

## LABOUR LEGISLATIONS AND THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN TRADE UNION MOVEMENT

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### Abstract

*A woman unionist, while not being a professional can also participate at the domestic, local, state or national level. At the domestic level, she must be a worker and a member of a chapter of a registered industrial union. She must also actively participate in union politics. Being a member, she can seek election into the offices of the trade union at any level. However, several studies on women in black Africa and indeed Nigeria have revealed that although there have been increased participation of women in wage labour in the past three decades, they have not significantly improved their involvement in union affairs, especially in leadership roles. A larger proportion display total indifference to trade union matters. Thus, the lone woman activist is the exception rather than the rule. Put alongside their counterparts in the informal sector of the economy, the participation of women workers is minimal. While women traders have acted collectively in the past to protect their interest, the same can hardly be said of the female wage workers. Even today, in Nigeria, women traders still act collectively under the umbrella of the numerous women associations to prevent undue interruptions of collectively agreed prices at each prevailing period. In fact, these women form the bulwark of masses of present political parties in Nigeria. But the picture of women wage earners activism is almost non-existent as the following discussion on women involvement in the Nigeria Labour Congress will show.*

**Keywords:** Unionism, Labour, Women, Trade, Legislation, Activism.

### 1.0. Introduction

In the years between 1900 and 1985, explanations of passive roles of women reveal that trade union matters were regarded a solely male issue due to the personality clashes and the hooliganism associated with it.<sup>1</sup> Parpart,<sup>2</sup> for example avers that rather, women acting as wives and daughters provided traditional support by reinforcing actions of their husbands and fathers

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<sup>1</sup> A.O. Okoronkwo, Women Participation in Trade Unions in Fashoyin and others (Eds) *Women in the Modern Sector Labour Force in Nigeria* (1985).

<sup>2</sup> J.L. Parpart, Women, Work and Collective Labour Action in Africa in Roger Southal (Ed), *Labour and Unions in Asia and Africa* (Macmillan Press, London. 1988).

in their collective fight as unionists. Thus, during the period, while the number of women workers in the formal sector was on the increase, there was less than commensurate participation of women in leadership roles in the unions. The role of women in the context of this paper is conceived as going beyond mere membership of unions, to encompass some involvement in decision making process of the unions.

While a few women have been able to achieve this feat in unions with large number of females such as the Nigerian Association of Nurses and Midwives, there are a few women in leadership positions of other unions. Pittin,<sup>3</sup> for example, reports that at the Nigeria Labour Congress, the apex organization of labour in Nigeria, only one of the forty-six executives was a woman. The scenario remains unchanged two decades later.<sup>4</sup>

What in essence, may be referred to as trade union activity for the Nigerian woman is found in concerted actions taken by women of Southern Nigeria, who in protecting their means of self-employment had organised demonstrations between 1929 and 1938 to force the colonial government to soften its taxation policy on them. Okoronkwo reports that these actions by the women achieved their objectives. Similarly, in 1946, women in the Onitsha province rioted to protest the establishment of Nsula Oil Mills while in 1950, it was the turn of the Calabar women.<sup>5</sup> Between 1941 and 1947, Egba Women in Abeokuta opposed the taxation policy on women and all forms of discrimination against women. And in 1953, Nigerian women formed a Federation of Nigerian Women's Societies (FNWS) where the voice of all Nigerian women will be heard and known.<sup>6</sup>

These actions, which depict some militancy by illiterate women in the informal sector of the economy was not upheld in later years even after women gradually through education and self-awareness became engaged in formal wage labour. Statistics of women in public and private sector show that women did not benefit from formal education until the 1960s to enable a substantial number to be employed in wage labour. For example, the 1963 census figures put the number of the nation's workforce at 18 million, out of which only 4.4 million were women.

This figure rose to 28 million of a total workforce of 57 million,<sup>7</sup> while a comparative labour force sample survey for 1970/71, 1982/83 annual years owed that the number of women employed in the private sector increased from 39,464 in 1965 to 741,493 or 8 percent of the total employed in 1970/71. However, the analysis showed that 64 percent of the employed women were in the services sector, 13 percent in the manufacturing sector, 12 percent in commerce and 5 percent in agricultural sector. The 1982/83 survey estimated that 11.4 percent of the women within the civilian labour force were employed in agriculture, 6 percent in manufacturing, 11.4 percent in commerce, another 11.4 percent in business services and 19.2

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<sup>3</sup> R. Pittin, *Gender and Class in Nigeria Industrial Setting*, (Macmillan Press, London.1984).

