing and consequent upon these developments, many women workers perceived the unions as being indifferent to their needs, desires and aspirations. The aim of this study is to examine the extent of neglect of women's specific needs and issues in the work environment by trade unionist and the implication of this situation for the collective bargaining process in industrial relation process in Nigeria with particular reference to Cross River State of Nigeria.

Method

100 hundred females subjects were drawn from all female associations while the other 327 subjects came from mixed unions. In all, 427 subjects took part in the study. The sample was drawn from 18 duly registered unions 4 all female unions and 14 mixed unions with 70 executive members. The subjects' ages range from 18 – 65 years. This age bracket forms the bulk of labour force and registered trade unions.

Tools

The subjects were given the following questionnaire, the Trade Unionism and Women's Issues Questionnaire (TUWIQ), which consisted of items designed to assess union's concern for women's specific needs in the industrial relation process in an organization. Both executive and non-executives were administered the questionnaire.

To measure the union activities that the members have been involved in, as well as assessing the level of concern of unions on women's issues this questionnaire on women's issues (TUWIQ) was employed. This questionnaire was developed by the authors. It is a 50 item scale and each question is completed on a six point response scale. These items were divided into six sections measuring different variables as shown on fig 1.

(1) Gender gap; (2) Welfare services; (3) Awareness of female workers of union activities; (4) Proportion of women in managerial cadre; (5) Level of participation of women in union activities and; (6) Union members relationship with employees.

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			Variable Measured
1.	1 – 18	Gender gap by the union	This section measures concern for gender gap (Training, employment, promotion etc, among the female cadre, for these have the potential to affect industrial relation and lower productivity). These 18 items were designed to assess the level of concern for gender gap and how they affect industrial relation process.
2.	19 – 24	Availability of welfare service	It is pertinent that in any good working environment, welfare service (such as rest rooms, child rearing facilities e.g. day-care centers) should be provided to enhance productivity of female workers.
3.	25 – 30	Level of awareness of the female workers of union activities	It is often erroneously assumed that most female workers are hardly interested in union activities as such, when major policy decisions are to be taken, in the bargain the female worker gets left out or side lined.
4.	31 – 37	Proportion of women in the managerial cadre	It is a known fact that a number of women in the managerial cadre are relatively low. This may be as a result of lack of access to facilities such as training, which would have enhanced their promotion to managerial cadre.
5.	38 – 42	Level of participation of women generally in union activities	Though a bulk of labour force constitute the women folk when it comes to active participation in union activities such as strikes, rallies, lockouts etc, they do not participate actively.
6.	43 - 50	The inter personal relationship that exist between union members and employers.	These items measures how cordial union members are amongst themselves and their employers in the affairs of industrial relations, for where good cordial interaction among members and the employers does not exist it affects productivity and leads to incessant strikes and disaffection.

Fig. 1: Description of the Tuwiq Scale

Table 1: Difference between all Female Association (union) and Mixed Unions; their Concern for Gender Gap

Concern for gender gap	TYPES OF UNION				
	Mixed $\bar{x} = 363$	SD	All female $\bar{x} = 64$	SD	t
Training	24.43	4.72	25.86	3.86	2.63*
Promotion	23.21	4.21	22.28	4.35	1.57
Employment	22.80	4.46	23.14	4.00	0.70
Overall concern for gender gap	70.31	9.93	71.33	8.64	0.85

*Significant at .01

Table 2: ANOVA for Influence of Socio-economic Status on Women's Level of Participation in Union Activities in Mixed Unions

Socio-Economic Status	N	\bar{X}	SD
High	72	27.46	4.50
Middle	76	24.66	4.96
Low	47	24.21	5.38
Total	195	25.58	

Sours. of Var.	SS	DF	MS	F
Between Group	406.50	2	203.25	*8.48
Within Group	5628.85	192	23.98	
Total	5035.35	194		

*Significant at .05

Table 3: Differences Between all Female Association and Mixed Union in their Perception of the Proportion of Women Participating in Union Activities at the Managerial Level

Type of Union	N	X	SD	T
All female associations	64	19.56	3.30	
Mixed union	363	19.94	4.62	*0.79
Total	427	19.88	4.45	

*Insignificant

Analysis

Apart from the mean, S.D's and t test analysis of variance ANOVA was used to test for significant differences between group need, especially where more than one independent variable exist. The resultant t. test indicated significant differences between the all Female Associations and mixed unions groups.

