

Hindrances to Women Participation in Trade Union Activities in Selected Universities in North Central Nigerian.

¹IYAJI, Adejoh

Abstract

This empirical work has as its major objective, the exposition of the factors hindering the effective participation of women in trade union activities in Nigeria focusing on the four house unions in three North Central Nigerian Universities. Close ended questionnaires and in-depth interview were used to elicit data for this research. Simple percentage and frequency tables were employed in analyzing the data. Findings of the study showed that a host of factors inhibit the effective participation of women in trade union activities in the three universities selected. Chief among the hindrances were the impact of patriarchal structures inherent in the unions, the attitude of the women themselves to unionism, family and domestic commitments amongst others. Recommendations bother on the need for greater networking between unions and women bodies in Nigeria to enhance women participation; eradication of patriarchal structures in unions; re-education and re-socialization or women to enhance their participation as well as show of commitment and change of attitude on the part of the women to union activities in Nigeria.

Keywords: Hindrances, Patriarchy, Trade Unionism, Women and Participation.

Introduction

Unlike in the colonial era and the early period of independence in Nigeria, women are now active players in employment outside the home front. They now seek employment, pursue careers in their chosen fields, such that women presently constitute 37 percent of the labour force in Nigeria (Onaejo, 2011). This in turn necessitated women to become automatic members of trade unions across industries as wage employment is a necessary condition for trade union participation (Yesufu, 1984).

In spite of the involvement of women in paid employment outside the home, studies have shown that women in wage employment are usually perceived as the extension of their traditional roles. Unions are usually perceived as ‘male power bases’ which struggle to “assure patriarchal advantage”. The argument in some quarters is that women exhibit low participation in trade union activities due to

¹ Department of Sociology, Federal University Kashere, Gombe State, Nigeria._
[Email:adejohiyaji03@gmail.com](mailto:adejohiyaji03@gmail.com), Phone: +2348039670090

certain social and cultural factors (Lawrence, 1994. Adefolaju & Omotosho, 2010).

Yinusa (1990) observes that women generally record low level of attendance at trade union meetings especially when it is outside working hours. Since attendance at meetings is another measure of trade union commitment, women participation in union activities has not been impressive. Though the incidence of gender disparity is not pronounced in membership, recruitment, and funding of the unions, it however, continues to be an issue in the management of affairs of the unions. This problem is not limited to Nigeria as it is a worldwide problem in industrial set up. Pieces of evidence abound that most trade unions in the developed world are still in the hands of men (Okpe & Angya, 2007).

With the steady rise in the population of women in wage labour in recent years, their low participation would have inimical consequences on the series of plight they face in the work place which could be best addressed through union action. As a matter of fact, women face so many plights in the workplace which most times result from patriarchal structures in the workplace. Gender problems such as sexual harassment of women, 'glass ceiling' and a host of other welfare problems that characterize the workplace today are issues which unions are in a better position to address. The only ones who can advance this course and ensure they are well taken care of are women themselves. The seeming low level of participation of women in unionism can be said to be partly responsible for the persistence of some of these plights.

Male dominated union leadership as well as the low level of participation of women in unionism which predominates today creates a situation where work issues are treated lightly. During negotiations, only women trade union leadership can and would strongly press for the employers to pay meaningful attention and offer lasting enduring panaceas to such problems as maternity leave, provision of creche facilities, equal pay for work of equal value, non-discriminatory promotions, training and transfer policies and practices, sexual harassment of female workers, violence in the workplace and other workplace issues having direct bearings on female workers. The lack of good and effective participation on the part of women in trade unionism leads to a situation where unions place women issues at the very bottom of their priority list. In fact, there are instances where women related proposals are traded off when there is pressure on unions leaders to make concessions (Onaejo, 2011).

Studies have equally revealed that the society perceives women as 'never-do-well' in the area of wage employment due to their psychological composition and cultural roles arising from women socialization- a perception that is carried over to their role in trade unionism (Okpe & Angya,2007. Ibarra, 2001,). As a matter of fact, there is also the belief that women culturally have no important roles in trade union activities (Onaejo, 2011). As a result of this, most women even when they

are seen in union meetings are hardly heard. Very many of them despite the crusade for equal gender representation hardly participate in union activities.

