

Chapter 23

Advocating the Woman Affirmative Action and Women Empowerment in Rural Cross River State of Nigeria: The Role of the Civil Society and the Media

Endong Floribert Patrick Calvin
University of Calabar, Nigeria

ABSTRACT

Most media initiatives (particularly radio and television programs) bordering on women empowerment and the woman affirmative action tend to give less attention to the rural woman to the advantage of her urban counterpart who, to a high extent is already abreast of the feminist concept. This more or less “accidental” discrimination is causing the grassroots women to stay somewhat in ignorance and to further be victimized by the viscous patriarchal system which prevails in traditional circles. Based on a documentary analysis and semi structured interviews with experts, this chapter explores the role of the local media and the civil society in the sensitization of the rural woman towards emancipation and socio-economic empowerment in Cross River State of Nigeria. The chapter equally assesses the effectiveness of the advocacy strategies employed by local media houses and NGOs for such purposes. It assesses civil society’s use of the media for the women affirmative action in rural Cross River State of Nigeria as well as the local media potential to push this affirmative action in the grassroots.

INTRODUCTION

The global struggle against patriarchy and chauvinism – manifested by issues such as the discrimination against women, gender inequality and the relegation of women to a subordinate status in the society – has engendered a variety of strategies and paradigms geared towards women emancipation and women empowerment. Some of these strategies include (i) the Beijing Conference, (ii) the Vienna Declaration

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of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women [1979], (iii) the Declaration on the Protection of Women and Children in Emergency and Armed Conflicts [1974], and (iv) the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women [2000] among others. To keep pace with this global mobilization against women marginalization, the Nigerian Federation has ratified the above mentioned declarations as well as a multitude of other international conventions pertaining to women emancipation. In addition to its signing of these international conventions, the Nigerian Federation has adopted gender sensitive schemes such as the Women in Development (WID) and recently the Women Affirmative Action which is described as a paradigm conceived “to promote power sharing and to protect groups [notably women] considered to be relatively disadvantaged” in the Nigerian socio-economic sphere (Jibril, 2006).

In principle, the Affirmative Action is a program or policy seeking to redress past social discriminations through the elaboration of strategic actions to ensure equal opportunities in such areas of development as education, law, politics and employment. Neologisms such as the Africanization policy (of the 1940s), the Indigenization policy (adopted since 1960), and the quota system represent various facets of the Affirmative Action in Nigeria. These forms of Affirmation Action have been adopted at different periods in the history of Nigeria. As a neologism and socio-political (development) paradigm, the Women Affirmative Action is progressively becoming popular in today’s Nigeria. It has come to be supported by the 1999 Nigerian Constitution, as revealed in its three components including: (i) anti-discrimination clause, (ii) the federal character principle and (iii) the federal character commission (Jibril, 2006).

Despite all these colossal (non-)governmental efforts, women marginalization is still strongly perceptible in almost all the spheres of the Nigerian economy. Illiteracy among women is still high and the role of women in development is still relatively insignificant. As observed by The British Council Nigeria (2012), the local implementation of the various documents aimed at enabling the Women Affirmative Action “has remained weak” (p.54). Though the course for women emancipation and empowerment is getting remarkable momentum in the political sphere, the plight of the Nigerian women continues to be grossly deplorable in the socio-economic sphere of the country. The various advocacy strategies aimed at pushing the women affirmative action are still very patchy and yet to yield the awaited results, especially in the grassroots. In effect, most women-based and feminist initiatives by governmental and non-governmental organizations in Nigeria tend to focus principally on the situation of the urban/modern woman (the woman in the town) paying relatively little attention to her counterpart in the grassroots. Similarly, most media initiatives (especially radio and television programs) bordering on the woman affirmative action tend to give less attention to the rural woman to the advantage of her urban counterpart who, to a relatively high extent, is already at breast of the feminist concept. This more or less “accidental” discrimination is causing the grass roots women to stay somewhat in ignorance and to further be victimized by the viscous patriarchal system which prevails in traditional(ist) circles. Based on a documentary analysis and semi structured interviews with experts (from local support organization and media houses), this chapter has as principal objective to critically explore the role of the local media and the civil society in the sensitization of the rural woman towards emancipation in Cross River State of Nigeria. The chapter will equally attempt to assess the effectiveness of the advocacy strategies employed by local media organizations and NGOs for the purpose. It will thus assess civil society’s use of the media for the women affirmative action in rural Cross River State of Nigeria as well as will examine local media’s potential to push this affirmative action in the grassroots.

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