<sup>4</sup> As at 2004.

<sup>5</sup> A. Nwabughuogu, *Political Change, Social Response and Economic Development: The Dynamics of Change in Eastern Nigeria, 1930-1950* (Unpublished Ph.D Dissertation at Dalhousie University, Halifax, Nova Scotia. 1981).

<sup>6</sup> Sunday Guardian. July 21, 2002.

<sup>7</sup> 1985 Census Statistics.

percent in the social services. Thus, one finds that, only from the 1980s did employment of women in formal labour sector witnessed some increase. In fact the recently published federal civil services manpower statistics show that the percentage of women as at December, 1981 stood at 31, 993 representing 12.1 percent of the total staff. By December, 1982 the number had increased to 33,970 or 12.8 percent of total staff employed.

What this means is that the number of women in wage employment only began to increase from the 1980's. Hence trade unions, which were formed before this period could not specifically cater for the interest of women workers who were in comparative minority. Of necessity, they had to be male dominated. In fact, after the first trade union, the Nigeria Civil Service Union was formed in 1912, it took another twenty-one years before another union, with predominately female workers, and the Nigeria Nurses Association could be registered under the Trade Union Ordinance of 1938. Even then, women did not feature in its administration as the study by Okoronkwo<sup>8</sup> reveals that its executive secretary, for decades was a man.

Scholars have proffered reasons for this development. Fapohunda<sup>9</sup> attributes this lack of lustre approach of women to trade unionism to dynamic economic and social factors operating on both sides of the market. In the Nigerian situation, where the competition for urban jobs is high, employers, influenced by the realities of differential labour costs or by discriminatory attitudes prefer to hire male labour who would not be encumbered by domestic and social demands, and the few women, who having acquired some professional skill and are employed automatically falls into the elite class who unlike their counterparts in the informal sector are unable to appreciate the importance of collective action to defend economic interests.<sup>10</sup> Such elite conception has militated against women active participation in the workers struggle on the fora of trade unions. Thus the base provided by women action in the colonial era could not catapult women into the realm of notice as labour leaders or activists.

Women workers in the view of Swantz,<sup>11</sup> 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 supporters at meetings. Another reason adduced by Swantz 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. Grint<sup>12</sup> 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<sup>13</sup> describes the case of

<sup>8</sup> A.O. Okoronkwo, Women Participation in Trade Unions in Fashoyin and others (Eds) *Women in the Modern Sector Labour Force in Nigeria* (1985).

<sup>9</sup> E.R. Fapohunda, *Women at Work in Nigeria: Factors Affecting Modern Sector Employment* (Praeger Publishers, New York. 1978).

<sup>10</sup> C.K. Agomo, *Labour Legislation and Women Workers* (1985).

<sup>11</sup> M. Swantz, *Women in Development: A Creative Role Denied* (C. Hurst & Co. London. 1985).

<sup>12</sup> K. Grint, *The Sociology of Work* (Polity Press, Cambridge. 1991).

<sup>13</sup> J. Vickers, *Women and World Economic Crisis* (Zed Books Ltd. 1991).

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.

However, the case of Nigeria, in a sense is crucial. Nigerian women were only exposed to wage or the formal labour market in the later 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. However, as Afigbo<sup>14</sup> has argued, there is the need for women to involve themselves in the trade union movement both as a means of encouraging more women to partake in the formal economic sector and as a way of leveling any form of discrimination against women in employment conditions and legislations at the work place. The type of decision which women in the trade unions can participate in, often depend upon the nature of their involvement. As a professional trade unionist, she is an employee of one of the twenty-nine industrial unions and an active participant in the policies of her organization.

## **2.0. Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) and Women Representation**

The first effort to accommodate women in the trade union movement can be traced to the 1981 to 1985 period when, the NLC in line with the principles articulated during the declared International Decade for Women, had at its first triennial congress in Kano, in 1981, adopted a proposal by its Constitution Review Committee, that a Women's Affairs Department be set up at its national secretariat, with the primary objective of promoting effective participation of women in the labour movement. Thus, in that year, a women representation department charged with the following duties was established

1. To ensure equal pay for work of equal value
2. To ensure non-discrimination on job opportunities based on sex
3. To ensure observance of ILO convention on women labour
4. To set up serving institutions including home economics centres.

