

Biblical gender equality and women's participation in leadership

Michael N Nwoko

Abia State University, Uturu, Nigeria
e-mail: nwokomichael09@gmail.com

Clement Chimezie Igbokwe

Abia State University, Uturu, Nigeria
e-mail: chimbest@gmail.com

Abstract

Lack of women participation in leadership positions has remained central in efforts to create an all-inclusive men-women sensitive society. Biblically, there is a resilient indication of God's intention for women's involvement in leadership positions. This study discusses biblical evidence supporting women's full participation in leadership and decision-making activities. The theoretical review was anchored on the tripartite approach of transformation theory of leadership, patriarchy, and liberal feminism. Methodologically, the study relied solely on secondary data collection, applying content and documentary analysis. The findings of the study showed that there are female Bible characters who demonstrated faith and exerted influence on society, successfully fulfilling their roles according to Biblical teaching. Further findings indicated that even in the ministry of Jesus Christ, women played significant roles and contributed to fulfilling his earthly mission. One of the study's recommendations was to implement affirmative action (also known as positive discrimination) as a strategy to overcome structural obstructions in male-biased institutions. This should be adopted by political parties, economic, religious, and social institutions, as well as bureaucracies.

Kurangnya partisipasi perempuan dalam posisi kepemimpinan terus menjadi isu sentral dalam upaya menciptakan masyarakat yang peduli akan inklusi gender. Dalam Alkitab, dapat dilihat bahwa Tuhan menginginkan adanya keterlibatan

perempuan dalam kepemimpinan. Penelitian ini membahas bukti-bukti dalam Alkitab yang mendukung partisipasi penuh perempuan dalam kegiatan kepemimpinan dan pengambilan keputusan. Tinjauan teoritis didasarkan pada tiga pendekatan sekaligus, yaitu teori transformasi kepemimpinan, patriarki dan feminisme liberal. Secara metodologis, penelitian ini sepenuhnya mengandalkan pengumpulan data sekunder dengan menerapkan analisis konten dan dokumen. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa terdapat tokoh perempuan beriman dalam Alkitab yang mempunyai pengaruh di masyarakat, dan berhasil memenuhi peran mereka sesuai ajaran Alkitab. Temuan lebih lanjut menunjukkan bahwa bahkan dalam pelayanan Yesus Kristus, perempuan berperan dan berkontribusi penting pada pemenuhan misi-Nya di dunia. Salah satu rekomendasi dari penelitian ini adalah penerapan tindakan afirmatif (juga dikenal sebagai diskriminasi positif) sebagai strategi untuk mengatasi hambatan struktural pada institusi yang masih bias gender. Penerapan ini sebaiknya dilakukan oleh partai politik, lembaga ekonomi, keagamaan dan sosial, serta birokrasi

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Introduction

The issue of leadership has defined a reciprocal process that entails mobilizing people with some motives and values, which may be political, economic, and other resources to realize certain goals independently, which may be mutually held by the leader and the followers (Burns, 1978). Leadership is applicable in every facet of any society. It can be exhibited from different perspectives-political, economic, social, religious, etc. Leadership is not exclusively reserved for men but also women. This is because, according to Okafor and Akokuwebe (2015), “women are a major stakeholder in the development project of any society”. Unfortunately, Sweetman (2000) laments that notwithstanding efforts made so far to have equal opportunity for women and men in every sphere of society, especially in the 21st century, women still lack full participation in

determining the affairs of their societies. Still, women generally have been excluded from participating nationally and internationally in high-ranking situations.

This explains that God also created women to be in some leadership positions. However, on this basis, Marrison (2008) reminds us that we all come to scripture with some assumptions from our own culture and society. Some of us come from a culture and society where women are expected to submit to men in particularly restrictive ways; others of us come from a culture and society that encourage women to think for themselves and to take leadership roles. Some cultures today are similar to ancient cultures in their attitudes toward women; others are quite different. Some people are afraid that any change in gender roles will cause more social chaos; others feel that changes are necessary. Each of us needs to be aware of the bias we bring to the Bible through discussion, and see how our particular bias might be influencing our understanding. In that way we let the Bible speaks to our biases.

