

## **Women's Participation at Executive Level in Trade Unions in Nigeria (1985-1990)**

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### **Introduction**

Gender issues are concepts which incorporate wage labour and domestic labour (Sow 1994:6). Most traditional societies, world-wide, perceive women as 'inferior' to men and men as 'superior' to women. In other words, women are seen as the weaker sex than men biologically. According to Berger (1986:216) the relationship between household labour, wage labour, and capitalism has been increasingly used by scholars as part of feminist efforts to explain economic activities carried out by women. This has led to awareness of how household labour sustains the capitalist system of economic production and to in-depth understanding of the complexities in the relationships between women's dual spheres of experience as household workers and as wage earners. Despite the high level of concern this issue has raised, certain ideas continue to be accepted with insufficient examinations. One of these is the notion that because of the split in their lives, women industrial workers do not experience proletarianisation as totally or as intensely as men do. This theory of women's incomplete proletarianisation attributes the low level of women participation in trade unionism to their involvement in reproductive and productive activities. Even as full-time wage earners, women continue to assume responsibility for household tasks, welfare of the members and socialisation of the future generation of workers. This division of time and responsibility, the theory claims, leaves women less prone to identify themselves solely as workers and therefore less liable to identify themselves to class-oriented collective action. But, their incomplete proletarianisation is economic and psychological, which

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also suggests that the option of relying on male incomes for support, if necessary, decreases women's dependence on their own labour power. In this paper, the theory of women's incomplete proletarianisation is used to explain: (i) the life situation and circumstances of the working women in Nigeria who felt cheated and oppressed by their low participation in trade unionism; (ii) their desire to get out of their 'shell'; and (iii) how they want to do it.

It is important to note that Great Britain was the cradle of industrialisation. As the process of industrialisation developed, trade unions emerged between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to fight against exploitative capitalists, and to obtain higher wages and less hours of work for the workers. Since then, scholars have conceptualised and defined 'trade unions' differently. For instance, Sydney and Beatrice Webb (1920) defined a trade union as 'a continuous association of wage earners for the purpose of maintaining or improving the conditions of their working lives'. Sydney and Beatrice Webb often referred to as the Webb, are classical theorists of trade unionism.

Their definition of 'trade union' was based on their experiences in Western countries. The Webb restricted the scope of trade unions to associations of wage earners; that is junior workers in complex organisation. In Nigeria, Trade Union Decree 1973, defines trade union as:

Any combination of workers or employers, whether temporary or permanent, the purpose of which is to regulate the terms and conditions of employment of workers, whether the combination in question would or would not, apart from this Decree, be an unlawful combination by reason of any of its purposes being in restraint of trade, and whether its purposes do or do not include the provision of benefits for its members (Trade Unions Decree No. 31, 1973, A 545, Section 1, Sub Section 1).

Compared with the Webb's definition, the definition of trade union as contained in Trade Unions Decree No. 31, 1973 has a wider space. It covers associations for wage earners, senior staff associations, management staff associations and employers association. In view of the existing inconsistencies and dissimilarities in conceptualisation and definition of trade unions, authors are free to define trade unionism as used in their contexts to avoid unnecessary ambiguities and misunderstanding. Therefore, in this paper, 'trade unions' are defined as associations of junior workers in industrial organisations for the purpose of obtaining higher wages for them and improving their conditions of

work. Senior staff association, management staff association and employers associations are outside the scope of the definition and so are excluded. These excluded associations represent the interests of senior staff, management staff and employers, and they perform more-or-less similar functions as trade unions for their memberships. They are also affiliated to the Nigerian Employers' Consultative Association (NECA), whereas Trade Unions are affiliated to the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC).

Before the industrial revolution in Great Britain in the eighteenth century, women scarcely participated in trade union activities. They started to participate in 1903 when the Civil and Public Services Association (CPSA) was founded. Up to 1920, executive positions were occupied by men. In 1921, Nova James became the first full-time female assistant secretary of the Clerical Officers Association (COA) which was a branch of the CPSA. By the end of 1978, CPSA had a total membership of 225,000. Out of these, 146,250 (65 per cent) were women, and 78,750 (35 per cent) were men. There were 29 members of the national executives; only seven were women and none was elected either as president or vice-president (Wigham 1980:54). Sloane and Witney (1985:85-92) had more or less similar pattern of women participation in United States of America. There, women participation in trade unionism has many implications on family life because of their multiple roles as mothers, wives, workers, etc. However, USSR (former Russia) presented a different picture: women participation was high. For instance, a woman trade unionist might be a chairman in a branch union, and a secretary at the district or national level (Lane 1978).

