

GENDER INEQUALITY AND WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN POLITICAL ACTIVITIES AND PEACE PROCESSES IN RIVERS STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

Gender inequality is endemic in Rivers State, and women are treated as Cinderella in peace processes, decision making and active political participation, and have thus been shackled in diverse ways, but behind the pretext of being otherwise engaged with culturally attributed motherly roles. Gender discrimination had thus lingered with solipsistic men who occupy positions of authority in the majority, and inured the women to the condition, apropos of gender inequality, as the elephant in the living room. This was however unsubstantiated, hence the study is a cutting edge of intellectual response which studied gender inequality and women participation in political activities and peace processes in Rivers State. The study is a cross sectional survey which triangulated data collection. Sample size was 400, determined by Taro Yamane statistics from the population size. Random and simple random sampling methods were adopted in the selection of the communities and respondents. The quantitative data were analyzed with ordinal level statistics and chi-square adopted in testing the hypotheses. The qualitative data were content analyzed. The study found that gender inequality hinders women from becoming members of conflict resolution committees, hinders the appointment of women at community decision making levels, and also hinders women from participating in active politics in Rivers State. Thereafter, policy recommendations were made.

Keywords

gender inequality; peace processes; active political participation; women; decision making; patriarchy

Introduction

Gender inequality is apparently pervasive in myriad dimensions of social life. It is likely an orchestration of discrimination against women in diverse societal ways. Gender discrimination in Nigeria is very alarming in our contemporary time (Bassey & Ojua, 2001). Throughout the ages, there has always been bias and prejudice against women that are manifested in all spheres of human relations. It has always been exhibited in different ways such as social, cultural, economic, religious and most importantly, political and socio-culturally (Adejuwon, 2011). According to Haralambos & Holborn (2008), many women think they have been discriminated by men, and perceive they are relegated to specific roles. These roles include becoming mothers and wives, performing domestic works like cooking, cleaning, serving and taking care of the man, and being subordinated to male authority. Dogo (2013, as cited in Ahiauzu, Ngulube & Agborubere, n.d.), stressed that women occupy a position of subordination to men, and have continually being discriminated on the basis of sex

in their intention and attempt to partake in different spheres of social life. In Rivers State, this situation is further exacerbated by the existence of patriarchal society system (Dogo, 2013). In Nigeria, there is the patriarchal basis of culture that conceive women as subordinates to men, and this give men the moral right to dictate the actions of women, and thereby causes a hindrance to women's participation in peace processes and active politics (Anyalebechi, 2016; Olaitan, 2018). In this way, men dominate everything concerning the affairs of society. One trivial area of life where women seem to have been discriminated against owing to the likely pervading gender inequality is the area of peace processes and political participation. This is because society is fraught with conflict. There have been incessant conflicts and protracted cult wars which have claimed many lives in part of Rivers State (Olaitan, 2018; Wabah & Ukpere, 2018; Zoranan & Elem, 2020). There have also been violence and gang wars which affect social and economic aspects of life in the slum areas of the State (Badom&Ndeue, 2023). Similarly, myriad of environmental conflicts between organizations and communities are prevalent in the State (Badom & Gbogbara, 2022. Conflicts abound in different ways and are caused by different factors, and this demands peace processes so as to mitigate conflict in society. Anyalebechi (2016) contends that it is men who initiate peace processes and decide the members; as such, they do not consider women as partners

UN Women (2010) stressed that women are conspicuously underrepresented in peace committees. As such, women may not contribute in decision making. Hence, Ogege (2009) argued that women involvement in peace processes and decision making in Nigeria is denied. Such alienation of women occurs even if they have shown ability to effectively contribute in peace processes as revealed in Amadi (2021). Again, women, it seems, have not been allowed to have the same opportunity of attaining key political positions. "Women feel continuously marginalized, stereotyped, taken-for-granted and experience little understanding of support" (Olayode, 2016, p. 99). Makama (2013) opined that attention should be given to the issue of women participation in politics because women in Nigeria have been relegated to the politically background for years. This is so despite the progress made by women in the area of education and work organizations (Nwogu & Wariboko, 2015). Similarly, UNIFEM (1999) argues that women's efficient handling of home duties can make them contribute towards a more efficient gender system that will enhance women participation in government.

