

The Historical Role of Women and Political Participation In Kukawa as a Panacea For Managing The Impact of Boko Haram Insurgencies

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Abstract

Women play a pivotal role in the growth and development of the society. Their roles go beyond the traditional role of taking care of the home front. The narrative that relegate the role of woman as being in the kitchen is outdated and has long been demolished. Kukawa women throughout history have played active roles in the political history of the community. The paper attempts to examine the historic roles and political participation in Kukawa Local Government Area of Borno State. This is against the backdrop of the limited narrative of women playing insignificant roles in terms of political participation. The paper argues that despite the enormous potentials of women and what they have offer in promoting political participation their male counterparts have continued to dominate the political landscape. The paper adopts the qualitative method of research which relies on the use of primary and secondary sources to bring out the salient roles of women in political participation in Kukawa Local Government Area of Borno State. Findings from the paper reveal that despite the unfavorable conditions women face in participating actively in politics, they have broken barriers through their engagements to attain remarkable feats in politics. The paper concludes that women involvement in politics is germane to the growth of the society and more incentives should be put in place by the government to encourage women participation in politics.

Keywords: Women, Kukawa, Insurgency, Boko Haram

Introduction

The place of women in all human society cannot be over-emphasized as they have a role to play in every facet of human living. However, despite this glaring reality, the role of women in some societies has been reduced largely to the fringes. This has been due to the nature of human society where the woman is made a second-class citizen. The situation is not different in Africa where the patriarchal nature of African communities has reduced their role in politics and other facets of the decision-making process. Her role is reduced to being the girl-child and mother who can only be seen and not heard. Her participation in politics and peace-building is reduced as a result of this. Whether she is not married yet, she will have to slug it out within the quest for political representation in an arena that is most imbalanced. If she is married, the situation is worse as she has to deal with the many nocturnal meetings that bestride politics and politicking.



In Nigeria, she has to deal with the high-powered intrigues and brigandage and this has to be with the express permission of her husband should she be married. In short, female representation in politics in Nigeria is grossly inadequate. The issue of the marginalization of women has been one that precedes the Fourth Republic in Nigeria. For example, in the build-up to the establishment of the Third Republic, the Political Bureau created by the military government of Ibrahim Babangida was mandated to review Nigeria's socio-economic and political system. In its report, the Bureau admitted that there is a gender gap in the country and recognizes the need to protect the rights of women in the country.¹ To this end, the Bureau recommended a concession of 5% of legislative seats at all local, state, and federal governments to women.² Although this recommendation was rejected by the junta, it points to how the issue of marginalization of women in political participation has garnered concern in the past.

But it is not in the area of political participation that women have been sidelined. They are also marginalized in the area of conflict resolution. Conflict is a phenomenon that is most unavoidable in human existence. It arises out of the variance in the interests of individuals in the society. It has been described as a situation in which the interests of two or more people within a space become incompatible³ or simply as the opposition of sides arising from disagreement on emotions or set goals among a people or group of people and resulting in each opposing side posing constraints on the other and the reactions that follow.⁴

Women and children have been the greatest victims of conflict the world over. When a conflict occurs, particularly resulting in fatalities, it is often the case that women and children suffer the most. They are rendered homeless and made to flee to places other than their abode resulting in a refugee crisis. In some other instances, they are rendered widows and forced to fend for their children alone even after losing their means of livelihood in the conflict. This explains why there has been a renewed call for their involvement in the peace-building process. The role of women in the peace-building process is recognized by the United Nations as evidenced in Resolution 1325 (2000) of the United Nations Security Council (UN Security Council, *Security Council resolution 1325 (2000)*). The resolution is the first UN resolution that recognizes that war and conflict affect women and children in different magnitude from men and that women have been left out of peace processes and stabilization processes.

The Resolution therefore recommends that all institutions and organs of the United Nations ensure that their conflict prevention and management processes have increased women representation and engagement while they are also made to be actively involved in the process of peace-building and peace-

¹Agbalajobi, T.D. "The role of African women in peacebuilding and conflict resolution: The case of Burundi. The Case of Burundi". *Journal of Global Media*, 8(15), 2009.

²Agbalajobi, T.D. "The role of African women..."