It is as a result of the foregoing that this study sought to bring to light, the barriers to women participation in trade union activities with particular focus on academic and non-academic unions in Kogi State University Anyigba, University of Abuja and the Federal University of Agriculture, Makurdi. This is with a view to unraveling some of the possible constraints militating against their participation in labour union activities.

Literature Review

Anugwom (2004) identified the patriarchal structure of unions as a major constraint inhibiting effective participation of women in the trade union movement. This is in the sense that trade unions are structured and function on the basis of male dominance. In other words, the legislations establishing unions, their functions, their times of meeting, activities, etc often are tailored to match men only. Therefore, since they are not established with the intention of having women “bossing them”, women find it difficult to play very active roles in them. This is what Parpart (1988) labels the ‘patriarchal ideology’ of the unions which negates women’s participation. In looking at the Nigerian situation, Ubeku (1983) shares this view by arguing that societal norms do not exactly encourage a woman to be a leader of men in the struggle for improvements in the conditions of employment. Again, there is the existence of subtle intimidation of the female members of trade unions by their male counterparts. This intimidation coupled with the fear of the ‘wrath’ of men has been mentioned as basic components of the patriarchalism of trade unions.

While it is acknowledged that Africa is mainly a patriarchal society, the strong barrier of patriarchy was broken when men in Africa eventually began to accept women as colleagues and partners in the workplace. With this innovation, one would have assumed a much easier ride to labour unions’ political power by women. While residues of union patriarchy still exist in terms of the timing of their meetings and their rowdy nature, the real barrier lies in the lack of the determination of women themselves towards union matters. Olajumoke (1985:3) argues that “women have regarded unionism as the prerogative of men”. For a long time, they have been scared of union affairs due to the personality clashes, hostility and hooliganism displayed by the men (Okoronkwo, 1992).

Another factor impeding the participation of women in labour unionism is the conflict of role between their traditional/domestic roles and the demands of formal employment. This factor especially as it concerns the role prescribed by tradition for women is often seen as a peculiarly African problem. Ubeku (1983) was partially referring to the relative traditional subjugation of women in labour matters when he sees traditional norms as militating against women participation

in labour matters. The issue is that traditional African society sees the women within the realm of domesticity, hence the woman is measured only by her prowess in child bearing/rearing and on the domestic front. This being the case, the man is the only one saddled with the economic demands of the family outside the immediate family environment.

The argument is that such a traditional conception of the role of women in society may have been carried over to the formal labour involvement of women. In this vein, women have been forced by development and greater instrumentality of society to seek formal economic sector participation but are still tied down by tradition. Hence they have largely shied away from labour union activism because formal sector economic involvement runs contrary to their domestic roles in society.

Active participation of Nigerian women in the trade union movement has also been affected by the phenomenon of the sexualization of the labour force. As a result, while it is a fact that there has been a steady increase in female work force over the decades, majority of this is concentrated in the care providing sectors where professional code of conduct and ethical commitment constrain industrial action. Besides, studies have shown that women have not really been actively involved in political action as a means of asserting their demands (Swantz, 1985; Grints, 1991). The implications of this are many. In the first instance, women generally prefer to listen at political meetings and union congresses. Secondly, decision-making processes are dominated by men, so that what is eventually decided reflect the interests of men more than those of women. Indeed, until recently, gender issues hardly feature in labour negotiations. There is an interesting paradox here because the same women actively participate in improvement and welfare/cooperative associations of their establishments.

Lack of solidarity and support on the part of the women themselves is a constraining factor in women's participation and quest for leadership of trade unions in Nigeria. Largely due to their socialization, most women do not frankly believe in their capacity for leadership. The general tendency is that where a woman is very active in a labour union, her greatest critics are unfortunately the female folks, who see her not only as a rebel, but one that should be taught to behave like the woman that she is. Thus, even where a woman expresses genuine intentions in asserting herself on the platform of labour union activism, petty jealousy, acrimony and sometimes outright hatred from fellow women truncate this aspiration. We should state here that for so long as this attitude remains the order of the day, for so long would the dream of active women participation and quest for leadership in labour unions remain elusive (Fapohunda 1999).