Besides, there seem to have been great disparity between male and female representation on peace committees. This necessitates the opinion of Dayal & Christien (2020) who emphasized that UN Women data indicate that only 2.5% of Chief mediators and 9% of mediators in peace processes are constituted by women. Similarly, Currier (2005) and Kpae & Masi (2019) affirmed the exclusion of women from peace processes in Rivers State. This, according to Makama (2013), is because Nigerian Society is patriarchal in nature, and thus causes discrimination of women.

The society arbitrarily attached roles on the basis of gender and sex. As a result of this role sharing, managing the home front and giving care are for women, while leadership, governance and protection of society are exclusively allotted to men. So women have no business in discussion concerning conflict resolution and peace building (Ogege, 2009, p. 412).

Aguene (2022) averred that no present society practices gender equality in terms of opportunities, and this result in gender disparity between the contribution of women to human development and how little benefit they get from society. In this way, Udegbe (2004) stressed that males and females exist within the confines of a plethora of stereotypes which impose role performance of certain gender and hinder another from exercising certain desired roles. According to Salaam (2003), patriarchy is the reason behind the marginalization of women in politics, economy, and labor market in Nigeria; patriarchy dictates the parameters for the

unequal structuring of gender positions in society. As such, women are excluded from contributing their quota, and from serious and formal issues, even the ones that affect them directly (Scott, 1986; Sertima, 2001). This level of inequality takes toll on women, even if they constitute about half of the population and are known to play vital roles as mothers. Also, it is common knowledge that in conflict and war situations women and their children suffer most (Oppong & Oppong, 1987).

Furthermore, at the level of active participatory politics there tends to be some level of gender inequality. Participating in active politics means that one is allowed to contest in elections at all levels and assumes political position to take decisions that affect society without some prevailing circumstances or conditions that directly or indirectly hinder him or her. In this way, men dominate everything concerning the affairs of society. Ahiauzu, Ngulube & Agborubere (n.d.) argued that the number of women who are actively involved in governance is continually very low. This is adduced to a patriarchal political party system which is structured on male domineering antics that hinder women to enjoy equality of political opportunities as men (Nna & Nyenke, 2005; Umeh, Ujunwa & Eze, 2023). This is corroborated by Okeke (2015) who averred a continual control of the political parties by men. Therefore, gender inequality is a cardinal reason for the subordination and exclusion of women in politics (Agbalajobi, 2010). All this is against the ethos of the Nigerian Constitution which provides participation in governance and active politics for all gender. It is the rate of gender inequality that paved way for the 1995 Beijing Declaration, which demanded 30% of women representation in government; also, SDG 5 stipulates the achievement of gender equality and empowerment of women and girls. “In addressing armed or other conflicts, an active visible policy of mainstreaming gender perspective into all policies and programs should be promoted” (Beijing Declaration, 2021). The seeming gender inequality is sustained by the culture of the society. According to Nmadu (2000) as cited in Makama (2013) the Nigerian society (Pre-modern and contemporary) is characterized by peculiar cultural practices that are inimical to the emancipation of women. The specific role of women as mothers and agents of procreativity made the men to think too that women should not be engaged in the peace process.

A peace process consists of all the meetings, agreements and negotiations in a bid to end the rift between groups of people that are fighting or in conflict with each other. Peace processes entail some negotiated steps to render panacea to conflicts and wars and this enables sustainable peace to thrive where conflict existed. Peace process is the right approach to resolving conflicts. Whenever there is conflict, women are adversely affected and are mostly excluded from participating in the process to end it (UN Women, 2021). It is pertinent to note that people of both gender bear the brunt of destruction that emanates from conflict situation, hence the engagement of women in peace process is considered a prerequisite to the acquisition of sustainable peace (Hass, Hartzell & Ottmann, 2022).