³Darling J.R. & Foliasso, C.E. "Conflict Management Across Cultural Boundaries: A Case Analysis from a Multinational Bank". *European Business Review*, Vol, 99, 1999, 383 – 92.

⁴Hellriegel, D., Slocum, J.W., Jr. *Management* (7th edition). Cincinnati: South-Western College Publishing, 1996.

keeping. The resolution also maintained that the security of women and children is safeguarded and enhanced in conflict and post-conflict situations. As a signatory to the United Nations Charter and in acknowledgement of this resolution of the United Nations Security Council, Nigeria has made efforts that will involve more participation in peace-keeping efforts. This is what gave birth to the Action Plan which is meant to promote the agenda of more involvement of women in peacekeeping, and all post-conflict efforts.

The focus of this chapter is on how the historical role of women and political participation can engender a reduction in the effect of the Boko Haram insurgency in Kukawa. Needless to say Boko Haram is a terrorist group that ravaged the Northeast and Northwest geo-political zones of the country. The terrorist group began as a Sahaba group in 1995 under the leadership of Abubakar Lawan who handed over the leadership of the group to Mohammed Yusuf when the former left for the University of Medina to study.⁵ On assumption of office, Yusuf introduced radical tendencies into the group with the sole target of establishing a Sharia'h government in Bornu State. Yusuf was said to have been mentored by Sheik Jafar Mohammed – He was a highly influential and popular preacher who was assassinated in 2007 while leading morning prayers in his mosque in 2007 – as his brilliance endeared him to the Sheikh, although he was to soon fall out with his mentor even before the Sheikh was assassinated.⁶

Under the leadership of Yusuf, the group adopted or was influenced by the philosophy of the Taliban in Afghanistan and thus outlawed Western education as well as considered non-Muslims as infidels.⁷ It is important to note that the name Boko Haram, which in Arabic means, Western education is outlawed Islamically, was not the initial name of the group. Their initial name was Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'await wal-Jihad, an Arabic name which can be translated to mean "*People of the way of Prophet Muhammed (peace be unto him) and Community (of Muslims) in line with the earlier generation of Muslims*". The group became very violent after the extra-judicial murder of Yusuf in 2009. Boko Haram is among the top ten terrorist groups in the world and its activities have led to the death of over thirty-five thousand (35,000) people since its first attack in 2009. The terror activities of the group have also led to the displacement of women and children within the region.

In light of the devastating effect of the activities of Boko Haram, it is expedient that we examine how the political participation of women and the historical role of women can be an ingredient for the reduction of the impact of the effect of Boko Haram activities.

⁵ Loimeier, R. "Boko Haram: The Development of a Militant Religious Movement in Nigeria," *Africa Spectrum* 47, 2012, 2-3.

⁶ Loimeier, R. "Boko Haram: The Development of a Militant Religious Movement...."

⁷ Loimeier, R. "Boko Haram: The Development of a Militant Religious Movement...."

Historical Role of Women and Political Participation in Kukawa

Kukawa is one of the strategic local governments in Bornu State. Aside from the location of the local government sharing proximity with Lake Chad and being one of the local governments worst hit by the Boko Haram Insurgency, Kukawa is a historical local government as it was the headquarters of the Kanem-Bornu Empire after El-Kanemi defeated the Seifawa dynasty and destroyed Ngazargamu which was then the headquarters.⁸ However, the effect of the Boko Haram insurgency has almost made the local government a shadow of its old self and has almost ripped the local government of the heritage it ought to enjoy. It therefore becomes imperative that measures are introduced to revitalize the local government and reduce the effect that the Boko Haram Insurgency has had on the local government.

While the Bornu State Government has initiated efforts at making those who were displaced from the local government as a result of the insurgency return home and begin their lives, these efforts may not yield as much result as expected due to certain reasons. Aside from the continued operation of the insurgent group and its splinter groups like ISWAP, this effort at resettlement and managing the effect of the rampage of Boko Haram has been done without exploring the role that women can play in this regard. More importantly, governments at all levels are not exploring how the historical role that women played in the pristine past and their political participation can be deployed in managing the effect of insurgency on the local government.

