



**ANALYSIS OF THE
HISTORY,
ORGANISATIONS AND
CHALLENGES OF
FEMINISM IN NIGERIA**

NIGERIAN GROUP



Analysis of the History, Organisations and Challenges of Feminism in Nigeria

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1. HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF FEMINISM IN NIGERIA

Background information on Nigeria

Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa and it has huge diversity along ethnic, religious and economic lines. The country's National Population Commission estimated the 2011 population to be about 168 million¹ with women representing about 49% of the total population. This represents an annual growth of 5.6million people since 2006 when the last official census was undertaken. Within Nigeria, there are about 250 different ethnic groups that speak nearly 400 native dialects. The prominent religions in Nigeria are Islam and Christianity. The country operates Federal System of Government with 36 states and the Federal Capital in Abuja. Nigeria gained independence from Britain after been colonized for more than five decades. Following the independence from the British Colonial Masters in 1960, the country was ruled by the military for almost 30 years before the return of democratic rule in 1999. The political anarchy that operated in Nigeria led to civil war between 1967 and 1970. Series of military coups d'état occurred that resulted in economic and political instability. The fifty-one years of Nigeria's post-colonial history have been a series of interchange between the military and the civilian government leading to a political climate and gender relations influenced by a strong military presence with minimal civilian rules (Okeke and Franceschet, 2002)².

In spite of the oil boom in the 1960s, poverty is still pervasive in the country and human development, statistics are not encouraging. According to the 2010 UNDP Human Development Report³, life expectancy at birth is 48.4 years. The Nigeria Millennium Development Report 2010 shows infant mortality of 75 deaths per 100 births; maternal

¹ <http://nigerianbulletin.com/2011/10/27/nigeria's-population-now-168m-hits-221m-in-2020-thisday/>

² Okeke and Franceschet (2002): Democratization and State Feminism: Gender Politics in Africa and Latin America, Development and Change, Volume 33, Issue 3, pages 439–466, June 2002

³ UNDP HDR (2010): The Real Wealth of Nations: Pathways to Human Development <http://hdr.undp.org/en/reports/global/hdr2010/chapters/>

mortality of 545 deaths per 1000 births; youth literacy of 80%; and HIV/AIDS prevalence among pregnant women of 4.2%. The report expresses fear that Nigeria may not meet majority of the goals at the target date of 2015 (GFR, 2010)⁴. Provision of infrastructure and services like roads, water, housing, energy, health care and educational facilities is relatively low compared to the revenue earnings over the years. Increased crime rate and other social problems which result from high unemployment is an exacerbating problem of the country's economy. Provision of housing, portable water, sanitation, basic education and primary health care, among others, is not adequate to a large number of the citizens. Politically, women occupy 7.3% of seats in Nigerian parliament (UNDP, 2010)

Feminism in Nigeria

Feminism has been a distant tool of intellectual discourse and political action to the majority of women scholars and activists in Sub-Saharan Africa (Adamu, 2006)⁵. In Nigeria, records of women's struggles to correct acts of discrimination and violence have been in existence since the 19th century. Nigerian women have been recognised to play significant roles in anti-colonial struggles. The struggles during the National Independence and social modernisation also resulted in the formation of women's movements. The pre-colonial and colonial eras revealed active participation of women in activities aimed to better their lot. The intervention of women in social and political landscape helped to improve their status at the grassroots, national and regional levels. In Nigeria, women have been involved in various movements and activities in their own ways even though such movements were not identified or labeled with any specific name. At the early stages, feminism as a concept attracted negative connotations, and usually feminist women were usually associated and/or stigmatized as being, 'men haters', frustrated or divorced women with nothing better to do but 'cause trouble'. Feminism gained attention in Nigeria as a result of different attempts made by women to secure and sustain equal rights and opportunities for women. The prevalence of unequal power relation resulting in disproportionate distribution of rights and privileges to women has been a great issue of concern leading to different interventions by individuals and women's groups to eradicate

⁴ Government of Federal Government of Nigeria: Millennium Development Goals Reports 2010

⁵ Adamu Fatima (2006): **Women's Struggle and the Politics of Difference in Nigeria**. http://web.fu-berlin.de/gpo/pdf/tagungen/fatima_i_adamu.pdf

such concepts. Feminism in Nigeria emerged out of the demands of women to improve women's status and eliminate debilitating factors that deprive women of enjoying their full human rights. Historically, women in Nigeria have faced a wide spectrum of experiences in navigating through several hindrances that have confronted them. The culture of patriarchy, male chauvinism and anarchy has undermined the rights of women and the outcome of this is the exploitation and marginalisation of women in the affairs of development both at the private and public spheres. Nigerian women have participated actively in all stages of the country's development from the Pre-Colonial Period through the Post-Colonial Period. In discussing feminist history in Nigeria, it is highly essential to discuss the struggles and interventions attempts by women at all stages of the country's development.