From this standpoint, this paper discusses women's societal leadership from the biblical understanding. This was motivated by the fact that, while people still debate on the issue of women's equality in leadership, we must understand what the Apostle Paul meant in a few passages in the Bible: "You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." (Galatians 3:26-29).

This study purely relied on secondary data collection, meaning that the researcher gathered information from various sources such as books, articles, and reports. The researcher examined existing materials through content and documentary analysis to extract relevant insight into women's participation in leadership positions from a biblical perspective. The research design was

descriptive. To ensure the reliability and validity of the data, the author applied rigorous criteria in selecting the sources of information only from reputable and credible publications.

Leadership and gender equality

Leadership

Leadership literature is inundated with different definitions and interpretations based on the various schools of thought. The intention here is not to go into the debate and argument on the divergent views or the hermeneutic discussion of the concept of leadership. One common and central attribute of leadership is influence. Based on this understanding, Bass (1997) defines leadership as a process through which a group of people is influenced to achieve set goals and direct the group to make it more cohesive and coherent. Dinibutun (2020) believes that leadership is a highly socially complex process. Leadership is the capability of evaluating and or forecasting a long-term plan or policy and influencing the followers toward achieving the formulated strategy (Mayowa 2009).

On the part of the leader, he or she inspires people, moves them to action, and changes the world. This can be achieved if he or she applies his or her leadership abilities, including skills, character, encouraging values, and beliefs. This also includes ethos and courage.

Leadership analysis can be viewed from three perspectives: first from the individual process also known as the dyadic process; second from the group perspective also known as the group process; and third, the organization perspective, which can be termed the organization process. In whatever perspective leadership is analyzed what is central is that leadership includes influence processes involving the determination of the group's objectives, motivating task behavior in pursuit of these objectives, and influencing group maintenance and culture (Yukl, 1989). By analyzing leadership from the gender

perspective, Ekekwe (2011) opines that leadership is the ability to open the space in which individuals in society can fill in the humanity (values and potentials) within them so that they are not seen and do not feel themselves to be just a “thing”, but proper human beings, with all the rights and responsibilities from nature that pertain thereto.

Conceptually, leadership has evolved and developed due to many political, economic, and social changes. The changes have been noticed within the organizational and environmental setting (Alonderiene & Majauskaite, 2016). From an organizational perspective, numerous studies have also been conducted to determine the effect of organizational performance based on the type of leadership. The performance evaluation includes determining the organization’s culture, how effective the workers are, the level of workers’ satisfaction and motivation on the job, stall performance indices, and the retention level of workers by the organization. The leadership style of every organization determines evaluation criteria (Shaw & Newton, 2014; Siddique et al., 2011; Yang, 2014; Yang & Islam, 2012).

Gender equality

According to the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), now officially United Nations Children's Fund, women’s equality is the concept that explains women and men, girls and boys have equal conditions, treatment, and opportunities for realizing their full potential, human rights and dignity, and for contributing to (and benefitting from) economic, social, cultural and political development. Gender equality is, therefore, the equal valuing by society of the similarities and differences between men and women and the roles they play. It is based on women and men being full partners in the home, community, and society. Equality does not mean that women and men will become the same but that women’s and men’s rights,

responsibilities, and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female (UNICEF, 2017).

A social and cultural construct distinguishes differences in the attributes of men and women, girls and boys, and accordingly refers to the roles and responsibilities of men and women. Therefore, gender-based roles and other attributes change over time and vary with different cultural contexts. The concept of gender includes the expectations held about the characteristics, aptitudes, and likely behaviors of both women and men (femininity and masculinity). This concept is useful in analyzing how commonly shared practices legitimize discrepancies between sexes (UNICEF, 2017).

Varieties of leadership conceptions

A theoretical review of the literature on leadership has shown various leadership theories. For the purpose of this study, we have adopted the transformation theory of leadership, and patriarchy and liberal feminism theories as the theoretical frameworks of analysis. The choice of this is predicated on the fact that in whatever way or form leadership is defined and explained, one common theme among them is influence. For the purpose of situating the gender aspect of this paper, we have decided to also make use of the theories of Gender Oppression - Patriarchy and Liberal Feminism theories. These take care of the inequality between men and women's participation in leadership positions in Nigeria and every other society.