Women workers in the view of Swantz, (1985) have not yet involved themselves in political activity as a means of putting forward their specific demands. In her study, Swantz discovered that women workers prefer to listen at political parties

and union meetings. Although work awakened their consciousness, it did not emancipate them from their traditional roles and positions as support tiers at meetings. Another reason adduced by Swantz (1985) is that trade union role and function in the economy is often associated with conflict with authority which serves as deterrent to women's participation since they do not have the same propensity for conflict as men. Grints (1991) argues that women are not typically involved in militant activity. They tend to be located within the caring professions where professional code of conduct and ethical commitment constrain industrial action. While this may be the case, recent facts have weakened this traditional assumption globally and in particular, Nigeria. Vickers (1991) describes the case of the Filipino women workers' struggle against repressive working conditions which made headlines. Moreover, a broader definition of protest reveal considerably more collective labour protest among women workers especially in stereotyped female professions like nursing and teaching in Nigeria in recent years. Also in the former eastern block countries, including Russia, women played active role in labour unionism than their western counterparts (Vickers, 1991).

However, the case of Nigeria, in a sense is crucial. Nigerian women were only exposed to wage or the formal labour market in the latter years of colonial rule and therefore did not even have the numbers to fight an entrenched inferior position. Thus, of necessity, there must be this apathy towards trade union activity unlike in other sectors of national life. As a matter of fact, it took women a fairly long time to engage in formal wage labour and consequently trade unionism because; the practice of educating women was not popular with most Nigerian families. As a matter of fact, until the 1970s, women did not significantly benefit from formal education and therefore, could not penetrate the formal wage labour sector in sufficient numbers.

Methodology

In a bid to collect the qualitative and quantitative data for this research, questionnaire and in-depth interview were employed as instruments of data collection. These instruments were used because of their accuracy and ease in gathering data from respondents. In addition to this, the use of questionnaire guaranteed anonymity, while the in-depth interview allowed for probing further on certain issues. The study adopted the qualitative and quantitative techniques of data analysis. The data from the interview were analyzed qualitatively by relating the outstanding points of the response to the objectives of the study. The data collected from the administered questionnaires were analyzed quantitatively, using simple percentages in frequency tables.

620 copies of questionnaire were administered on the female members of the four house unions in the three universities. 36 respondents randomly selected from the three universities formed the respondents for the in-depth interview.

Out of the 620 questionnaires administered, 569 were retrieved. This was because some of the questionnaires were either wrongly filled or not dully completed and some could not be retrieved after several efforts by the researcher. Consequently, the data analysis for this study had to be based on the 569 completed and returned questionnaires. In the course of the analysis, the responses were categorized into two- the academic staff and the non-academic staff. All the responses of the non-academic union members were lumped. Thus, responses of members of the Academic Staff Union of Universities in Nigeria is captioned as ASUU while that of the non-academic is captioned as non-academic staff unions.

Findings and Discussion

Table 1: Frequency distribution of respondents according to the factors hindering the participation of women in trade unionism

Variables	Frequency		Percentage	
	(ASU U)	(Non-academic unions)	(ASU U)	(Non-acad unions)
Agree	35	29	33	27.9
Strongly agree	27	212	25.5	45.8
Disagree	28	95	26.4	20.5
Strongly disagree	16	27	15.1	5.8
Total	106	463	100	100

Demanding nature of trade union activities

Agree		12	209	11	45.1
Strongly agree	0	1	0	2	
Disagree	84	250	79.3	54	
Strongly disagree	10	3	9.4	0.7	
Total	106	463	100	100	