Noble as these ideas were, their objectives could not be realised due to inbuilt prejudice of male unionists who were charged with implementation. For example, the directive from the NLC secretariat that state chapters should set up women wings was regarded as women liberation under the guise of trade unionism, hence only three of the thirty-six chapters heeded the directive. These were the Lagos, Oyo and Anambra State Councils. In fact, the depth of pessimism which followed the establishment of the Anambra chapter had resulted in an attempt by its protem chairperson in her maiden address to allay the fears of critics by reiterating the objectives of the wing as being to "create awareness among women members of all industrial unions, act as a specialised NLC standing committee on women's affairs, focus attention on the

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<sup>14</sup> A.E. Afigbo, *Women as a Factor in Development* (Acena Publishers. 1991).

married female workers in particular and finally to do what it can to strengthen Nigeria Labour Congress and its affiliates".<sup>15</sup>

In spite of the above, the lackadaisical attitude of the NLC secretariat persisted especially as the Women's Affairs Department charged with the implementation of the 1984 resolution was headed by a male unionist. Thus by 1987, the attempt to get women involved in the NLC had virtually collapsed. In subsequent years, no attempts were made to encourage women unionists to vie for, national vacant positions. Even where new posts were created as in the 1984 Triennial Enugu Congress, where three new posts of that of vice president and national trustees were created, no female candidate was nominated for any of the vice president posts. The posts were already shared among the male unionists. Even the post of the national trustee for which there was a female contestant, the males ensured that she lost. This attitude would definitely constrain women from participating in trade union activities. Parpart<sup>16</sup> describes this unwillingness of men to vote for women in union election as being anchored in the identification of unions both in origin and existence with men. Therefore, a method of asserting male dominance is to maintain the institutional structure of the trade union movement. Take the case of the Nigeria Civil Service Union; The Federal Civil Service Rules, 03201(a) emphasizes, that:

*Nigerian women, whether married or not may be admitted to the permanent establishment in these trades of the Federal Public Service for which they are qualified on equal terms with men.*

Overtime, the percentage of women employed in the permanent positions in the civil service increased. The 1998 published federal civil service manpower statistics show a decrease in the rate of women employed on temporary basis. Whereas in 1988, the percentage of women on temporary employment was 15 percent, by 1998, the percentage had decreased to 0.2 percent. From the above, it is obvious that the Nigeria Civil Service Union is one union, which enjoys the patronage of a large number of females (about 46 percent of total membership). In spite of this eminent position, which women workers attained in the civil service, their level of participation in trade union matters is still negligible. A study by Olajumoke<sup>17</sup> showed that women did not attend meetings, did not aspire to elective offices within the union and because of this lack of commitment, there was virtually no representative at any of the domestic or state chapters. In fact, only about 8 percent of the officers at the national and state levels were females. Within the six specialized committee of the union, only 25 percent of the members were female and from the northern states of the country, (1990, annual report). The result of women's disinterest in union activities is that the union is one industrial union without a women's affairs committee within it.

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<sup>15</sup> E.O. Osiruemu, *The Labour Movement under Military Rule, 1966-1988* (Unpublished Ph.D Thesis at University of Benin. 1995).

<sup>16</sup> J.L. Parpart, Women, Work and Collective Labour Action in Africa in Roger Southal (Ed), *Labour and Unions in Asia and Africa* (Macmillan Press. 1988).

<sup>17</sup> C.M. Olajumoke, *Nigerian Women and their Participation in Trade Union* (Lagos. 1985).



The point of stress is that women, which constitutes about 40 percent of the Nigerian working population, are not adequately active in the leadership of the trade union movement, both at the national and state levels. Various scholars have blamed women for their apathy to labour unionism without tackling the constraints confronting them. Some of these factors militating against women's active participation in trade union movement are therefore analysed in the next section.