Transformational leadership

Transformational leadership was started by James V. Downton in 1973. He was the first to coin the term. James Burns later added this in his paper on political leaders titled: Leadership (Burns, 1978). The theory has been applied in various other disciplines and more frequently in organizational psychology. The central argument is that leadership is a process whereby a "leader and followers help each other to advance to a higher level of moral and motivation". Burns (1978)

further expresses the challenge of separating management from leadership, claiming that the difference between the two concepts is in the characteristics and behaviours of the person who manages or leads. As a result, Burns advanced the concepts of ‘transforming leadership’ and ‘transactional leadership’.

Burns (1978) explains that transforming leadership creates important change in the life of the fellowship and organization. Transforming leadership is all about ‘give and take’ relationship between the leaders and the followers. While transactional leadership does not apply this. It is the leaders' responsibility to make change through examples by enunciating and invigorating the vision and challenging goals of the organization by articulating its mission. Yukl (2011, p. 251) seeks to “raise the consciousness of the followers by appealing to the ideals and moral values rather than to materialistic desires or negative emotions.”

According to Avolio et al. (2009) and Samad et al. (2015), transformational leadership theory explains that the leader motivates, inspires, and transforms followers to perform while transcending self-interest for the betterment of the organization. Bass (1985) elaborates more on this theory. According to him, transformational leaders always create more awareness in followers in order to understand the importance and values of task outcomes and how to activate their higher order of needs. Transformational leaders also stimulate their followers to act for the sake of the organization. Table 1 below depicts various contributors to the characteristics of transformational leadership theories.

Table 1. Characteristics of Transformational Leaders

Contributors	Characteristics of Transformational Leaders
Kuhnert and Lewis (1987)	Transformational leaders have the capability of thoughtfully affecting people to make a shift in their insights, the value they expect, and the things they need. By doing so, the followers of the leaders also become leaders themselves.

Egri and Herman (2000)	Transformational leaders have the characteristics of guiding definite Occurrences and altering the followers' modes to evoke emblematic dreams and expected chance. They also inspire the cravings and objectives of the followers.
Antonakis, Avolio and Sivasubramaniam, (2003)	Transformational leaders are pre-emptive in their relationship with their followers by raising their awareness of superior cooperative interests and encouraging them to accomplish their expected goals.
Avolio and Bass (2004)	They give impact to their followers to achieve beyond their interest in their organizations by exposing them to their vision, reinforcing the followers' awareness and the strategies they can implement to achieve their vision. They speak to their followers to achieve success and become independent, and at the same time create relationships

Patriarchy feminism

Patriarchy, Bhasin (2004) explains, refers to male dominance over women and is characterized by a system that keeps women playing a secondary role in various instances. Patriarchy theory's central argument is that man is meant to occupy the dominant position in society and woman is to take a subordinate position. A patriarchal society, according to Napikoskic (2020, p. 1) is a "society that consists of a male-dominated power structure throughout organized society and in individual relationships. In a system in which men have more power than women, men have some level of privilege to which women are not entitled."

Walby (1990) believes that patriarchy is a system and practice that allow men to exploit, dominate and oppress women, and does not allow for equal role of men and women. It is, therefore, biologically determined. Based on this biological determinism of the theory, Millet (1977), argues that every oppressed woman gives consent to the oppression she meets and that women believe that men's dominance is due to the superiority of men over women. So, this affords men to have all power in their hands in families, and societies, and form leadership positions. Sultana (2011), concludes that this is why men enforce

restrictions on women's mobility along with the rights for equality and property. Some areas that have been demonstrated against women range from violence against women, low wages offering oppressive use of traditional and religious practices against women, to deprivation from having equal access to education and leadership positions.