Discussing the Third World nations generally (i.e. Africa, Asia and Latin America), Savara (1986:70) remarked that the women are often seen as a more docile working force compared with men. So, they are less prone to participate in trade union activities than men. Also, there is often a difficulty in getting statistical data specifying the relative proportions of men and women who are trade unionists. For instance, in Tunisia, according to Zeghidi (1995:350) trade union movements developed in association with the National Liberation Movement (NLM). The 'rich', the 'communists', and the 'intellectuals' were often the targets of Tunisian trade unionists. These target groups were seen as the oppressors of the masses. In 1980, there was a massive increase in the labour force; 340,000 working women represented 21.7 per cent of

it. The women were employed in the manufacturing industry, and in the services. In 1984, 10,000 women were primary school teachers, 4,000 were secondary school teachers, and 21 per cent of the University teachers. Textiles and clothing industries were also set up in cities, villages and towns. These introduced a new phenomenon of female factory workers in Tunisia and a great number of female workers joined the trade union movement. I find these statistical analysis stimulating. The data could be interpreted, in my own opinion, to mean that a high proportion of women in Tunisia are liberated from the oppressions of the patriarchal traditions and work outside the home. Tunisian women are becoming more aware, sensitised, and conscientised about gender issues and relations. Such awareness has encouraged them to join labour movements, despite strong resistance from the men in those labour movements. They know fully well that their active participation will help them to achieve social, economic, and political empowerments which they need for advancement and prosperity of the Tunisian working class in general, and for working women in particular. Despite these noble achievements, it is disappointing to note that no statistical representation of the role of men and women in labour movements in Tunisia was recorded. This gap in knowledge makes it difficult to quantify, determine, and compare the proportion of women vis-à-vis men who participate in the Tunisian labour movements.

In Nigeria, prior to 1976, women participation in trade union activities had psychological effects. These psychological effects were brought about by the mode of socialisation of women. Women were socialised to believe that their rightful position was in the home, rearing children, looking after their husbands, and performing domestic chores and drudgery. Any other achieved aspiration was regarded as an appendage. But with industrialisation, urbanisation, modernisation, and emancipation of women, the myth of familism, and the myth of women's non-productivity which were imposed on Nigerians by colonialists became out-moded (Michel 1980:155-172). Today, Nigerian women both in rural, urban and city centres work outside their homes, in the farms, and trade in the markets. Those with high level Western education work in industries, firms, and civil service. Some of these women are entrepreneurs of international and multinational corporations. Women trade and work outside their homes in order to earn incomes and assist to improve the life style of their families (Obi 1992:311-316; Anyanwu 1993:127-129). Nigeria had a total labour

force of 23,179,000 in 1970. Out of these, 63.25 per cent (i.e. 14,549,128) were males, and 36.8 per cent (i.e. 8,529,872) were females. In 1990, its total labour force was 38,438,000. About 64.6 per cent (i.e. 24,830,948) were males and 35.4 per cent (i.e. 13,607,052) were females. Further analysis of these data reveals that in 1990, women in Nigeria labour force experienced an increase of 159.5 per cent, and men also experienced a percentage increase of 170.7 per cent over the 1970 figures (The World Bank, *African Development Indicators* 1996:291). It is likely that these workers belonged to different trade unions and associations according to their occupational status. But there was no statistical records available showing the distribution of these workers by gender, status, trade unions and associations. This is a gap in knowledge. This research is an attempt to make a contribution to knowledge about participation of workers, especially women at the executive level in trade unions in Nigeria between 1985 and 1990.