### 3.0. Women in Information Technology

Computing is still seen as a man's job in Africa, like many other professions. Men are also meant to be 'better' in many ways, although statistics from Obafemi Awolowo University in Nigeria show that final year female students perform better than their male counterparts in both the computer hardware and software disciplines offered by the University.<sup>18</sup> The previous section showed that the literacy rate for African women is low, and that very few women are entering tertiary education or joining technical programmes. This, together with the figures from the World Bank<sup>19</sup> shows that the female who share in vocational and technical education was only 28 per cent in 1983, may say something about the likely role of women in the IT area

in Africa. If overall literacy is low and very few women are joining technical programmes, we would expect the proportion of women in the IT field, as users or professionals, to be low.

There are very few women at the system analyst level. The few women who have reached such professional levels are from the ethnic minorities. Women are badly under-represented in IT management jobs everywhere and it is no surprise that women in Africa, considering their position in society, have not made it. For instance, in the UK, according to research done by ICL and IBM, 32 percent of trainee systems analysts were women, while only 3 percent of data processing managers were women. The research also found a marked decline in recent years in female entrants to the sector, without explaining why this is so. The report concludes that:

*Women are as well suited as men, and on some aspects more suited, to work in the new organizational and IT environment where the emphasis is on building relationships and on seeing different connections between people and technology*

But, bearing in mind the lack of generalizable evidence, it does appear that the likely impact of IT on women, and the role they are playing in the IT area, may be minimal, considering the general status of women in African societies and their position in the technical fields. With the increased penetration of computers in organizations, both in the public and private sectors in Africa, there must have been some impact, however small, positive or negative, on women. For instance, the introduction of computers in most government ministries (more women in Africa work in the public sector than in the formal private sector), some jobs undertaken by women may have been eliminated by automation and others may have been created. Women do most

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<sup>18</sup> B. Soriyan and B. Aina, Women's Work and Challenges of Computerisation: Nigerian Case in I.V. Eriksson and others (Eds) *Women, Work and computerisation: Understanding and Overcoming Bias in Work and Education* (North Holland.1991).

<sup>19</sup> World Bank, *Sub-Saharan Africa: From Crisis to Sustainable Growth* (Washington DC, World Bank.1989).

of the data entry work -although changing technology may eventually make data entry pools obsolete -and therefore jobs may have been created in this area. With so many women working in the services sector (three times more than in industry) in Africa, and the increasing emphasis on automation in this sector, IT is bound to have had some impact on women's employment. Women, who are concentrated lower down in the hierarchy in low status jobs, are often easy targets when it comes to getting rid of people. Their employment is particularly vulnerable to automation because of their concentration in work with low skill requirements.

The introduction of computer-based technology into clerical work can build on women's skills, and may have given them new opportunities to enhance human skills. But in the financial sector-banks and insurance companies -where computer technology has penetrated most in Africa, computerization is believed to have limited employment growth. However, without further information, it would be wrong to reach certain conclusions. The manufacturing sector is of no great importance in many African countries, and has not been extensively automated.

Moreover, the current economic and political crisis faced by Africa will not allow extensive automation or major industrial growth in the foreseeable future. It is therefore difficult to predict what impact IT may have on women working in these areas. It does appear that the impact of IT on women has been different from organization to organization and nation to nation. In some South East Asian countries, jobs have been created for women in IT manufacturing and assembly, although the importance of cheap female labour is slowly decreasing, whilst in many other countries, such as Japan, automation has reduced the employment opportunities for low skilled women. The situation in Africa is very different and such impact can be expected. Direct foreign investment in manufacturing and assembly work where many of the women in South East Asia are employed does not exist in Africa. Distance from markets and poor communications facilities also mean that data entry work has not taken off in Africa as it has in the Caribbean.

The attitudes toward women, by both men and women themselves, have often suppressed the development or advancement of women. The existing sociocultural norms have so far restricted girls' and women's access to education, training and employment. Poor grounding in mathematics and science subjects at primary level, and the lack of exposure to technically-oriented subjects, limit their performance in these subjects at secondary school and their access to technical programmes at the tertiary level. African governments themselves have done very little to promote women's participation in technical education, training and employment.

Employers' stereotyped attitude (especially towards working mothers) regarding women's abilities and competence in technical fields mean that few women are recruited. Silent discrimination and stereotyping also exists in many organizations, with the result that even women already in employment are not always given the opportunity to prove their worth.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> S. Leigh-Doyle, Increasing Women's Participation in Technical Fields: A Pilot Project in Africa, *International Labour Review*, Vol. 130, No. 4.