Liberal feminism

Feminist theory is an expanded version of the patriarchal theory. According to Napikoskic (2020), Liberalism is an ideology and doctrine that underscores the value of freedom and believes that the state or society should guarantee freedom for every individual, irrespective of gender. Liberal feminism theory, therefore, preaches the value, freedom, and role of women in any society (Baehr, 2020). Liberal feminism theorists are the view that "female subordination is rooted in a set of customary and legal constraints that blocks women's entrance to succeed in the so-called public world", and strive for gender equality via political and legal reform. Liberal feminism is also called 'mainstream feminism.' This focuses attention on how to achieve gender equality with the application of political and legal reforms and institutions in a democratic system (Maynard, 1995).

Though there are some disagreements on how freedom should be understood, on one part, some liberals are of the idea that freedom should be free from coercive interference. They belong to the group called 'classical liberal feminists. Gaus, Courtland, and Schmidts (2018); and Paul, Miller, and Paul (2007) are in this group. On the other hand, other liberal thinkers are classified as 'new liberals' or egalitarian-liberal feminists.' They believe that freedom is a personal thing where one chooses how to live and has political autonomy to live with others (Rosenblatt, 2018).

Efforts have been made in Nigeria since the new democratic dispensation which started in 1999 to introduce Gender and Equal Opportunities in

Nigeria's constitution. Various legislative bills presented in this regard at the National Assembly all failed legislative passage. According to Iroanusi (2020) of the online Premium Times newspaper, five legislative bills to achieve gender inclusion and participation presented at the National Assembly between 2016 and 2022 all failed to pass. This was first introduced in the Eighth Senate in March 2016. The bills seek to give women equal opportunities in the areas of job employment and rights to inherit children; and equal rights to marriage and divorce. Women also have the right to education, property, and bequeathed inheritances.

The bills summarily were to establish 35 percent gender quotas in the Constitution and manifestoes of political parties. Unfortunately, the bills were rejected by male lawmakers who argued that the Nigerian Constitution was clear on the rights of citizens, including women.

Figure 1. Women protesting at the National Assembly for the inclusion of women in politics



Source: Iroanusi, 2022.

Biblical teaching on gender equality and women's participation in leadership

Society is often criticized for being narrow-minded toward women. Conversely, many biblical teachings portray special positions for females in the Church and

society. Men and women are responsible to fulfill God's commandments and purpose for humanity. The two have an equal playing field in God's agenda. They have the same right to salvation and salvation with a common currency of faith in God (Browder, 2021). God, at the beginning of creation, was gender sensitive and instituted gender equality. According to Payne (2009, p. 41), "God in Genesis presents gender equality, rather than male leadership, as humanity's created state." The Bible teaches that man and women are created equally by God and His image, and He asked the two to have dominion over everything he created outside of man and women.

The equality of man and woman, according to Gen. 1:26-26, does not portray any form of men's dominion over women. The equality here that the Bible teaches is not limited to spirituality but also to physical things. God blessed man and woman and charged them both in verse 28: "Be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over . . . every living thing that moves upon the earth."

The Bible further teaches that man and woman were created for equal and full partnership in leadership. Genesis 2:18: 18 "The Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him." The word 'helper' is a Hebrew called "ezer," which also means a help, helper). This word is used in 66 places in the Bible. This "ezer", though pronounced "ay-zer" means God's strength, power, and protection, help, and being a rescuer, which was used to designate woman in Genesis 2:18 refers to God in most instances of Old Testament usage (I Sam 7:12; Psalms 121:1-2). Consequently, the word conveys no implication whatsoever of female subordination or inferiority (Christians for Biblical Equality, 1989). Women have a biblical role in society from helping within the church to fulfilling the Great Commission. The Bible encourages all Christians — both male and female — to follow the commands of God in telling others about Him. Women can use avenues such as serving in the church and political appointments to accomplish this charge. God has used

females from cover to cover in the Bible, and they will continue to be used by Him in the future, as they are obedient in following his leading in their lives (Browder, 2021).

Women in a leadership position in the Bible

Table 2 depicts bible characters who were women of faith who integrated their beliefs into various political leadership positions and fulfilled biblical commands in their times and seasons.

Table 2. Inspiring examples of women leaders in the Bible.