According to Nwauzor (1990), there were no records to show that women in Nigeria participated in trade unions up to 1960s. But after the restructuring of trade unions along industrial line and into one central body in 1978, the presence of women became apparent. That led to the formation of the Nigerian Labour Congress Women's Wing (NLCWW) in 1985, and thereafter state branches, such as that of Edo State were set up. With the birth of the women's wing, trade unionism in Nigeria has responded to the yearnings of women to participate at all levels and this gives a new dimension to the involvement of women in Nigerian movement. Involvement of women becomes possible because women in trade unions share aspirations of trade unionists, and some women have husbands who are trade union leaders. Omoregie (1990) emphasised that in order to participate actively in trade unionism, a woman must have a co-operative and understanding husband who does not entertain gossips about his wife. Otherwise, she cannot cope with the demands of the movement, and eventually may have to resign to despair. She stresses the need for women to participate actively in trade unionism; that women have much to bargain for themselves and for their colleagues such as shorter hours of work, maternity leave, etc.

Furthermore, with respect to the participation of women in key executive positions in the national trade unions in Edo State, for instance, official documents showed that there were 33 trade unions, 4

failed to supply the names of their chairpersons/secretaries. Out of the 29 trade unions which supplied the names, 28 had male chairperson, and only one had a female chairperson, Mrs C.T. Omoregie of the National Association of Nigerian Nurses and Midwives (NANNM) (Federal Ministry of Employment Labour and Productivity 1990). Also in NANNM at the national level, there were 21 chairperson positions. Out of the 21 chairperson positions, only 4 women occupied the position in four States namely: Edo, Ogun, Oyo and Cross River States (Omoregie 1990). One would have thought that half of the chairperson positions, at least, would be occupied by women, since in the nursing profession there is greater number of women than men. But ironically, the reverse was the case.

From the above exposition, the low participation of women in Nigerian trade unionism was attributable to the socio-cultural stereotypes about men and women which usually determine their socialisation patterns, and gender division of labour. Are there any other crucial factors which prevent women in Nigeria from participating in trade unions at the executive level? Can the present low participation of women be increased? Why should high participation of women in Nigerian trade unions be encouraged? These are some crucial questions this research attempts to answer.

### **Methodology**

Respondents were sampled from six cities namely: Jos, Lagos, Enugu, Kanò, Warri and Benin. These respondents were working in different establishments, and thus belonged to different trade unions. These include Nigerian Union of Teachers (NUT); National Association of Nigerian Nurses and Midwives (NANNM); Non-Academic Staff Union of Universities, Educational and Allied Institutions (NASU); Nigerian Union of Journalism (NUJ); National Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas Workers (NUPENG); National Union of Postal and Telecommunication Employees (NUPTE); and Radio, Television, Theatre Arts Workers Union (RATTAWU). Accidental sampling technique was used to select 25 women and 25 men trade union members from each of the following areas:

- In Jos, NUT, NANNM, NASU, NUJ, NUPTE and RATTAWU.
- In Lagos, NUT, NANNM, NASU, NUJ, NUPTE and RATTAWU.

- In Enugu, NUT, NANNM, NUJ, NUPTE and RATTAWU.
- In Kano, NUT, NANNM, NASU, NUJ, NUPTE and RATTAWU.
- In Warri, NUT, NANNM, NUJ, NUPTE, NUPENG and RATTAWU.
- In Benin, NUT, NANNM, NASU, NUJ, NUPTE, NUPENG and RATTAWU.

Thus, the total number of men and women selected for the research was 300. This research is women oriented. Men were included in the sample simply to reduce gender bias, and also for comparative purposes. The research found the sample size convenient to handle in view of the financial constraints and time available for the research, June-November 1990. Structured questionnaires were distributed to 300 men and women. Out of the 300 questionnaires distributed, only 150 were completed properly. This represented a response rate of 50 per cent.

Structured questionnaires were used to collect:

- Data relating to personal details of the respondents, e.g. indicate your highest educational attainment;
- Data relating to research objectives, e.g. would you like Nigerian women to occupy executive positions in trade unions ? Give reason(s) for your answer;
- Data relating to research hypothesis, e.g. do you agree or disagree with the statement that if Nigerian trade unionism improves its social image, women participation will increase at the executive level?

Descriptive and qualitative approach was used for data analysis: Frequency distribution and percentages were used to determine the relationship between variables. Data collected with structured questionnaires were used to write Section Three of this paper.

### ***Methodological Problems***

Problems were encountered with the structured questionnaire technique used for data collection. Three hundred questionnaires were personally distributed to 300 respondents to complete and return. Four research assistants (graduate students) were employed to assist in data collection.