Feminists Movement: Pre-Colonial Era

The analysis of women's roles in Nigeria's liberation struggle in the pre colonial period can be understood from the nature of the economic, social and political actions they were engaged in that period. During the pre-colonial period, Nigerian women participated actively in the private and public spheres and usually have independent access to resources. The exception to this were the women in the Northern part of the country comprising mainly of the Hausa-Fulani whose commercial activities were restricted as a result of the use of the Islamic purdah. Even at this, they still made a strong impression on the socio-political landscape of the region. Notable women asserted their rights and started their own feminist movements. A prominent example was Queen Amina of Zazzau. In 1576, she became the undisputed ruler of Zazzau, a Hausa city in Northern Nigeria. Distinguished as a soldier and an empire builder, she led campaigns within months of becoming ruler. Amina subdued the whole area between Zazzau and the Niger and Benue rivers absorbing the Nupe and Kwararafa states. The Igala kingdom, also in Northern Nigeria, was reputed to have been founded by a woman, Ebele Ejaunu.

In Southern Nigeria, in both the Old and New Oyo, the Oba, known as the Alafin, developed a highly centralized and complex palace administration. Historically, women played various important roles in the palace administration. The Kings wives were called in general *ayaba*, but they were of various ranks and grades. Greater sex differentiation was more pronounced in other societies in the South. This resulted in women forming strong organizations. Among the Igbo and Ibibio, women controlled their own affairs and possessed political influence on the

basis of their collective strength. Where such female organization was lacking, as among the Ijaw, Kalabari, Efik, Edo, and Itsekiri, individual women of high status exercised political power as a collectivity. This they did either through the office of the queen mother (Benin) or through their personal relationships with the male rulers. In socially stratified societies, women of high status always occupied a higher social status position than the “commoner” men as well as women⁶.

However, in Yoruba and Riverine Igbo societies, not only the individual high status women but also women as a collective possessed political power through their organizations and through their representatives, such as the Yoruba ‘Iyalode’. The Yoruba wars, such as the popular Kiriji war, demanded extraordinary services from both men and women; where women were able to rise to the occasion, they were rewarded with greater political responsibility as in case of the Egba and Ibadan Iyalodes. The end of the century initiated another sequence of historical events which was to affect women’s political roles adversely. Pre-colonial African women occupied a position complementary, rather than subordinate, to the men. As has been shown, the sex segregation which existed in many spheres of society often enabled women to control their own affairs

Feminists Movements: Colonial Era

The Yoruba and Igbo women in southern Nigeria played powerful political roles within dual-sex systems of female and male authority. Women were part of associations that were based on trade, age, and kinship. The women were able to organize themselves through associations like the Market women to fight a collective cause. The colonialists had introduced certain rules and regulations which weakened the enjoyment of social, economic and political rights of women. Women’s representation in the public sphere was very low even though women were granted the right to vote in the 1950s in the South and in the North in the 1980s. The Women's War of 1929 (also known as the Aba Women’s Riots), in which Igbo market women protested British taxation, was a notable example of women using their traditional power against colonial rulers. Grounded in their roles as mothers and providers of the family, women collectively defended their complementary sphere of authority within the extended family and wider community.

⁶ Chima Ubani Centre: [www.chimaubanicentre.org/ebook/Benin paper.doc](http://www.chimaubanicentre.org/ebook/Benin%20paper.doc)

Women's movements/organizations in Nigeria continued to value the complementary of women's and men's interests, an idea reflected in the strategy of Nigerian women's groups to demand reserved places for women in political offices⁷. The Abeokuta market women protests in 1948 came almost two decades after the Aba riots. Women again revolted against colonial taxes and the failure of the traditional rulers to defend their interests by challenging the colonial masters. Instead under indirect rule, the Alake of Abeokuta was the person ultimately responsible for tax collection. Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti, who, at the time was head teacher at the Abeokuta Grammar School learned about this women's struggle, and formed the Abeokuta Women's Union (AWU) where the 'elite' Abeokuta ladies joined in solidarity with the market women of Egba land to work together to find a way to stop this practice of excess and unnecessary tax collection. This women's group coordinated by Mrs Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti was able to question the character of governance with regard to the authoritarian, arbitrary nature of decision-making by the Sole Native Authority and the colonial government. This later grew to a movement that became a string component of the independence movement. Also, through this development, women were able to develop a clear voice in questioning the repercussion of existing policies on the quality of life and status of women. These women used different cultural traditions to threaten the authority in order to bring the change they so much desired in the status of women. In the case of the Abeokuta protest, women bared their bodies naked at the Oba's palace⁸, an action which was a taboo in Yoruba tradition. This eventually led to the vacation of the throne by the Alake, though, for a period. It was through this anti-colonial resistance struggles that the different foundations for women's emancipation, equality and empowerment were initially laid such as the formation of the National Women's Union (NWU), the first national women's organization founded in 1947. It was also the first women's organization in Nigeria with nationwide representation covering all ethnic, religious and class lines. The Union had prominent female leaders such as Margaret Ekpo and Funmilayo Ransome Kuti who created a political niche for Nigeria women through their active roles in mainstream political movements and individual female organizations (Okeke and Franschet, 2002).