Name	Leadership Position	Responsibility and Action
Deborah	Judge and Prophetess	She played the role as both a judge and a prophet. Some tried to argue that God called Deborah only because Barak rejected to go to battle without her (Judges 4:8-9). But that ignores the fact that Deborah held court before this male military leader came on the scene (Judges 4:5). (<u>Influence Magazine</u> , May 17, 2019).
Miriam	Exodus Leader	When the kids of Israel miraculously crossed the Red Sea, Miriam was among the first women to pick up an instrument and lead in worship (Exodus 15:20). But this wasn't her only ministry role. Micah 6:4 names Miriam as a leader of the nation, along with Moses and Aaron. (<u>Influence Magazine</u> , May 17, 2019).
Mary of Bethany	Disciple	While the twelve male disciples of Jesus are more familiar to most, was one of many women who followed Jesus (Luke 8:1-3). Sitting at a teacher's or rabbi's feet was a privilege normally reserved only for men. Yet in Luke 10:39 we find Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus, assuming the posture of a student of the Lord. (<u>Influence Magazine</u> , May 17, 2019).
Phoebe	Deacon	Little is known about Phoebe's hope that she held the title of "deacon" (Romans 16:1). But many scholars believe Phoebe's role was to bring Paul's

		letter to the church in Rome where she would have read it to the believers and even replied questions they may have had. What an amazing responsibility!
Priscilla	Teacher	Priscilla was not only a business owner in Corinth who gave Paul lodging and perhaps a job but she was also a great teacher (Acts 18:26). It's of note that Luke lists Priscilla first, which may indicate she was the lead teacher of the two. (<u>Influence Magazine</u> , May 17, 2019).

James Hurley writes, “The most striking thing about the role of women in the life and teaching of Jesus is a simple fact that they are there” (Hurley, 1964, p. 124). Among the gospel texts, there is no special statement that disclaims the view of the day concerning women, their uniform testimony to the presence of women among the followers of Jesus. Though this constitutes a serious break from the teaching tradition it has been described as being ‘without an instance in contemporary Judaic teachings (Hurley, 1964). In the life and time of the ministry of Jesus Christ, women played an undeniable role as shown in table 3. Schreiner (2001, p. 185) confirms this, who explains that “Jesus treated women with dignity and respect and elevated them in a world where they were often mistreated.”

Patriarchal cultural pressures and women’s participation in leadership in Africa

Patriarchalization of the church entails such aspects as, sexism; patriarchy, and androcentrism. Sexism, according to Ackermann (1991) is a form of discrimination just like racism or classism. However, sexism goes beyond the race, class, and cultural orientation of a person.

Sexism occurs when privileges are accorded to males over females, on the grounds of gender. Patriarchy is a form of social organization in which the father is the head of the family. In this institution, therefore, power is held by

men (Muriithi, 2000), while Ackermann (1991), explains patriarchy as the “rule of the father and denotes the legal, economic and social systems which validate and enforce the sovereignty of the male head of the family over its members.” Napikoski (2020), states that the concept of patriarchy has been central to many feminist theories. It is an attempt to explain the stratification of power and privilege by gender that can be observed by many objective measures. Androcentrism means male-centeredness. Androcentrism occurs when what is thought of as being universally human is not determined by what women and men together understand and experience, but has been exclusively laid down, described, and categorized by men (Ackermann, 1991). Muriithi (2000) further observes that African culture has some fundamental aspects. Some cultural practices determine the societal valuation of women: in this case, such aspects as a patriarchal negation of women; women silenced by culture; and stereotyping are crucial.

One of the pre-occupations of African women’s theological articulations is cultural oppression against women as a result of the patriarchal social system and the authority role that men are to dominate. There is a common claim that culture is a leading issue, which has preoccupied the theology of African women. Thus, to a great extent, has silenced many women and made them not experience the grace of God for their liberation private and public perspectives in both private and public perspectives. To this effect, the roles and images of African women are socially and culturally defined (Wamue et al., 1996).

Reading through the biblical examples of women leaders in the Bible, *Zambian Churches Mother Bodies* (2010), observes that many of them operated in cultural contexts very similar to ours, and yet they were able to achieve much in their ministries for God. Transformational women leaders are found in both the Old and New Testaments. For example, Deborah (Judges 4: 4-24), served her community as both Judge and Prophet, in a patriarchal society

where women were often confined to the home; Deborah's role was all the more amazing, transformational, and charismatic.