Out of the 300 questionnaires distributed, 221 respondents (73.7 per cent) completed and returned their questionnaires. Seventy-nine respondents (26.3 per cent) did not return the questionnaires; even after

extra copies were given to them to complete. But they refused saying that they would not have the time to do so. These respondents also refused to be interviewed at work. They were afraid of making mistakes and being disciplined by the management. In fact, refused to be interviewed at break/lunch periods. They claimed that they used the periods to do brisk business, go for school run, shop around, and eat outside. Out of the 221 questionnaires (73.7 per cent) which were returned, 150 (50 per cent) were completed properly, and these were used for data analysis.

## **Empirical Findings**

### ***Socio-economic and Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents***

Of the 150 respondents that were interviewed, 73 (48.7 per cent) were men and 77 (51.3 per cent) were women. All the respondents worked in different establishments comprising industries, firms and the civil service. Consequently, they belonged to different trade unions in accordance with the Trade Union (Central Labour Organisation) Special Provisions Decree No. 44, 1976. The trade unions to which the respondents were members were varied (see Section 2.1 for details). Out of the 73 male respondents, 15 were executive members of trade unions, while 58 were ordinary members. On the other hand, out of the 77 female respondents, only 3 were executive members. A greater number of men than women were executive members of Nigerian trade unions. The respondents belonged to different ethnic groups namely: Igbo, Hausa, Yoruba, Tiv, Edo, Esan, Etsako and Ijaw. The average age of the respondents was 35 years. Most of the respondents were married (100), 43 were single and 7 were either separated, divorced, or widowed. On the average, each respondent had four children, and their average age was 10.2 years. They were young children. The age range of the children was 1-25 years old. About 91 per cent of the respondents were Christians. They were nominal Christians. They combined Christianity with paganism by worshipping idols too. All the respondents were junior staff. Their jobs ranged from cleaning to clerical jobs. They earned an average income of Naira 6,733.3 per annum. There is no doubt that these socio-economic and demographic factors could influence the responses of the respondents to the questions asked in relation to the objectives and hypothesis of the research.



***Constraints to Women Participation at Executive Level in Trade Unions in Nigeria***

There were two levels of participation in the trade unions: (i) executive level; and (ii) ordinary membership level. The respondents who participated at the ordinary membership level had no problems with participation in trade unions. They attended local meetings of the unions. These meetings were held during office hours, and within the industrial premises/workplace. The management of the establishments allowed members of trade unions to attend meetings whenever scheduled. Members participated in discussions at meetings and paid monthly dues to the coffers of the unions by a check-off system. Ordinary members did not hold executive positions. But the respondents who participated at the executive level in addition to the roles of the ordinary member, held executive positions as chairpersons, secretaries, treasurers and executive members without portfolio. The positions of chairperson and secretary were key positions. The rest were regarded as minor positions. Trade unionism in Nigeria is stigmatised by the Nigerian societies as a tough, dirty, political, corrupt, scandalous, hooliganistic, tedious and time-consuming job. Thus, executive members are expected to possess these types of traits for positive actions and results.

The respondents were asked to declare whether or not they would like women to occupy executive positions in Nigerian trade unions. Data in Table 1 shows that 134 (89.33 per cent) responded in the affirmative. Sixteen respondents (10.67 per cent) did not support the view. The same Table 1 also shows that out of the 77 women respondents, 71 said yes, and only 6 said no. This data analysis means that a majority number of the respondents would like women to occupy executive positions in trade unions in Nigeria.

**Table 1 : Whether or not Women Should Occupy Executive Positions in Trade Unions in Nigeria**

Opinion of respondents	Men		Women		Total	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Yes	63	42.00	71	47.3	134	89.33
No	10	10.00	6	34.00	16	10.67
Total	73	48.67	77	51.3	150	100

Source: Fieldwork conducted by R.U. Obi, 1990.

The research further shows that out of the 150 respondents, only 18 were executive members; 15 were men and 3 were women. This means that in Nigerian trade unions, for every 3 female executive members, there were 15 male executive members. Or put in another way, in trade unions in Nigeria, men and women participate at the executive level at the ratio of 3 women to 15 men. This is equal to the ratio of 1 woman to 5 men (1 woman: 5 men). Hence, women participation at the executive level in trade unions in Nigeria is low compared with men.