Men are responsible for the exploitation of women in society. This is because society is patriarchal and Nigerian society is so structured that women are not given the same opportunity to be represented in peace committees and in active politics. As such, women are deprived of the relative benefits of involvement. Apart from representing women’s interests, there are other pecuniary benefits attached to being a member of a peace process and getting involved in active politics which functions like work. Human beings will always be interested in performing a task for the purpose of earning money or getting other economic benefits available to politicians and members of peace processes. Patriarchy serves as the first structure of dominance and women subordination, and “continues as the most pervasive and enduring system of inequality, the basic societal model of dominance” (Lerner (1986), as cited in Ritzer, 2008, p. 469). Men create and maintain patriarchy, and women, by such

structuring, are everywhere violently oppressed by the male dominance (Becker, 1999; Rhodes, 2005 Richardson, 1996). The few women who are determined and show capability to compete with men are those without husbands. As such, most women live under the patriarchal dominance; it is imperative to stress that women have their concerns and can only have their issues adequately addressed if they discuss their matter, by serving in the peace committees and having increased political participation. This is because Nigeria society operating on patriarchy allocates sensitive and powerful political posts for men (Atu et al., 2019; Nwogu & Wariboko, 2015; Olayode, 2016). Such patriarchal structure stems from Nigeria's cultural belief and value systems (Blais & Gelineau, 2007; Duke, 2010; Enemu, 1999).

It is the general perception of most people that only an insignificant number of women are able to take part in peace committees, decision making and active politics owing to gender inequality. However, to the best of our knowledge, intellectual response has not given any attention to this problem. This created a lacuna. Therefore, this study filled the gap. In this way, the study investigated gender inequality and women participation in political activities and peace processes in Rivers State, and specifically, the study sought to: investigate the relationship between gender inequality and membership of women in conflict resolution committees in Rivers State; examine the relationship between gender inequality and the extent of inclusivity of women at community decision making levels in Rivers State; investigate the relationship between gender inequality and the extent of women's participation in active politics in Rivers State.

Method

The study adopted a cross-sectional research design and data were sourced through survey. In this way, the study triangulated data collection methods. Triangulation enhances validity and presents diverse ways of comprehending a research problem (Noble & Heale (2019), as cited in Sakib, 2023). It thus involved the application of more than one method to collect data and this was found suitable for the study. The study sourced its data through a structured questionnaire, in-depth interview and focus group discussion. The questionnaire was structured on a four point likert scale that was rated from Strongly Agree (SA) - 4, Agree (A) - 3, Disagree (D) - 2, to Strongly Disagree (SD)-1. Again, the in-depth interview as a qualitative method of finding out about the experience, thoughts and feelings of people on social phenomena (Schutt, 2009), was also adopted. In addition, some persons, different from those who the questionnaire was administered to, and who possess adequate knowledge of gender inequality as it relates to peace process, were selected. Besides, the focus group discussion for the study had participants drawn from different five other local government areas randomly selected. Participants include women groups, civil societies, men, and youth. These data collection methods ensured that stakeholders participated (Stocum, 2001). In addition to the primary data explored, the study also utilized secondary data from journal articles and books.