Sex-stereotyping on the part of parents, educators, religion, the media and society at large encourage impression that certain jobs are exclusive for men. Women's own lack of confidence also influences their entry into certain fields and jobs. However, any further research should consider class and race as well as gender: women's participation in the IT area must be in the context of the domination of the field by certain classes and races. Examination of such issues would help identify their impact on the majority of the indigenous population. Further research on women's situation in Africa would also help answer some of the questions raised in the introduction.

#### **4.0. The Constraints of Labour Legislation and Women Workers**

Agomo<sup>21</sup> has 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 functioned on the basis of male dominance. In other words, the legislations establishing unions, their functions, their times of meeting, activities, 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<sup>22</sup> labels the 'patriarchal ideology' of the unions which negates women's participation. In looking at the Nigerian situation, Ubeku<sup>23</sup> 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; but the strong barrier of patriarchy was broken when men in Africa eventually began to accept women as colleagues and partners in the work place. With this innovation, one would have assumed a much easier ride to labour unions political power by women. While residues of union patriarchy 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 towards union matters. Olajumoke<sup>24</sup> argues "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.<sup>25</sup> The problem was further exacerbated by the attitude of some women workers who refuse to participate in union elections in their offices in order not to incur the wrath of their male employers or bosses. Some play the nefarious role of informants to management. Others still regard trade unions as bodies whose roles are mainly confrontational to the establishment. They, therefore think they stand the risk of losing their jobs if they actively participate in

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<sup>21</sup> C.K. Agomo, *Labour Legislation and Women Workers* (1985).

<sup>22</sup> J.L. Parpart, Women, Work and Collective Labour Action in Africa in Roger Southall (Ed), *Labour and Unions in Asia and Africa* (Macmillan Press, London.1988).

<sup>23</sup> A. Ubeku, *Industrial Relations in Developing Countries: The Case of Nigeria* (Macmillan Press, London.1983)

<sup>24</sup> C.M. Olajumoke, *Nigerian Women and their Participation in Trade Union* (Lagos. 1985).

<sup>25</sup> A.O. Okoronkwo, Women Participation in Trade Unions in Fashoyin and others (Eds) *Women in the Modern Sector Labour Force in Nigeria* (Lagos. 1985).



unions' activity. In the circumstances, they express satisfaction with their lot as long as they earn salaries.

Another factor seen as 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 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 in 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. Traditionally, in Africa, a woman's role is considered to be mainly that of child bearing and child rearing. It can be stated that at a time when women should be acquiring skills that would ensure their effective participation in the labour force, they are preoccupied with child bearing and child rearing since there are hardly any facility to take care of the children while women go out to work.<sup>26</sup> 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. It is in this perspective that Fapohunda<sup>27</sup> argues that the full capabilities of women in Nigeria will remain under-utilized and the benefits of development unequally distributed unless society at large and its agent, the government, are determined to develop this potential and are sympathetic to the problems of combining home and work responsibilities.

Afigbo,<sup>28</sup> while subscribing to the conflict role thesis, comments that a harmonious and mutually acceptable reconciliation has not been achieved between the new role of women in social, economic and political development and their traditional role as the linchpin of the family. But he goes on to assert that it was the opportunity for vertical and horizontal mobility which our indigenous societies provided for women that enabled them to contribute significantly to the synthesis of our way of life. One can summarize from the above that while it may be unconventional from a traditional prescriptive point for women to be in the forefront of the new political and social order of the society, there is no restricting ties in the traditional society that would hinder determined women from becoming prominent role players in social, economic and political development of the country. Also, Afigbo calls for a harmony which

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<sup>26</sup> G. Amon-Nikoi, *Women and Work in Africa* in U.G. Damachi and V.P. Diejomoah (Eds) *Human Resources and African Development* (Praeger Publishers, New York. 1978).

<sup>27</sup> E.R. Fapohunda, *Women at Work in Nigeria: Factors Affecting Modern Sector Employment* (Praeger Publishers, New York. 1978).