Family and domestic commitment

Agree		56	2
52.8	62.4		
Strongly agree		0	9
0	19.9		
Disagree		31	7
29.2	15.8		

Strongly disagree		19	9
17.9	1.9		
Total		106	463
100	100		

Attitude of women towards unionism

Agree		56	289
52.8	62.4		
Strongly agree		0	92
0	19.9		
Disagree		31	73
29.2	15.8		
Strongly disagree		19	9
17.9	1.9		
Total		106	463
100	100		

Meeting time and venue

Agree		0	3
0	.6		
Strongly agree		0	0
0	0		
Disagree		69	392
65.1	84.7		
Strongly disagree		37	68
34.9	14.7		
Total		106	463
100	100		

Numeric strength of women

Agree		34	24
32.1	53.6		
Strongly agree		0	9
0	1.9		
Disagree		43	18
40.6	40.6		
Strongly disagree		29	18
27.3	3.9		
Total		106	463
100	100		

Socio-cultural beliefs and practices

Agree		74	237
69.8	51.2		
Strongly agree		24	70
22.6	15.1		

Disagree	6	150
5.7	32.4	
Strongly disagree	2	6
1.9	1.3	
Total	106	463
100	100	
Awareness level of women		
Agree	0	51
0	11	
Strongly	0	0
0	0	
Disagree	81	355
76.4	76.7	
Strongly disagree	25	57
23.6	12.3	
Total	106	463
100	100	

Reacting to the impact of patriarchal structure on participation of women in unionism, table 1 shows that, 33 percent or 35 of the ASUU respondents agreed with the view that patriarchy impacts negatively on women participation in union activities. 25.5 percent or 27 of the respondents strongly agreed with the view, while 26.4 percent or 28 of the respondents however disagreed with the view. 15.1 percent or 16 of the respondents strongly disagreed with the view that patriarchal structure in the union negatively affects the participation of women in unionism. 27.9 percent or 129 of the non-academic respondents agreed with the view. 45.8 percent or 212 of the respondents strongly agreed with the view. 20.5 percent or 95 of the respondents disagreed with this view while 5.8 percent or 27 of the respondents strongly disagreed with the view that patriarchal structures affect women participation in unionism. From the table, it can be inferred that patriarchy exerts a negative influence on the level of participation of women in union activities.

Table 1 equally shows that 11 percent or 12 of the ASUU respondents agreed with the view that the demanding nature of trade union activities affects the level of women participation in unionism. 79.3 percent or 84 of the same respondents however, disagreed with this view. 9.4 percent or 10 of the respondents did strongly disagree with the impact of demanding nature of trade unionism on women participation. 45.1 percent or 209 of the non-academic respondents in the three universities agreed with the impact of the demanding nature of trade unionism on women participation. 0.2 percent or 1of the respondents strongly agreed with the view; 54 percent or 250 of the respondents however did disagree on the impact of the demanding nature of trade unionism on women participation.

0.7 percent or 3 of the respondents strongly disagreed with the view. The fact that the bulk of the respondents disagreed with negative impact of demanding nature of trade unionism is a pointer to the declining influence of this factor on women participation in trade union activities.

Asked if family and domestic commitments had any impact on women participation in unionism, table 1 shows that, 52.8 percent or 56 of the ASUU respondents, agreed with the view. However, 29.2 percent or 31 of the respondents disagreed with the view. 17.9 percent or 19 of the respondents also strongly agreed with the view that family and domestic commitments affect the participation of women in trade unionism. 62.4 percent or 289 of the respondents made up of non-academic staff agreed while 92 representing 19.9 percent of the respondents strongly agreed with the view. 15.8 percent or 73 of the respondents did disagree with the view that women's participation in unionism is affected by family and domestic commitments. 1.9 percent or 9 of the respondents strongly disagree with the view. The majority of the respondent irrespective of their union affiliation agreed and strongly agreed with the view that women's participation in unionism is affected by family and domestic commitments. The responses indicate that more than half of the respondents were of the opinion that family and domestic commitments negatively impacted on the level of participation of women in union activities is in line with the assertions of Rees, (1991).