The sample size of the study was 400, determined through the Taro Yamane statistics (1967). The sample size was determined from the Rivers State population size of 5,185,400 revealed in the 2006 census, at 0.05 levels of precision. 10 local government areas randomly selected from the 23 LGAS for the administration of questionnaire, and 330 respondents who were selected through simple random sampling were administered the questionnaire in each of the ten LGAS. In addition, five focus group discussions were conducted in Port Harcourt, Obio-Akpor, Degema, Eleme and Andoni Local Government areas. Each FGD has 12 persons, which resulted to 60 persons for the FGDs, while the in-depth interviews had 10 participants, 3 from Bonny and OpoboNkoro, and 4 from Gokana, all subsumed in the sample

size of 400. The respondents to the questionnaire were selected through the simple random sampling method. The Cronbach alpha reliability technique, which produced a 0.8 coefficient result, was used to determine the study's quantitative data reliability. Hence, the result produced a high level correlation. Analysis of the quantitative data was done with the support of tables, graphs and ordinal level statistics. Precisely, the demographic data and items of the questionnaire were analyzed with the percentile, while the chi-square statistics was adopted in the test of hypotheses. The qualitative data were coded and content analyzed.

Results and Discussion

Table 1. Socio-demographic information of the respondents of the administered questionnaire

Categories	Variables	Frequency	(%)
Sex	Females	164	49.70
	Males	166	50.30
Age	18 – 30	85	25.76
	31 – 43	90	27.27
	44 – 56	82	24.85
	57 – 69 and above	73	22.12
Level of education	No formal education	40	12.12
	Primary	72	21.82
	Secondary	131	39.70
	Tertiary	87	26.36
Marital status	Married	189	57.27
	Unmarried	132	40.0
	Divorced	9	2.73
Occupational status	Unemployed	148	44.85
	Employed	182	55.15
Type of occupation	Civil servant	78	23.64
	Business	90	27.27
	Farmers	63	19.09
	Traders	82	24.85
	Others	17	5.15
Local government area of residence	Okrika	33	10.0
	Asari-Toru	33	10.0
	Ogu-Bolo	33	10.0
	Ahoada-East	33	10.0
	Ahoada-West	33	10.0
	Emohua	33	10.0
	Omuma	33	10.0
	Oyigbo	33	10.0
	Tai	33	10.0
	Khana	33	10.0
Status in the Local government area	Sojourner	96	29.09
	Native	234	70.91
Status on idea of how peace committees are handled	Have adequate knowledge	319	96.67
	No adequate knowledge	11	3.33

Source: Field survey, 2023.

H₀₁: The more gender inequality remains unchecked, the more it does not hinder women willing to serve as members of conflict resolution committees in Rivers State.

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD
1	I feel that because of discrimination based on sex, women are excluded from those who set up conflict resolution committees.	105 (31.82%)	138 (41.82%)	60 (18.18%)	27 (8.18%)
2.	I think that because of gender discrimination women are not appointed to be members of conflict resolution committees.	138 (41.82%)	113 (34.24%)	52 (15.76%)	27 (8.18%)
3	I believe that because of discrimination based on sex, women are discriminated against in the formation of conflict resolution committees	87 (26.36%)	109 33.03%	92 (27.88%)	42 (12.73%)
4	I feel that because of gender discrimination, men are mostly the ones who constitute conflict resolution committees.	102 (30.91%)	96 (29.09%)	72 (21.82%)	60 (18.18%)
5	I think that only on insignificant number of women are allowed on peace committees because of gender discrimination.	98 (29.70%)	114 (34.54%)	63 (19.09%)	55 (16.67%)

Table 2. Contingency table showing observed and expected frequencies

S/N	Strong Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	105 (106)	138 (114)	60 (67.8)	27 (42.2)
2	138(106)	113 (114)	52 (67.8)	27 (42.2)
3	87 (106)	109 (114)	92 (67.8)	42 (42.2)
4	102 (106)	96 (114)	72 (67.8)	60 (42.2)
5	98 (106)	114 (114)	63 (67.8)	55 (42.2)

Chi-square calculated value = 58.111

DF = (r-1) (C-1), where r is the number of row and C the number of column

DF = (4 – 1) (5 – 1) = 3 x 4 = 12 at 0.05 level of significance.

The table value of χ^2 at 12 DF = 21.026

The χ^2 value (58.111) > 21.026, (table value)

Therefore, we reject the null hypothesis and retain the alternate research hypothesis, upholding that the more gender inequality remains unchecked, the more it hinders women from being members of conflict resolution committees in Rivers State.