Statistically, this research has demonstrated that women would like to participate in trade union activities at the executive level. But they were not able to participate in great numbers, and as actively as they should, because they were faced with certain constraints which dampened their desire. The following are identified by the respondents as major constraints to participation of women at the executive level in Nigerian trade union:

#### *Gender Discrimination*

Data in Table 3 shows that out of the 150 respondents, 72 (48 per cent) mentioned gender discrimination as a constraint to women participation at the executive level in Nigerian trade unions. They stated that unequal job opportunities existed for men and women. In Nigerian traditional societies, division of labour exists and it is based on sex. Trade unionism involves politics and as such it is regarded by the tradition as a 'masculine' job and not a 'feminine' job. Trade unionism involves too much out-door exposure to the masses. Women are expected by our traditional norms and values to stay in-doors at home

looking after husbands, bearing and rearing children and performing domestic duties. Based on these ideologies and beliefs, many Nigerian women usually shy away from active participation in trade unionism. They do not like to be called 'ugly names' and to receive derogatory remarks from the members of the public. Participation at the executive level also involves too much travelling out-of-station for different types of meetings such as National Executive Council Meetings; and meetings with the government parastatals and representatives, especially in times of industrial crises.

**Table 2 : Constraints to Women Participation in Trade Unions**

Constraints	Men		Women		Total	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Gender discrimination	29	19.33	43	28.671	72	48.00
Lack of time	24	16.00	18	2.00	42	28.00
Lack of husband's support	15	10.00	10	6.67	25	16.67
Lack of vigour	5	03.33	6	4.00	11	7.33
Total	73	77	100	77	100	150

Source: Fieldwork conducted by R.U. Obi, 1990.

Today, working women in Nigeria are becoming aware of the benefits of active participation of women at the executive level in trade unions and also of the benefits of occupying top executive positions as chairman. Consequently, the women respondents argued that certain positions were exclusively reserved for men. Men mainly occupied positions as chairperson and secretary; whereas, women occupied positions as treasurer and public relations officer. The Sex Discrimination Act 1975<sup>1</sup> should not just exist in theory but rather it should be implemented and enforced; that there should be no gender discrimination as regards to what position women and men should

<sup>1</sup> Sex Discrimination Act 1975 was declared by the United Nations. The main objective of Sex Discrimination Act is to ensure equal opportunity for men and women. The Act prohibits discrimination on grounds of sex in recruitment, placement and promotion.

occupy. All that women required was to be given the chance to prove their worth.

#### *Lack of Time*

Table 2 also shows that 42 respondents (28.0 per cent) saw 'lack of time' as a constraint to women participation in trade union activities. These respondents argued that women, especially those with babies and young children, had no time to participate effectively and efficiently in trade union activities. They had multiple roles to perform, and attendant inter-role conflicts, stresses and strains to bear. The women combined child bearing and child rearing with domestic and industrial roles. They felt that these roles were enough burden on their shoulders to cope with. This is an important factor to note. It is not necessarily lack of interest that prevented women from participating in trade unionism. The women were keen to participate, but the problem was lack of time.

#### *Lack of Husband's Support*

It is also shown in Table 2, that certain respondents identified lack of husband's support as an impediment for women participation. Out of 150 respondents (16.67 per cent), 15 men and 10 women held this view. This means that a greater number of the male respondents than the female respondents perceived lack of husband's support as an obstruction to women participation in trade union activities in Nigeria. This point is also crucial. There is no doubt that trade union activities interfere with domestic roles of women. These respondents maintained that not all men would like to stay at home to baby-sit, and take care of the home while their wives attend local meetings, or travel out of station even for a few days on trade union matters. Consequently, many husbands did not allow their wives to participate in trade union activities. Such denials had psychological implications on the women too.