Churchyard's (2001) writing on the transformational leadership role of Deborah, explains that God selected Deborah, the prophetess, to serve as one of the earliest judges of Israel. She lived between Ramah and Bethel where the people of Israel came to her for judgment. Deborah's role as both prophetess and judge included ministering to both men and women. As a judge of Israel, Deborah served as a spiritual leader over the congregation of Israel, which included the (male-only) Levitical priesthood.

Another example is Miriam (Exodus 2:4, 7-8). She is the elder sister of Moses, standing guard over her baby brother on the river's shores. She comes from an outstanding family of leaders. Miriam might be called the leader of a woman's group, as we see her in Exodus 15: 19-21 leading a group of Israelite women in victory, song, and dance after crossing the Red Sea. She is a gifted woman, a poet, and a musician as well as a women's leader. In the Toolkit of Numbers 12: 2, 6, we further discover that she, like her two brothers, was also a prophet, a messenger of God's Word. Churchyard (2001) stated that God spoke authoritatively to the Israelites through Miriam and Aaron. In addition, Micah lists Miriam alongside Moses and Aaron as the prophets who redeemed Israel from Egyptian bondage.

Table 3. Women in the Ministry of Jesus

Name	Role
Elizabeth	Elizabeth's role happened before the birth of Jesus. Her husband's name is Zechariah. She was noted to be "upright in the sight of God" and an obedient woman. (Luke 1:6). When Mary visited her, "the baby leapt in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit" and blessed Mary (Luke 1:41-45).
Mary, the mother of Jesus	She marvellously outlined that "I am the Lord's servant... May it be to me as you've got said" (Luke 1:38). She lauded God in a lyric-found in Luke 1:46-55. Mary was a great illustration as

	she “treasured up all these things and considered them in her heart” (Luke 2:19, 51). She contributed to Jesus his biological son, appearing in the public view for the first-time miracle (John 2:1-11).
Anna	Ann was an elderly prophetess who appeared when Jesus was taken to the temple for dedication and according to Luke 2:38 “gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem” (Luke 2:38). However, it was not recorded how she spread the Good News.
Mary and Martha	Mary and Martha are two biological sisters. It is believed by some theologians that women should not talk when men are talking. Notwithstanding this, Jesus still recognized them as his friends, which is recorded in John 11:5: “Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.” It was Martha that Jesus addressed as “a woman named Martha who opened her home to him” (Luke 10:38). She was taken as a widow and she owned a home. Her sister Mary was seen as the woman who “sat at the Lord’s feet listening to what he said” (v. 39), Martha her sister was eventually cooking a meal. She asked Mary to be her in the cooking.
A daughter of Abraham	This woman that was tagged “a daughter of Abraham” had a disability for eighteen years. She came in when Jesus was teaching in the synagogue and was healed by Jesus as recorded in (Luke 13:10-13). Jesus was criticized for allowing her to come into the synagogue by the ruler of the synagogue as she was “a daughter of Abraham” (Luke 13:16).

Women in Jesus Ministry

In the Old Testament, male dominance is misused especially from the standpoint of Gen. 2: 23 “the bone of my bones”. This bible verse is mostly taken literally as if a woman is to be owned like property because she is from a man’s bone. As a result, the issue has been aggravated because of the notions of equality between men and women, resulting from the so-called feminist movement (Elijah, 2009). Because some men believe that the masculine form of God used in the Bible supports their idea, the feminist movement has a

question to ask: “If God is masculine, how can He stand and agree with the brutality that men are doing to women?” (Jones, 1973, p. 96).

As a result of the emphasis Jesus places on the women who followed him, Oluwashola and Kolawole (2020) identify husband and wife missionary teams that contributed to the ministry of Jesus. They include Priscilla and Aquila, Andronicus and Junia in Romans 16:3 and 7, and pairs of women in the persons of Tryphena and Tryphosa in Romans 16:12. Thus women, while not being chosen in the same way as the twelve, were certainly ‘with’ Jesus, invested in, and then entrusted with the ministry. Therefore, the women were with Jesus throughout his earthly ministry. They observed him and had time for him.