Women have always played a vital role in the Kukawa and Kanem-Bornu empires and even under Shehu who toppled the Seifawa dynasty. This is despite the role of Islam in the kingdom as Islam came into Bornu under the reign of Mai Ummejilmi who was the second Mai of the dynasty and the first to convert to Islam and put the kingdom on the world map.⁹ As is the case with many states that ran on the precepts of Islam and following the patriarchal nature of many African communities, women were hardly given a major role to play in politics. They were expected not to be seen or even remain silent. The case of the Kanuri was not in any way different and this is captured in the traditional Kanuri setting of household structure. A typical Kanuri family home is made up of inner rooms which are for the women and out of view of the public while the outer rooms serve as anterooms or/and rooms for the men. The case of Kanem and Bornu was not one of total patriarchy as some women exercised some level of powers. Although it was not a matrilineal society, women had their role played in governance. Of importance was the role played by the women of the

⁸Kemper, Steve. *Labyrinth of Kingdoms: 10,000 Miles Through Islamic Africa*. New York: W. W. Norton, 2012, 137–152. ISBN 978-0-393-07966-1. and Onwubiko, K. B. C. *History of West Africa (Book Two)*, 1800 – Present Day, Onitsha, Africana Educational Publishers, 1973.

⁹Barkindo, Bawuro, “The early states of the Central Sudan: Kanem, Borno and some of their neighbours to c. 1500 A.D.”, in: J. Ajayi und M. Crowder (ed.), *History of West Africa*, vol. I, 3. ed. Harlow 1985, 225-254.

courts – the women around the Mai. Of importance was the role played by the Magira, the Magara, and the Gumsu.¹⁰

The Magira was the Queen mother – the mother of the Mai – and her role in the political administration ranged from training a prospective Mai on the intricacies of governance and administering the people as well as conflict management to rendering the needed political advice to the Mai as well as serving as a check on him not to become despotic and taking the wrong administrative step or counsel from his political advisers.¹¹ Her role also included serving as the ears of the Mai in the court to know whatever conspiracy might be planned against the Mai.¹² A good example is the case of Magira Aisha who was the sister to Mai Idris Alooma and was renowned for protecting the Mai, while he was much younger and was due to succeed his father, from the plot to assassinate him by Dunama Abdullah.¹³ Through her political dexterity and determination, Aisha was able to foil this plot by playing what is commonly referred to as court politics. Aisha reigned as regent between 1562 and 1572 before she handed over power to Idris Alooma who was already of age but she kept on advising him in the early days of the latter's reign. Another example is the case of an unnamed Magira who ordered that Mai Biri be kept in seclusion on account of the actions of the Mai which could threaten the political stability of the kingdom.

The Gumsu is the first wife of the Mai and the one in charge of the administration of the palace on behalf of the Mai. She was also in charge of the royal food and saw to it that the Mai was properly fed and taken care of. She also must maintain discipline and decorum within the palace among officials as well as serve as an adviser to the Mai. The third woman in the triad is the Magara who is the Mai's senior sister who serves as adviser for the Mai and as the one saddled with the responsibility of taking care of the royal children. The triad forms the second most important political institution in the kingdom and wields much influence within the system.¹⁴

Whenever there is an interregnum or a weak Mai is in power, these women can wield wide-ranging powers and even blackmail a Mai into submission or rescinding a policy by threatening to withdraw their services (Platte, 2005). While most history books have emphasized only this triad and that female office holders are only mentioned once in the colonial files of Borno in the National Archives, Kaduna, some further evidence reveals that there are also other titles like the Mai's sisters other than the official sister whose duty is to perform social works within the kingdom (Kemper, 2012). Platte (2005) also identified the title of Mairam or Nana which is the Princess of the kingdom as documented

¹⁰Onwubiko, K. B. C. *History of West Africa (Book One), 1000 – 1800*. Onitsha, Africana Educational Publishers, 1972.

¹¹Stride, G.T. and Ifeka, Caroline. *Peoples and Empires of West Africa*. Lagos: Thomas Nelson, 1971

¹²Stride, G.T. and Ifeka, Caroline. *Peoples and Empires...*

¹³Onwubiko, K. B. C. *History of West Africa (Book One)*.

¹⁴Onwubiko, K. B. C. (1972). *History of West Africa...*

for the Bornu Court in the 20th century. The Princess is by extension the head of the unmarried women in the community.