#### *Lack of Vigour*

Also in Table 2, lack of vigour is shown as another factor which militated against women participation in trade union activities. Out of

the 150 respondents, only 11 (7.33 per cent) comprising 5 men and 6 women held this view. This view is also crucial to note, though its numerical representation is statistically insignificant. These respondents pointed out that women are weaker sex than men. Women by this are reminded that: (a) they are too soft, too weak and too frightened to be trade unionists but, should perform better as housewives; (b) trade unionism is a masculine job; and (c) Nigerian societies perceive it that way. However, the author of this paper argues that these negative concepts are socio-cultural and patriarchal ideologies which our societies maintain in order to relegate women to the background. These negative conceptualisations are too generalistic. There are also women who would like to be in the forefront of any affairs. This type of women are endowed with ambition, enthusiasm and vigour to satisfy the demands of the Nigerian trade unionism. Many of these women unfortunately are still left in the 'cooler' in our societies simply because of the traditional method of division of labour by sex in which trade unionism and politics are perceived by all, as exclusively domains for men, and as such, not for women.

#### *Women and Executive Positions in Trade Unions in Nigeria*

Furthermore, the researcher wanted to know the executive positions which all the respondents (including men and women) would like women to occupy in Nigerian trade unions. Table 3 shows that out of 150 respondents, 72 (48.0 per cent) declared that they would like women to occupy any positions at the executive level as chairman, secretary, treasurer, public relations officer, and executive member without portfolio. Out of these 72 respondents, 27 were men and 45 were women. This data analysis means that more women than men wanted women to occupy any positions at the executive level in trade unions in Nigeria. Only 16 respondents out of the 150 were indifferent. They were indecisive and could not give their opinion on the issue.

**Table 3: Executive Positions Women Should Occupy in Trade Unions in Nigeria, by Sex and Status**

Positions	Men		Women		Total	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
President/Chairperson	16	10.67	23	15.33	39	26.0
Secretary	3	2.00	5	3.33	8	5.33
Treasurer	13	8.67	2	1.33	15	10.0
Any position	27	18.00	45	30.00	72	48.0
No response	14	9.33	2	1.34	16	10.67
<b>Total</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>48.67</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>51.33</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Fieldwork conducted by R.U. Obi, 1990.

### *Testing the Research Hypothesis*

The research hypothesis is that, the participation of women at the executive level in trade unions will increase if trade unionism improves its social image. Data in Table 4 shows that out of 150 respondents, 113 (75.34 per cent) agreed with the statement that women participation at executive level in trade unions will increase if trade unionism improves its social image; whereas, 35 (23.33 per cent) disagreed with the statement, and only 2 (1.33 per cent) said nothing. This shows that a majority number of the respondents comprising 49 men and 64 women agreed with the hypothetical statement. On the basis of this result, we can accept the hypothesis, that the participation of women at the level of decision making in trade unions in Nigeria will increase if trade unionism improves its social image.

**Table 4: Trade Unionism and Women Participation, Societal Perception at the Executive Level**

Level of Agreement	Men		Women		Total	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Agree	49	32.6	64	42.67	113	75.34
Disagree	24	7	11	7.33	35	23.33
No response	-	16.00	2	1.33	2	01.33
<b>Total</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>51.33</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Fieldwork conducted by R.U. Obi, 1990.

### ***How to Increase Women Participation in Trade Unions in Nigeria***

Respondents were given the opportunity to suggest ways of increasing participation of women in trade unions. Some of the useful suggestions made are as follows (see Table 5).

#### ***Equal Job Opportunities***

Data analysis in Table 5 shows that 76 respondents (50.67 per cent) out of the 150 suggested that to increase women participation in Nigerian trade unions, men and women should have equal job opportunities. Also, a greater number of women (49) than men (27) held similar view. This factor is important because it would help the women to occupy key executive positions as chairperson and secretary as well as minor positions as treasurer and executives without portfolio. Occupying these key positions would also enable women to present their views, especially on gender sensitive issues, and to bargain for their privileges, rights and interests, e.g. longer maternity leave period, and shorter working hours. Men alone should not occupy key positions in Nigerian trade unions. Women should be given some chances, too. This, in my opinion, is a way to achieving democracy in Nigerian trade unionism, apart from increasing women participation.

