

Chapter 65

Gender Responsive Election Coverage in Nigeria: A Score Card of 2011 General Elections

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ABSTRACT

This article appraises media coverage of elections in Nigeria with a view to determining the extent it is gender responsive. Specifically, it assesses media coverage of elections and highlights the implications for gender equitable politics in Nigeria; provides data on coverage of both men and women during 2011 general elections; and reviews whether media personnel have fulfilled their social responsibility expectations such as gender equality goals to which the Nigerian state has pledged to in many international instruments. Data for the study were mined from existing documents on media coverage of elections in Nigeria collected, during the 2011 general elections across the six geopolitical zones; and African Media Barometer 2008 and 2011. This score card brings to the fore the extent Nigerian media personnel are implementing the Beijing Platform for Action; and the findings can be used for policy formulation on media reportage and programming for gender responsive election coverage.

INTRODUCTION

Gender issues, especially the role of media have been receiving increasing attention in the past decades - from 1975 UN International Year on Women through the decade (1976-85) to New York 2000 Beijing+5. Top on the agenda of the Nairobi World Conference to review and appraise the achievements of the UN Decade for Women in 1985, the Beijing Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995, and New York 2000 were women and the media. A common theme in these “women empowerment fora from Mexico’75, through Nairobi’85, to Abuja’89, Dakar’94, Beijing’95 and New York’00 is gender equitable development (Ogwezzy-Ndisika, 2011). So, gender inequality has become a global concern;

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-1933-1.ch065

and continues to be a major theme in global treaties, covenants, and declarations because women are now acknowledged to be catalysts to people-centred development strategies. In fact, one of the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), specifically MDG N0.3 is aimed at achieving gender equality and women empowerment.

Gender equality is important because it allows countries to draw on the full range of human resources available to it to progress; and helps ensure that women's and girl's needs are adequately met in policy-making process. One way of achieving this, is:

...women's participation in politics – as voters, candidates, politicians, civil society activists, and in other roles... Central to the issue of equal access [participation] ... is the actual extent to which women may exercise their rights to opinion, expression of information without discrimination and the degree to which women actually enjoy their right to participation in public life...(The ACE Encyclopaedia: Media and Elections, 2012, p.17)

However, research findings on media representation of women reveal that women are under represented in general (Ogwezzy-Ndisika, 2011). Considering the fact that media are increasingly being used world-wide with their power of reaching a large mass of audience, it cannot be ignored in the political scheme of things. This might account for why Nwankwo (1996, p.XI) quoted in Ogwezzy (2004, p.137) said that “one vital factor in the pursuit of gender equality in politics is the media”.

Notwithstanding, election coverage historically has been biased against women – both in quantity and quality, because reports are often gender biased much to the disadvantage of women, as women are either ‘invisible’ – missing voice, stereotyped, or negatively represented. This is despite the fact that today it is a common knowledge that there is a shift in the traditional roles of women; it has not reflected in the way the media represent women. Rather women get prominence on issues of sex via showing the photograph of semi-rude women to play up sex appeal, and media writers write stories that emphasize chastity for women. These reinforce gender stereotypes and these stereotypes have implications for women's participation in politics. Hence, the need for the evaluation of media coverage of elections in Nigeria with a view to determining the extent it is gender responsive.

As Nigeria prepares for another major election in 2015, it is important in order to have data on coverage of both men and women during elections, and to review whether media personnel have fulfilled their social responsibility expectations such as gender equality goals to which the Nigerian state has pledged to in many international instruments. Data for the study were mined from existing documents on media coverage of elections in Nigeria collected, during the 2011 general elections in Nigeria across the six geopolitical zones; and *African Media Barometer* 2008 and 2011. So, this paper on gender responsive election coverage provides a way of assessing media coverage of elections and highlighting the implications for gender equitable politics in Nigeria. It is hoped that this score card would bring to the fore the extent Nigerian media personnel are implementing the Beijing Platform for Action; and the findings can be used for policy formulation on media programming for gender responsive election coverage.

ESSENCE OF GENDER RESPONSIVE ELECTION COVERAGE

Resistance to gender equality in the past has largely derived from weak understanding of the implications of gender mainstreaming for all social groups coupled with the failure on the part of gender actors and

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