H₀₂: The more gender inequality persists, the more it does not hinder the appointment of women at community decision making levels in Rivers State.

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD
6	I feel that gender bias causes the preference of most men to be appointed as rulers that can take decision in my community.	136 (41.21%)	83 (25.15%)	48 (14.55%)	63 (19.09%)
7	I think that because of gender discrimination, females are mostly alienated from community leadership organizations.	121 (36.67%)	109 33.03%	51 (15.45%)	49 (14.85%)
8	Discrimination on the basis of sex is the	134	118	62	16

	reason women are mostly not appointed in the same number with men to serve on community leadership committees.	(40.61%)	(35.76%)	(18.79%)	(4.84%)
9	I feel that women have an unequally few persons compared to men when they constitute community development committees in my community, because of gender bias against women.	171 (51.82%)	107 (32.42%)	43 (13.03%)	9 (2.73%)
10	I feel that because of the increasing rate of discrimination on the basis of sex, women are deprived of equal representation with men at decision making levels at the state level.	88 (26.67%)	132 (40%)	(60) (18.18%)	50 (15.15%)

Table 3. Contingency table showing observed and expected frequencies

S/N	Strong Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
6	136 (130)	83 (109.8)	48 (52.8)	63 (37.4)
7	121 (130)	109 (109.8)	51 (52.8)	49 (37.4)
8	134 (130)	118 (109.8)	62 (52.8)	16 (37.4)
9	171 (130)	107 (109.8)	43 (52.8)	9 (37.4)
10	88 (130)	132 (109.8)	60 (52.8)	50 (37.4)

Source: Authors' Computation

$$X^2 = 103.319$$

$$X^2 \text{ table value} = 21.026$$

DF = (r-1) (C-1), where r = number of row and C the number of column

$$DF = (4 - 1) (5 - 1) = 3 \times 4 = 12 \text{ at } 0.05 \text{ level of significance}$$

Therefore, x^2 value (103.319) > 21.026 (table value).

Thus, it is necessary that we reject the null hypothesis and retain the alternate research hypothesis and therefore accepting that the more gender inequality persists, the more it hinders the appointment of women at community decision making levels in Rivers State.

H₀₃: The Persistence of gender inequality does not cause hindrance of women from participating in active politics in Rivers State.

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD
11	I feel that owing to the rate of discrimination on the basis of gender women are hindered from contesting for councillorship elections owing to the prevailing conditions put in place by the men in our state.	109 (33.03%)	98 (29.70%)	70 (21.21%)	53 (16.06%)
12	I think that discrimination of the female gender causes political parties in our local government area to refuse to nominate women to represent their parties in elections on equal rate with men.	112 (33.94%)	125 (37.88%)	72 (21.82%)	21 (6.36%)
13	I feel that discrimination against the female gender causes denial of women to be nominated for the position of council	117 (35.45%)	102 (30.91%)	79 (23.94%)	32 (9.70%)

	chairman, as men are always nominated.				
14	Gender discrimination is the cause of denying women equal rights to be elected by parties as head of political parties, as the men in our local government area.	131 (39.70%)	80 (24.24%)	53 (16.06%)	66 (20%)
15	I think that discrimination against women is the reason women are mostly supporters of political parties and not allowed to contest for positions as the men in Rivers State.	101 (30.61%)	95 (28.79%)	83 (25.15%)	51 (15.45%)

Table 3. Contingency table showing observed and expected frequencies

S/N	Strong Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
11	109 (114)	98 (100)	70 (71.4)	53 (44.6)
12	112 (114)	125 (100)	72 (71.4)	21 (44.6)
13	117 (114)	102 (100)	79 (71.4)	32 (44.6)
14	131 (114)	80 (100)	53 (71.4)	66 (44.6)
15	101(114)	95 (100)	83 (71.4)	51 (44.6)