Results and Discussion

The following results were obtained after the analysis Table 1 presents the mean, S.Ds and t values for (TUWIQ) scale. The results indicate that all female association (unions) were more concerned and eager about women's training than members in the mixed union, the results again show a significant difference between the two groups in the training factor at .01 level (Table 1).

The results on table 1 on concern for gender gap shows that all female associations have a high level of concern for gender gap in terms of training than their mixed counterparts. Women feel that they are not adequately catered for by their employers when it comes to training women employees for additional skills. This is because the men think that women acquiring additional skills is a waste. This could be so because inspite of the acquired training, they still end up at home performing their primary function of taking care of the home. Of course, most of the trainings are in areas such as vocational, secretarial study and so on. This finding is in line with the study carried out by United Nation's Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO, 1972) in collaboration with International and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW, 1992). The findings from that research showed that there is lack of adequate training opportunities in technical areas for women in workforce especially at the low level cadre of jobs. This assertion was confirmed by Fapohunda (1976) when she said that women have a higher labour force than their male counterparts. However women enter the labour market and are still doing so but in the areas mostly at the low level jobs or rather jobs designed for females e.g. nursing cleaners, teaching etc. but very few women are trained as doctors, engineers, and lawyers. The few who are trained, do not represent the percentage of women in labour force. This is the reality of what is on ground today in Nigeria or perhaps in many of the developing countries of the world.

When concern for employment and promotion of women was considered the result was insignificant. This is explainable from the fact that women constitute about 50% of the work force today, with their influx into the labour market, they automatically stand the chance of being promoted as at when due.

The results on Table 2 shows the influence of socio-economic status (SES) on Women's level of participation in union activities. The result reveals that women from high socio-economic status have a high level of participation in union activities than women from low socio-economic status (SES) and middle socio-economic status. In other words women from high SES participate more actively in union activities than those from both middle and low SES respectively.

The finding is not unexpected because in an all female association there is little or no competition. The females may not see themselves in competition with anybody since all members are females. However, in mixed unions the reverse is the case. It was found that women who are at the high socio-economic status level are seen as being closer to management and it is believed that their voices/opinion would be heard more than those at the middle or lower socio-economic status level. Information about union activities are specifically made known to them and their active support solicited to show the seriousness of the unions. But for the middle and lower socio economic level members, their level of support and participation is taken for granted. Since members of the high socio-economic status feel they have been accorded that recognition, they have to reciprocate by status feel that they have been accorded that recognition, they have to reciprocate by showing their active support and interest in union activities.

Table 3 presents the results of Mean S.D's and t ration for all female associations and mixed unions in their perception of the proportion of women participation in union activities at the managerial level. The results is not unexpected however, for the expected finding to have conformed with the reality of what is actually in practice one should have obtained a significant difference of the proportion of women on managerial levels that participate in union activities. For most unions, the number of women holding managerial positions are small and does not represent the numerical strength of the women population within the union. The same finding was obtained with regards to work places and the women labour force participation. Within the union structure one finds only one or two women in the executive. And the positions mostly held are that of Vice-Chairperson or Treasurer. In such situations women rarely contribute to issues and worse still their individual needs never gets to the collective bargaining table. Koziara & Pierson (1981) rightly observed that in the third world countries, Nigeria inclusive, women's absence from Trade Union Leadership is most marked. Shields (1994) too stated that where women were appointed to top managerial jobs, some of them feel they must become like the 'boys' and once they get there it is hard to change track. This may explain the difference in women's perception of the proportion of women participation in union activities at the

and once they get there it is hard to change track. This may explain the difference in women's perception of the proportion of women participation in union activities at the managerial level in this study the result was insignificant in all female associations and mixed unions. Since a negligible proportion of women participate at both the managerial and executive levels, that could be responsible for women's needs hardly being thought of as being important. For they have neither the powers nor the opportunity to present them at the collective bargaining table where they should be rightly tabled in addition with other requests on better condition of service. This situation can only change if only they embrace the political will to join unions and participate actively in its activities.

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