As can be seen from table 1, 52.8 percent or 56 of the ASUU respondents agreed with the view that the attitude of women affected their participation in trade unionism. 19.9 percent or 92 of the respondents strongly agreed with the view. 15.8 percent or 73 of the respondents however, disagreed with this view. 9 respondents strongly disagreed with the view that attitude of women affect their participation in trade union activities. From this table, it can be seen comparatively that the non-academic respondents had the bulk of the responses linking the attitude of women with their low level of participation. The ASUU respondents had responses that were almost equal- 56 agreed and 50 disagreed. One can therefore infer that there is a significant difference in the responses of ASUU members and that of the non-academic staff unions with regard to the impact of this factor on women participation in union activities.

From table 1 also shows that, ASUU respondents numbering 69 disagreed with the view that meeting venues and time affect women participation in union activities. 34.9 or 37 of the respondents also strongly disagreed with this view. For the non-academic staff, 3 of the respondents agreed with the view that meeting time and venue affected the participation of women in union activities. 84.7 percent or 392 of the respondents disagreed with this view; 68 of the respondents also strongly disagreed with the view. The implication of this is that meeting time and venue do not exert any significant influence on the participation of women in trade union activities.

Responding to the question of the numeric strength of women and its effect on the participation of women, table 1 shows that, 32.1 percent or 34 of the ASUU respondents agreed with the view. 43 percent or 40.6 of the same respondents disagreed with the view. Aside this number who disagreed, 29 or 27.3 percent of the respondent strongly disagreed. 53.6 percent or 248 of the non-academic respondents agreed with view that the numeric strength of women affected the participation of women in union activities. 1.9 percent or 9 of the respondents strongly agreed with the view. 40.6 percent or 188 of the respondents disagreed; 3.9 percent or 18 of the respondents strongly disagreed with the view. The implication of the impact of the low numeric strength of women though not perceived as strong determinant of women participation in trade union activities, can be said to be responsible for the inability of women to challenge their male counterparts since elections into the union executives is democratized and democracy is game of number.

Table 1 shows that 69.8 percent or 74 of the ASUU respondents agreed with the view that socio-cultural practices and beliefs affect the participation of women in union activities; 22.6 percent or 24 of the same respondents strongly agreed with the view. On the other hand, 5.7 percent or 6 of the respondents disagreed with the view that socio-cultural practices and beliefs affect negatively the participation of women in union activities. This is in addition to 1.9 percent of the respondents who strongly disagreed with the view. Looking at the responses of the non-academic staff, it can be seen that 51.2 percent or 237 of the respondents agreed with view that socio-cultural practices and beliefs affect the participation of women in union activities. 15.1percent or 70 of the respondents strongly agreed with the view. 32.4 percent or 150 of the respondents disagreed with the view. 1.3 percent or 6 of the respondents strongly disagreed with the view that socio-cultural practices and beliefs affect women participation in union activities. Comparatively, both the ASUU and non-academic respondents did not differ in their responses as a large proportion of both respondents (393) agreed and strongly agreed with the view that socio-cultural practices and beliefs affect women participation in union activities.

Lastly, table 1, shows that 11 percent or 51 of the non-academic respondents agreed with the view that the awareness level of women, negatively affects the participation of women in trade union activities. 76.7 percent or 355 of the respondents disagreed with the negative impact of the level of awareness on the participation of women in trade union activities. 12.3 percent or 57 of the respondents also strongly disagreed with the view. 76.4 percent or 81 of the ASUU respondents disagreed with the view while 23.6 percent or 25 of the ASUU respondents strongly disagreed with the view that the awareness level of women, negatively affects the participation of women in trade union activities. Respondents from both unions were unanimous in their response as the majority of both union members disagreed and strongly disagreed with the view that the

awareness level of women, negatively affects the participation of women in trade union activities.

The study found out that patriarchal structure in the unions affects the participation of women in union activities. As evidenced in the responses from the administered questionnaire, 164 of the respondents agreed that patriarchy affects the participation of women in union activities. As a matter of fact, 239 of the respondents strongly agreed that patriarchy had a negative impact on women participation in trade unionism.