Source: Authors' Computation

$$X^2 = 51.213$$

$$X^2 \text{ table value} = 21.026$$

DF = (r-1) (C-1), where r = number of row and C the number of column

$$DF = (4 - 1) (5 - 1) = 3 \times 4 = 12 \text{ at } 0.05 \text{ of significance}$$

The x^2 value (51.213) > table value (21.026)

Based on the rule of rejecting the null hypothesis if the X^2 value is greater than the table value, it is therefore necessary to reject the stated null hypothesis and we retain the alternate hypothesis, thus accepting that the persistence of gender inequality causes hindrance of women from participating in active politics in Rivers State.

In addition, the focus group discussions were conducted in five local government areas and produced the following results. The same three specific objectives derived from the purpose of the study became the focus point in each group. The first FGD was organized for participants in Port Harcourt local government area. A dominant assertion of the participants' discussion in each group is here presented in italics. It was unanimously agreed by the participants that gender inequality hinders women from taking part in the constitution of conflict resolution committees: *"It is a truism to say that men are the initiators of conflict resolution committees. They are also the persons appointed to be members. This happens on a large scale because of marginalization of the female gender"*.

They equally agreed that gender inequality negates poor representation of women at the community decision making levels. They stressed that men are mostly responsible for taking decisions. This according to them is because the committees that take decisions are composed only by men, and in few cases, one or two women who may not contribute significantly because of the larger population of the men on the decision making committees: *"There is great bias against our women, because they are hardly appointed or elected to be members of decision making committees. This emanates from the general belief that women are subservient to the men, and that they should be house wives"*.

Similarly, the third objective which focused on the stance of women in active politics was discussed. In a common voice, the participants agreed that women in Rivers State have

been deprived of active participation in politics owing to the persistent rate of gender inequality. They maintained that women are not allowed by the men who are in the decision making organs to contest elections. They reportedly do this with stringent rules that can keep women away from indicating interest: *“Everyone will agree that the number of political office holders in our state is ninety-eight percent of men. Men are reservedly political office holders, while women in their teeming support have been hindered from contesting political positions”*.

The second FGD was conducted in Degema LGA. The participants generally agreed, after intense argument, that there is persistent gender inequality in the state, and that such inequality based on gender levels deters women from being nominated or selected to function in the conflict resolution committees that are always formed by men. They argued that males always constitute about 98% percent or so of such committees’ members, and also that women are deliberately left out, on the notion that women are lesser minds and should be in the house to attend to household chores: *“Women are always considered by the men to be house wives whose primary responsibility is to attend to house duties and the conflict resolution committees for the men who are bread winners”*.

Besides, the participants agreed unanimously that same gender inequality has caused women not to be appointed into community decision-making bodies; they stressed that women are not involved or appointed to the town councils and administrative bodies, where decisions are taken in the communities, even though the decisions enforced bind the women alike. In consideration of the research objective bordering on relationship between gender inequality and extent of women participation in politics, they argued with eight persons in agreement against four that gender inequality deters women from being appointed or allowed to actively participate in politics at the local government and state levels. They stressed that the political positions such as councilor, chairman, House of Representatives are denied to women because the party executives are mostly men: *“It is not a secret that women are not allowed by the men to contest for political positions. They use the party rules to shield the women from political positions. The only major position given to women in the party executives is the women leader”*.

The third FGD was conducted in Obio-Akpor local government area. The discussion group had equal numbers of men and women from a civil society group. On the issue of the first research question - what is the relationship between gender inequality and representation of women in the constitution of conflict resolution committees - they agreed, after a thorough debate and follow-up questioning, that owing to gender inequality, women have not had adequate representation in the constituted conflict resolution committees. This, in their opinion, stems from the fact that women are perceived as an inferior gender to men, except few women who are considered to be socially strong to have influenced men: *“There is no doubt that women are precluded from being chosen as members of conflict resolution appointment group, they are also not allowed on equal basis to be members of the committee, except few “Iron ladies women” who also behave like the men”*.