Aside from these, there were also courtesans and royal prostitutes headed by the Maira who wielded a level of political importance and were involved in the political governance of the kingdom. At the level of traditional communities, the villages are headed by the Lawan while each local community is headed by the Bulama who is second in rank to the Lawan. Records, particularly from the pre-Boko Haram post-colonial era show that women have been installed as Bulama. Like their male counterparts, female Bulama serve as the eye and ear of the authority and adjudicates over petty disputes within the community. There was also the title of Shugawa Kamube who served as the head of women in the community. She is not from the royal family but a commoner who is chosen by the women themselves and well-respected and one whose words are law to the women.

Following the historical role that women play in the traditional Kanuri society, one would expect that women would have a pivotal role to play in the post-colonial governance system but that is not the case. The level of political participation of women in Bornu State in general and Kukawa local government in particular is abysmally low. These have been confirmed in various studies. Egwu, Kale, and Godowoli¹⁵ established that while it is permissible for women to vote, it is not permissible for her to venture into politics as such women are considered infidels and indecent. Even for voting, a woman's choice is an extenuation of her husband's choice of candidate as she is not meant to make a political choice outside the interest of the husband.

In fact, in some cases, the women do not even know whom they are voting for as they are simply told where their husbands or custodians are toeing and they have to fall in line. This notion appears to be seen as the ideal as even women also frown at women who are seen to be putting themselves in opposition to the political choices of their husbands. The situation is not in any way better with female political representation. It is interesting to note that there has not been any female local government chairman for the local government. It is even more interesting, though worrisome, that none of the wards in the local government has produced a female councillor before. Female representation equally seems a tall order for the State House of Assembly membership, House of Representative membership, and the House of Senate membership. Put differently, there is low female political participation in the local government as women are simply kept on the fringes of events.

Despite not having a footing in the political sphere, women in Kukawa have been involved women in their counter-terrorism moves. While the exact number of women from the local government who are involved with the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) is unknown, these women have been actively involved in counter-terrorism moves of the Nigerian state. Their activity

¹⁵Egwu, G., Kale, A. , and Godowoli, H. "The Peculiar Role of Women in the Socio-Political System of Borno State Nigeria." *International Journal in Management and Social Science* Volume 6 Issue 12, December 2018 ISSN: 2321-1784, 7-19.

includes carrying arms (Which is rare though) and searching for women who may wish to enter public places like churches, mosques, weddings, and events, as well as other public places. They have been instrumental in the arrest of female Boko Haram members through the supply of adequate intel as well as the foiling of attacks. They have become frontiers of protection and are actively engaged in the protection of their communities in collaboration with security forces. This however comes with the risk of being attacked by the insurgents.

Historical Role of Women and Political Participation in Kukawa as a Panacea for Managing the Effect of Boko Haram Insurgency

One thing that cannot be said to be in contention in this discourse is the fact that we are not exploring the powers the woman has and how her political participation will help in managing the effect of Boko Haram. For one to understand how the historical role and women's participation can play a pivotal role in managing the effect of the insurgency on the local government, one needs to equally understand the place of stakeholders in the scheme. In this study, we will define the idea of stakeholder to refer to the individuals or group(s) of individuals that are considered vital to the survival of an institution, organization, or government.

In other words, the stakeholders are those individuals or groups of individuals whose interests are directly or indirectly affected by the existence or actions policies and decisions of an institution, organization, or government. It is a fact that an institution or organization that listens to the demands and allows the active participation of its stakeholders in its decision-making process will record better performance over organizations that do not pander to the demands or engage their critical stakeholders in arriving at their decisions. Similarly, a government that panders to the wishes of its people or/ engages them before it makes certain critical decisions will be considered a success and enjoy more legitimacy over another government that does the opposite this.