The impact of the patriarchal structure on the participation of women in trade unionism was further echoed during the interview sessions. Most of the respondents acknowledged the existence of patriarchal structures in the present day union and the negative impact it has had on female participation but concluded that the structures are fast disappearing. This discovery is in line with the assertion of Parpart (1988) who averred that patriarchal ideology of the unions negates women's participation in unionism. According to Osiruemu (2011), the patriarchal structure of unions is a major constraint inhibiting effective participation of women in trade union movements.

In the area of the demanding nature of trade union activities as a factor affecting the participation of women in unionism, findings of the research revealed that this is not a real decider of women's participation in unionism. 334 of the total respondents of 569 disagreed with this view. This is in addition to the 13 respondents who also strongly disagreed with the assertion.

The researcher also found that family and domestic commitments affect the participation of women in trade unionism. In fact, 345 of the respondents were of the view that family and domestic commitments inhibit the participation of women in trade union activities. This correlates with the views of Rees (1991) who noted that women who have families suffer from conflict of roles and are over-burdened by demands from both sides, such that they have little or no time for union activities. According to her, women unionists are mostly those without children, family or immediate domestic commitments. Responses from the interview sessions however differ slightly as the interviewees were of the opinion that a balance can always be struck if women really wanted to participate in union activities. To them, family and domestic commitments should not be a deciding factor when it comes to women participation in union activities.

Findings from the research also revealed that the attitude of women has had a lot of impact on their participation in trade unionism. 437 of the respondents made up of those who agreed and strongly agreed were of the view that the attitude of women strongly affects their participation in trade unionism. According to Osiruemu (2011), the problem of women participation is further exacerbated by the attitude of some women workers who refuse to participate in union activities

in their offices in order not to incur the wrath of their employers. According to her, part of this attitude is also borne out of the social norms imbibed by women that teach them that their success is measured by how successful they are at the home front than in any other thing.

During the interview session, the majority of the respondents who though agreed with this view, were of the opinion that this attitude was fast changing and that it would only be a matter of time for this to be completely wiped off. This view was echoed by most of the respondents at the University of Abuja and University of Agriculture Makurdi during the interview sessions.

Findings also revealed that the participation of female members of the unions is not affected by meeting time and venue. This finding is in contrast to the insinuations by some scholars that the patriarchal nature of unions creates a situation where union activities like meeting times and venues are decided without due consideration to the suitability of such times and venues to the female members of the union. From the in-depth interview, it was discovered that respondents also did not see meeting times and venues as militating against female participation in union activities. They argued that meeting times and venues are such that do not affect the participation of women in unionism. According to a respondent, only on very few occasions are union meetings held into the night. So the insinuation that meeting times affect women participation does not hold water.

It was discovered in the course of the study that the view that the population of women affect their participation in union activities is not a potent factor in limiting the extent of participation of women in union activities. 338 of the total 569 respondents were of the opinion that the numeric strength of women does not have any influence on the participation of women in union activities. This is evidenced by the fact that more than half of the questionnaire respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed with the view that the numeric strength of women affects their participation in union activities.

Supporting this view too, the interviewees were of the opinion that the population of women members in unionism does not have any bearing on their level of participation. They argued that if anything, the numeric strength of women can only be a factor during union elections and not participation in majority of the unions' activities. According to them, participation in union activities was a matter of personal conviction; since women did not chose to be members because other women are members, their participation too cannot be hinged on the number of women found in the unions.

In response to the question on whether socio-cultural practices and beliefs affect the participation of women, findings revealed a strong link between the two. As a matter of fact, 405 of the 569 respondents agreed and strongly agreed with the

belief that socio-cultural practices and beliefs negatively affect the participation of women in union activities.

This view was also shared by the in-depth interview respondents. According to one of the respondents in Kogi State University, ‘

One cannot take away the fact that our cultural norms still exert a lot of influence on the way we think and behave. The Nigeria woman is socialized to be submissive and since the industrial relations atmosphere in Nigeria is one that is characterized by antagonism, women often shy away from it because to such typical Nigerian women, militancy is not good for women.