<sup>28</sup> A.E. Afigbo, *Women as a Factor in Development* (Acena Publishers, Enugu. 1991).

may be lacking so far between the two roles and not for women to abandon their traditional family roles on the basis of political development.

It seems plausible that conflict of role might arise between women's traditional roles and their work demands; in fact, some scholars have identified family demands as hampering the involvement of women in labour activism.<sup>29</sup> In this regard, women who have families, suffer from this conflict of roles and are over-burdened by demands from both sides and have little or no time for union activities. In a study of women workers in the United Kingdom, Rees discovered that women union activists are mostly those without children, family or immediate domestic commitments. In her words, "clearly the only women who felt able to take on union duties were those relatively free from family commitments including a partner". The problem before Nigerian women workers in this regard is mainly that of establishing a harmony between their domestic roles and their job demands. It may be a tough task in view of the strong emphasis on the family in the Nigeria society. However, with gradual awareness of women of the import of active participation in unions, and encouragement from their male counterparts, these problems are gradually being surmounted. Some male colleagues in unions go all length to frustrate women unionist as it happened in the case of the NLC, 1984 Enugu Congress.

Another factor militating against women participation relates to legislation by governments aimed at protecting women at the place of work. Sometimes, spurred either by internal pressures or the International Labour Organisation (ILO) the provisions of such legislations are aimed at eliminating discrimination against women. However, these legislative gestures, when extended to the area of women participation in trade union movement become counterproductive in the long run;<sup>30</sup> while it has a short term effect of encouraging women, it has a permanent effect of defining women as second fiddle players and a group that needs the agent of society, that is, governments for hand-out, in the labour sector. Encouraging legislations that are European in style leave untouched some important issues regarding the African women worker. Therefore, legislation may particularly account for the origin of lack of enthusiasm by women in union activities as union politics and the role one plays in them can hardly be legislated. The only option might be for unions to reserve a certain number of percentages of their post for women. Although such a move may push women down to their status in the pre-colonial days and enhance the consolidation of a patriarchal stale trade unionism, where men decide the benefits that would accrue to women.

## 5.0. Conclusion

It should be noted here that, the efforts made by Nigerian women to advance and bring recognition to women is a just cause and very significant in exfoliating the rights of women as human rights. From historical accounts, based on reliable sources, it is confirmed that there have been significant strides in recognizing women in political participation and the

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<sup>29</sup> T. Rees, Gender, Power and Trade Union Democracy in Fosh and others (Eds) *Trade Unions and their Members* (Macmillan Publishers. 1990).

<sup>30</sup> C.K. Agomo, *Labour Legislation and Women Workers* (1985).

participation of economic activities as of rights. This has in turn enhanced the status of women who in acquiring political power and social honour and also wealth creation.<sup>31</sup> Nonetheless, in many areas of life, subordination of women has been clearly evident, for example, in the traditional societies of Nigeria, farming activities is prevalent with women constituting the bulk of farmers. In some of these farming societies, women have only rights to use the land and cannot own it; land being the most valuable property and only devolved along blood line in order to keep the property in the family. It is feared that since the women will get married outside the blood line and would give birth to children belonging to another bloodline, the woman should not be entitled to own family land and hence alienate it to the benefit of non-family members.

This is not however the case in every traditional society in Nigeria, as what is obtainable in the east may not be so in the south west or the north. The point at stake here is that women are given lesser value and rights not appropriated to them as their male counterparts because the traditional system has also come to play in the economic and political arena. Again, gender inequality is taking a serious toll in the Nigerian situation and caution must be made to put a stop to this epidemic called gender inequality. Women are seen as lesser beings and relegated more to domestic work and production of babies and housekeepers without seeing the potentials that they possess to enhance the well-being of the society. The genius in them is not seen because eyes of both men and women have been blinded to equal rights and values of women have in relation to the rights of men been dropped so low that it has become a popular saying that ‘it is a man’s world’.

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<sup>31</sup> Bolanle Awe, Iyalode Efusetan Aniwura (Owner of Gold) in *Nigerian Women in Historical Perspective* ed. Bolanle Awe, Ibadan, Sankore/Bookcraft (1992) 52-71. She emerged as the head of a family compound acquiring the title of Mogaji. It is to be noted that the traditional societies were made up of families/compounds so that the Mogaji was an important figure in the political governance of the societies.