In the next place, the discussants unanimously agreed that gender inequality causes the non-inclusion of women in the community decision-making committees. Revelations from the follow-up questions were that their society is structured in a way that the decision-making bodies are occupied by men in a larger number because women are considered as house wives domiciled at home and not concerned with leadership. Women are expected to take care of the house and the home functions, while men are concerned with matters of society and leadership: *“Women are generally seen as home keepers who take care of the men, and the few women who occupy leadership positions as the men are not respectful to their husbands. Men are always in charge of leadership”*.

The last generally accepted notion reveals that active party politics is perceived as the men's preserve, and that women are regarded as supporters of their husbands. They agreed that, when it comes to politics, women are not treated equally with men who clinch the political party positions, excepting a slim opportunity such as women leader position and few others facilitated by men who are their boyfriends, but the men are solely in charge of politics: *"The men occupy the political positions of authority, and women are treated as no-equals, as there are only a few who have contested elections, and most of them succeeded because they are the girlfriends of top political leaders. The men remain active in politics on an un-equal basis with the women"*.

Furthermore, the fourth FGD conducted in Eleme LGA involved youths (six males and six females). The first objective bordering on gender inequality and representation of women in the formation of conflict resolution committees was discussed. The group, after rigorous discussion, agreed that only few women have been involved in conflict resolution committees formed, but mostly the men. This, according to them, is because of the persistence of inequality between men and women. They revealed that women have not been appointed for such serious businesses as conflict resolution, rather they (women) are expected to do other busy chores at home: *"The men are the people who are in charge of the committees they constitute and the members are mostly men, who they think are influential. The women are left out and have nothing to contribute since they are excluded from the committees"*.

The group also agreed that gender inequality is the reason women are not appointed to be members at the community level, to be members of decision making bodies such as the town council, community development committee and the paramount leadership positions which are sensitive and demanding positions that the communities cannot leave in the hands of females. Thus, these positions have so far been occupied in the majority by men, with an insignificant number of women in some cases: *"Only influential people are appointed as members of decision making committees. The women are not as influential as the men who are in control of the communities. Also, some positions are reserved for the men, therefore women cannot occupy them. For instance, no community in Rivers State will allow a woman to be their paramount ruler"*.

In addition, the discussants also agreed, after divergent opinions, that gender inequality hinders women from participating actively in politics in Rivers State. They agreed that politics is at the same point very competitive and hot for women, and also because married women cannot abandon domestic matters for a serious issue like politics, which is time, money and connection demanding in the Nigerian context: *"A large number of women are serious with their families and have left the issue of active involvement for the men who have the money, time to play the Nigerian dirty politics. It is true that all this happens because of gender marginalization. The only few women who are actively participating in politics like the men are mostly without husbands and they behave like the men"*.

Finally, the fifth FGD was conducted in Andoni local government area, and the participants were drawn from a women group. The discussants, after series of debates and follow-up questions from the researchers, established the point bordering on the first specific objective that gender inequality is pervasive, and that it affects the selection of the female gender as member of conflict resolution committees in Andoni and Rivers State at large. It is their submission that women are treated as second class citizens and caregivers. This, according to them, is how the society has structured women. In their agreement this affects the choice of women as conflict resolution committee members: *"There is nobody who will not agree that women are not included in the committees they form, even if the conflict affects all of us. As mothers we feel the impact of the conflict more but the men are the ones who are the committee members. We are regarded as people who should only take care of our children"*.

and prepare the home but the men see themselves as the only people to lead the conflict committee”.