It is important to differentiate this theory from the shareholders' theory which places a premium on those who have higher stakes in the system. The shareholders' theory argues that an organization must concentrate its focus on those with higher stakes in the system and not all who are affected directly by the existence of the organization. The stakeholders' theory shares some similitude to the political participation method which also emphasizes the need for every stakeholder to be involved in the process of getting out policies. The difference between both theories however is that while the political participation model emphasizes the involvement of only stakeholders in the decision-making process, the stakeholders' theory emphasizes that the interest of all critical stakeholders must be taken into consideration in the decision-making process but that is not to mean they have to be involved in this process unlike what the political participation method. The stakeholders' theory holds that each subject in a conflict is important and must be treated as thus. They have to be involved in the decision-making process and their interests are factored into whatever policies the government will come up with. This theory explores the vital nature of each stakeholder involved in the conflict under

investigation and how their interests have been taken into consideration in government policies and decisions aimed at conflict resolution.

A review of the state of things in post-conflict areas reveals that the interests and opinions of women as well as that of children are given less consideration or prominence in the scheme of things. There is less focus given to the role they can play in the post-conflict rebuilding and reconstruction process. As a major victim of the aftermath of the conflict as well as a major bloc in every human society, their place in the post-conflict stage must be recognized and given prominence. One of the ways to go about this is to ensure that they are given higher political participation and role in the post-conflict process. In the case of Kukawa, women were deeply involved at some point in the offensives of Boko Haram and were often coerced into this. There have also been those women who have been courageous enough to constitute themselves into a major force in repelling attacks and supplying necessary intelligence reports to the military and other security agencies to help with the combat against Boko Haram. Thus, emphasis needs to be placed on the need for women to be actively involved as against the near-silent role they are playing at the moment.

The historical role of women in Kanuri communities which Kukawa is one of is one of the ways of managing the effect of the Boko Haram insurgency. Following our discussion earlier, the unique role of women in the administration of Bornu and Kanem can be retold to foster the motivation for the development of iconic women who will be a force to reckon with in the fight against Boko Haram. The heroics of the royal triad as well as the unique place of the Shugawa Kamube can be used to galvanise women into advisory roles in the governance of communities in the local government. It must be noted that history can be used as a force to enhance counter-terrorism.¹⁶

Even in the fact of the patriarchal nature of the local government, women need to be given a special role in helping authorities redefine and combat terrorism. Take for instance, in her study, Shallange noted that some of the respondents maintained that there are female Bulama who perform better than male Bulama through their better collaboration with NGOs and helping the people. It was also recorded that the role of the Shugawa Kamube was quite instructive as she was well-respected by the women. She notes that even women who cannot be reined in by their husbands are easily reined in by the Shugawa Kamube. The women were a stabilizing force with their informal duty as a check on the Mai and proffer good advice. To this end, women must be treated as a stabilizing force in Kukawa and their opinions must be taken since it is an established observation that women adopt a cooperative and collaborative approach to conflict. This will promote political participation.

Political participation has been identified as one of the drivers of the growth and development of a community. Women's political participation has a way of rebounding the overall development of a community. Increased political

¹⁶Blumenau, B. "Terrorism, History and Neighbouring Disciplines in the Academy". In R. English (Ed.), *The Cambridge History of Terrorism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021 doi:10.1017/9781108556248.006

participation of women will cause a drop in major issues like fistula, early child marriage, of school girls, among others. A woman would rather invest in infrastructure and see women getting empowered. All these actions are capable/ of creating value for the women and in turn help in mitigating the impact of the BH insurgency. Given that this empowerment could even come in the form of economic empowerment helps place the woman as one who can also contribute meaningfully to the wellbeing of her home as well as the community.

Conclusion

A community like Kukawa does not have cannot afford to leave things to chance given the devastation it has faced at the hands of Boko Haram insurgents for almost two decades. With those who were in the Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps returning on account of the closure of the camps by the Bornu State Government, the local government needs to begin to look at women empowerment and deploying the efficiency of its women towards its development. As we pointed out in this study, there is a need for the redefinition of the place of women in the local government through the redefinition of their historical roles and by ensuring more political participation from women. At the moment, women are playing a vital role as evidenced in the activities of female Bulama and Shugawa Kamube in places like Monguno. Kukawa cannot afford to be left behind as there is a need to tap into the prowess of women by involving them more in the policy drive of the local government. The continued subjugation of women will not benefit the local government. Hence, there is an urgent need to look at exploring the benefits that lay in deploying the historical role and political participation of women in Kukawa towards its rebuilding and mitigating the impact that the Boko Haram insurgency has had.