(ASUU member, Kogi State University, Anyigba)

This finding is in consonance with the views of Ubeku (1983) and Amon-Nikoi (2003) who attributed the low level of participation of women in unionism to cultural traits imbibed by women.

The study also revealed that the awareness level of women does not affect their participation in trade unionism. 518 of the 569 respondents disagree and strongly disagree with the notion that the awareness level of women has any impact on their participation in trade unionism. The in-depth interview respondents also agreed with this view as the majority of them were of the view that women are very aware of the existence of unions and what they stand for on the campuses. According to a chairperson of one of the in-house unions, “it is only when people are not in the know of a thing that you can say they will not be part of it.” According to them, women are aware of the roles of the unions in helping them fight for their rights so, the excuse of lack of awareness as a reason for non-participation cannot arise.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Findings of the study as can be seen shows that women participation in trade union activities Nigeria is hindered by a host of factors. From the data generated in the course of this study, some of the hindrances include patriarchal structures inherent in the unions, the attitude of the women themselves to unionism, family and domestic commitments amongst others.

It is on this premise that some practical recommendations on how to improve the level of women’s participation in trade union activities is put forward. The first of these strategies is a concerted and rigorous education of women to become highly aware of their rights and obligations as members of unions. There is the urgent and dare need to psychologically re-orientate Nigerian women to take active part in union congresses in order to protect their collective interest in the work place.

There is also the need for greater networking between the unions and women bodies in Nigeria and the work places like the Nigerian Association of University

Women (NAUW), the National Association of Women Academics (NAWAC) and the National Association of Women Societies over issues bothering on enhancing the active participation of women in unions both on our campuses and outside it. These women-based associations can do well by organizing sensitization workshops and campaigns targeted at generating positive awareness amongst women workers on the one hand, and on the other, raising serious gender questions about the patriarchal structure of unions and their mode of operations. This way, unions would be made more gender sensitive and responsive in their activities and programs. In fact, trade union education should be introduced in the form of seminars and conferences which should highlight successful women trade unionists as models who are enlightened, liberated, being able to know her rights and obligation and how to fight for them without being confrontational to the authorities.

Secondly, male members of unions should be re-educated and re-socialized by the unions to see and accept their female counterparts as equals. Male members of the unions should be re-educated to accept that real equality for women in the union can only be achieved at their expense. In this regard, women activists should be encouraged and integrated into the leadership structure of the union at the national and branch levels. Towards this end, deliberate efforts should be made by unions to reduce the barriers to the effective participation of women in unionism. For example, executive itinerary which have been gender-based in favour of men should be reviewed to enable women take active part in the decision-making process of the organization. It is for instance, possible to suggest holding such meetings during the day to enable women participate actively in critical decisions affecting members of the union.

Thirdly, women workers must themselves show greater commitment in the union's activities. As unions existing in the work places, the unions have fundamental principles they try to defend at all times and costs. Our women can understand these only when they actively engage in the union's activities. Women should participate actively in unionism and seek the leadership of unions not because they are women, but because they have the capacity for such leadership. You cannot be recognized or be taken serious in unionism (even as a man) unless you qualify for such recognition. Knowing how unions operate and showing greater commitment to its principles by attending meetings, participation in deliberations, defending resolutions on critical national issues, carrying out assignments with great dedication, diligence and to the best of one's ability and above all, protecting the unions, and their leadership are some of the ways to get involved.

Finally, all the above suggestions can only work if unions in Nigeria become gender-sensitive. There is the need for integrating gender issues in the operations of the unions. The decision of the umbrella labour organization in Nigeria, the

Nigeria labour congress (NLC) and the Academic Staff Union of universities (ASUU) in this regard is a welcome development. These Gender Committee are charged with the duty of realizing the integration of gender issues in the operations of the union and through this, encourage the active and effective participation of women in union activities. In this regard, unions are encouraged to liaise with women or women bodies in the work places on the appropriate strategies for actualizing the ultimate goal of active women participation in trade unionism.

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