Attention was also given to the second specific objective bordering on the relationship between gender inequality and the extent of inclusiveness of women in community decision making levels. In a unanimous opinion, they agreed that gender discrimination actually causes women to be deprived of appointment or selection to feature at community decision making in Andoni and even in other LGAs in Rivers State. They agreed that all the decision making organs of leadership in their communities are dominated by the male folks, with only a minuscule of females. This is because women are discriminated against by men who had so structured their society from inception. Specific attention was given to decision making bodies like community development committee (CDC) town council, paramount ruler and other community leadership organizations, reportedly occupied by men as members.

Lastly, all the discussants agreed that although gender inequality has caused the exclusion of women from active politics in Andoni and Rivers State, politics is a very difficult profession in Nigeria, and demands sufficient money, influence, connection and other factors for one to be actively involved. However, they realized that the way of structuring politics, that made it difficult for women to be actively involved, is necessitated by the domineering and marginalizing antics of men who favor only men to be active politicians: *“Those who take part in active politics are the men who have kept all conditions favoring only the men to contest and win elections. Except few women who have clandestine relationship with influential figures in each of the political parties, women are seeing as followers who in their vast majority are only giving the post of women leader”.*

The researchers conducted in-depth interviews in 3 different communities. The interview was also based on the objectives of the study. It was discovered from the coding and thematic analyses that there is a relationship between gender inequalities on one hand, and hindrance of women from being appointed as members of conflict resolution committees, exclusion of women at community decision making levels and hindrance of women from active participation in policies in Rivers State on the other hand.

In an attempt to provide answers to the research questions derived from the stated objectives of the study, the researchers employed different methods of investigation. Thus, these are the overall findings of the study that were derived from the analyses of the questionnaire, Focus Group Discussion (FGD) and in-depth interview, which yielded similar results as follows: the more gender inequality remains unchecked, the more it hinders women from being appointed as members of conflict resolution committees in Rivers State; the more gender inequality persists, the more it hinders the appointment of women at community decision making levels in Rivers State; the persistence of gender inequality causes hindrance of women from participating in active politics in Rivers State.

Conclusion

The study examined the relationship between gender inequality and women participation in political activities and peace processes in Rivers State. Women have continually been dominated by men in peace processes, decision making bodies and active political participation, and this affects the contributions from women perspective. Such marginalization indirectly daunts Nigeria’s democracy, because such an indirect exclusion hinders women’s contributions as a gender. This equally deprives women of the pecuniary gains of membership of the political processes and of playing active politics. Such continuous exclusion of women from active politics is very pathetic as it amounts to suppression of the commendable talents of intelligent women (Matthew, 2023). Women in Rivers State of Nigeria had been subjected to continuous discrimination and this should not continue. Hence this

study, which emanated from the problem stance of peoples' sheer assumptions about gender inequality and alienation from peace processes and active political participation. The study revealed that gender inequality is the cause of unequal participation of women in peace processes, active participation in politics and decision making. This supports the findings in Agbalajobi, 2010, which averred that gender inequality is the major reason for the exclusion of women in politics. This is also established by Umeh, Ujunwa & Eze (2023). It is therefore established in this study that gender inequality alienates women from peace processes, decision making bodies and active political participation in Rivers State. We therefore recommend that gender inequality should be curbed, by allowing women to have equal representation on any constituted peace process. Also, women should be allowed and encouraged to be appointed to represent at the decision making levels. In the same way, they should be encouraged and given equal representation to actively participate in politics. This can be done by leaving some position or percentage to be filled by women, so as to enhance equal participation in politics. Further, women should be treated as equal partners in all social organizations and be allowed under the affirmative action to fill certain reasonable percentage. The culture of treating women as housewives only should be curbed, and communities should endeavor to encourage the culture of equality also in terms of allowing women to engage in work and other pecuniary related functions, and encourage women to also see themselves as contributors to family sustenance in terms of providing for the family as the men do. This will encourage them to engage in work and other activities that will provide them money. This is because "work changes societies positively in many ways and in that process creates for many people a standard of living that produces in excess of what is required for human basic subsistence" (Badom & Girigiri, 2022, p.455).

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