#### ***Enlightening the Populace***

Data analysis in Table 5 also shows that out of 150 respondents, 48 (32.0 per cent) comprising 28 men and 20 women mentioned provision of enlightenment programmes. These included campaigns on mass media, e.g. newspapers, magazines, radio and television, workshops, conferences, symposia and seminars on trade unionism and participation of women. Enlightenment programmes would help to educate the masses and generality of the Nigerian public on the roles of women in trade union activities, especially at the executive level. Understanding the roles of women in trade unions would help to gradually erase the psychological biases from the minds of the people (e.g. that trade unionism is for men; women who participate in it are prostitutes) which Nigerian traditions and customs impose on women. These efforts would no doubt help more women to realise that it is not a taboo for them to participate actively in trade unions; that trade unionism is a job for both men and women. The adoption of this

ideology nation-wide would encourage more women to participate actively and identify themselves with Nigerian trade unionism.

#### *Having Time for Participation*

Table 5 further shows that out of the 150 respondents, 18 (12.08) comprising 13 men and 5 women suggested that convenient time should be created for meetings to enable women to participate in trade union activities. These respondents asserted that meetings should be scheduled to hold during official working hours (i.e., 7.30a.m. - 3.30p.m. Mondays to Fridays) and not in the evenings and at week-ends. It was obvious to them that this sort of arrangement would be more convenient for women, especially the married ones with young children. Admittedly, men should be made to baby-sit and perform other domestic duties in the absence of women. The fact that all is under control at home will reassure women and they can participate more effectively in trade activities. However, in Nigeria today, there are men, irrespective of their level of Western education and exposure to modernity and industrialisation processes, who are still traditionalists to the core. Such men never participate in domestic duties. They regard domestic duties as jobs for women and children to perform, and not for men.

#### *Husband's Support*

Finally, data analysis in Table 5 also reveals that out of 150 respondents, 8 (5.33 per cent), comprising 5 men and 3 women, suggested that women need their husbands' support to participate effectively in trade union activities at the executive level. It is interesting to note here that greater number of men than women held this view. This re-confirms the existence of gender inequality in our societies; women subordination to men, and men domination and superiority over women. Despite this observation, it is crucial for the women who are trade unionists or aspirants to seek and obtain their husbands' support for participation. This would help to maintain peace at home, and also give the women the courage to pursue trade union activities with greater enthusiasm and vigour than even before.



**Table 5: How to Increase Women Participation in Trade Unions in Nigeria**

Suggestions	Men		Women		Total	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Creating equal job opportunities	27	18.00	49	32.67	76	50.67
Enlightening the populace	28	18.67	20	13.33	48	32.0
Time for participation	13	8.67	5	3.33	18	12.00
Husband's support	5	3.33	3	2.00	8	5.33
Total	7	48.67	77	51.33	150	100

Source: Fieldwork conducted by R.U. Obi, 1990.

### Summary and Conclusions

This study had re-confirmed the research findings of scholars such as Ubeku (1983) that the participation of women in trade unionism in Nigeria is low compared with the participation of men. This study has also discovered that in the Nigerian trade unions, for every three women occupying executive positions there were fifteen men. Therefore, men and women participated in the trade unions at the executive level at the ratio of one woman to five men.

Although a majority of the respondents (89.33 per cent) wanted women to occupy any executive position in the trade unions, the women themselves had certain constraints militating against their desire to participate. Four major constraints were identified, and they were (i) gender discrimination; (ii) lack of time; (iii) lack of husband's support; and (iv) lack of vigour. Gender discrimination (48 per cent) was the most predominant factor, while lack of vigour (7.33 per cent) was the least dominant. The research hypothesis that women participation at executive level in trade unions will increase if trade unionism improves its social image, was tested and validated.

Useful suggestions were proffered about how to increase the participation of women at the executive level in trade unions in Nigeria. They were as follows:

- Providing and allowing equal job opportunities for men and women.
- Providing enlightenment programmes for mass education about women and trade unionism in Nigeria.
- Creating convenient time for men and women to participate at union meetings at the executive level and ;
- Seeking husbands' support for meaningful participation.

### **Policy Implementation**

In view of the above research findings and recommendations about women participation at the executive level in Nigerian trade unions this paper calls on the Nigerian trade unionism to improve its social image in order to encourage and increase the participation of women. The paper also calls on the Nigerian government and parastatals, scholars and trade unionists to provide enlightenment programmes through mass media, conferences, workshops, symposia, among others, to educate the masses on the role of women in trade unions. These would help to allay people's fears about the participation of women in trade unions. These would also, no doubt, help to sharpen the interest of more women to join and identify themselves with the Nigerian trade unionism and by so doing increase their participation.

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