The challenges of women’s participation in leadership

Many barriers have limited women’s participation in leadership globally. One key factor to these barriers is structure, which can be narrowed down to a lack of legal instrument that upholds equity in leadership participation. According to Women Watch (2007), there have been efforts by the international community to promote gender equality in leadership and to eliminate any form of discrimination against women. Specifically, two major efforts are the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995), and the Millennium Summit (2000).

The challenge of women’s participation in a leadership position can be attributed to many factors, which have been identified through an empirical review of works in literature.

1. Lack of institutional and legal affirmative action. There is a lack of institutional policies and programs that promote affirmative action that would have brought women fully into leadership positions. This coupled with discrimination has become systemic barrier to women participation in leadership role alongside with men (Women Watch, 2007).

2. Patriarchal settings in African family societies are one major challenge for woman in participating fully in politics and organisational decision-making processes (Aino, 2012; Okafor & Akokuwebe, 2015). The low status of Nigerian women is generally reproduced by the culture of male supremacy inherent in local traditions and cultures, including religious idiosyncrasies (Aina, 2012).
3. The traditional role of the women and the girl-child in carrying out household chores, often leaves them with little or no time for formal education and self-development.
4. Stereotypical constraints against women in striving to attain political and organizational leadership roles to the top (Okafor, Fagbemi, and Hassan, 2011).
5. Obnoxious socio-cultural practices that include widowhood practices, female genital mutilation (FGM), restrictive religious practices (as observed in the Northern geo-political zone), and purdah system (observed in the northern part of the country) (Aina, 2012). These obnoxious sociocultural practices have hindered women's participation in leadership positions.
6. Non-extension of equal rights to all citizens, especially women, because they are seen as second-hand citizens in some parts of the country. In such cases, they are not allowed to participate in anything even at the grassroots level. Women are made to see that their permanent position which they could occupy fully is in the kitchen (Okafor, Fagbemi & Hassan, 2011).
7. Sexual harassment. Within the workplace and political space, sexual harassment is a challenge to women's participation in leadership positions and decision-making. Sexual harassment is considered a "major barrier to leadership positions. There are pieces of evidence that women who reject sexual advances from men usually never get promoted or recommended and sometimes, they are frustrated out of the workforce (Women Watch, 2007).

The United Nations' World Summit in 2005 for the member States was to reaffirm the Platform for Action. The outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly has contributed to achieving the internationally agreed development goals, including those contained in the Millennium Declaration. According to the United Nations (1995), the Beijing Platform for Action considered the inequality between men and women in the sharing of power and decision-making at all levels as one of the critical areas of concern for women's empowerment. It stated "Women's equal participation in decision-making is not only a demand for simple justice or democracy but can also be seen as a necessary condition for women's interests to be taken into account.

Conclusion

The findings of the study showed that there are female Bible characters who demonstrated faith and exerted influence on society, successfully fulfilling their roles according to the Biblical teaching. Further findings indicated that even in the ministry of Jesus Christ, women played significant roles and contributed to fulfilling his earthly mission.

Besides recommitting the gender bills for consideration and passage, both the Executive and the Legislature need to be reminded that Nigeria is a signatory to several international instruments that address gender inequality such as the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). There is also the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action that addresses various aspects of women's lives about the realization of their human rights. Nigerian lawmakers therefore need to understand that unless these laws are passed and enacted, there will always be bias in public spaces – leaving the women disadvantaged. There should be determination on the part of women to assume leadership positions in the public and private sectors. There should be democratic and equitable participation in the

development process through office holding to give control over the allocation of resources (Okafor, Fagbemi, and Hassan, 2011). A strategy that aims to overcome structural obstructions in male-biased institutions is affirmative action (also known as 'positive discrimination'). It also requires full implementation. This should be adopted by political parties, economic, religious, and social institutions, and bureaucracies. From a biblical perspective, biblical equality, as reflected in various Bible pages of the Bible, should be respected and seen as true to Scripture. All believers of the Holy Scripture should stand united in our faith that the Bible, in its totality, is the liberating Word that provides the most effective way for women and men to exercise their gifts distributed by the Holy Spirit and, therefore, to serve God.

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