⁷ Women and the Nation, Sokari, September 28th 2010

⁸ Olushola Ojikutu (2011): Yoruba Women in the Pre-independence Era
<http://234next.com/csp/cms/sites/Next/ArtsandCulture/5594609-147/story.csp>

In the 1950's, before Nigeria gained her independence. Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti and some other women activists fought for women's rights and the country's independence alongside Nigerian founding fathers. She became the leader of the Women's wing of the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC) party in the Western region. Margaret Ekpo, also a fierce defender of women's rights, stood her ground in issues of equality with men, representing women resolutely with great dignity in multiple capacities. In the Northern part of the country, strong figures like Gambo Sawaba played prominent roles in the struggle for women rights and became a leading light for women in that part of the country. They routinely toured the country, mobilizing women to be politically conscious and to participate in the emerging political affiliations in order to protect and ensure the advancement of the nation. She, alongside Margaret Ekpo, Funmilayo Ransome Kuti and other leading political leaders such as Nnamdi Azikiwe, Obafemi Awolowo, Malam Aminu Kano and many others were at the fore front of relentless agitation for Nigeria's independence from Great Britain. The active roles played by women in the nationalist system led to the formation of elitist women's organizations which focused on charitable causes but failed to confront male dominance and anarchy in the society. In 1959, the National Council of Women's Societies (NCWS) was organized to be an umbrella for women's organizations across Nigeria (Okeke and Franceshet, 2002).

Feminists Movements: Post-Colonial Era

The movements under the leadership of Mrs Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti quickly extended beyond the South West to other regions in Nigeria. The National Women's Union (NWU) metamorphosed into the Federation of Nigeria Women's Societies (FNWS) in 1953. The FNWS was political in character and content. Through the FNWS, women were able to call for political participation and full representation in all legislative houses. At the same period, there arose a conflict of interest as women organizations faced the strategic question of whether to affiliate with government and political parties or to organize autonomously.

The emergence of social women's organizations with particular focus on consciousness, hearing and placing women's issues on the public agenda tend to be prominent especially in the urban areas. However, it is important to note that many of these organizations only acted within traditional boundaries and maintained neutral course in relation to the issue of

women's marginalization and male dominance. Different activities by feminist movements have assisted in inspiring women to improve their self-confidence and also help them to strive hard for the total liberation and socio-political and economic empowerment of women (Azuike, 2003)⁹. Many women in Nigeria desist from carrying the label of 'feminists'. This majorly could be due to the fear of societal exclusion of anyone who declares herself/himself publicly as a feminist. Another reason is the notion exhibited by certain arms of the press to label feminism as a man-hating group of unattractive, unlovable and frustrated women (Azuike, 2003).

Since the beginning of the post-colonial era, women's movements in Nigeria have organized many protests although restricted to major cities like Lagos. This period has also witnessed the multiplicity and specialization of women organizations. Organisations have developed their activities around focal areas germane to women interest. These include sexual and reproductive rights, rape, environment, domestic abuse, political marginalization, early child marriages, misapplication of the Shariah Law in some part of the North against women's interests etc. They have successfully brought to national and international glare abuses against women. In the Niger-Delta area, for example, women have been very audible and resourceful in the creation of awareness of the discrimination, dehumanization and injustice faced in that region. They have been visible in the struggle against Multinational Oil Companies and the Nigerian Military occupation of their lands through organizations like the Federation of Ogoni Women Association established in the early 90's. Women suffered amongst other things, rape, violence, burning, beatings and torture during a three-year campaign by the then Nigerian military government in 1993. The Ogoni women spearheaded (under their association) a resistance against the government for all these injustices¹⁰.

Politically, the participation of Nigerian women in the Beijing Conference of 1995 has led to a stronger voice for women in the political landscape. Issues of representation of women in top

⁹ Azuike (2003): A Radical Feminist Approach to the Works of Zaynab Alkali. A PhD Thesis in the Department of ENGLISH, Faculty of ARTS, University of Jos, Nigeria.
<http://dspace.unijos.edu.ng/bitstream/10485/843/3/a%20Radical%20Feminist%20Approach%20to%20the%20Works%20of%20Zaynab%20Alkali.pdf>

¹⁰ Women's Movements- Autonomous and Affiliated Women's Movements in Nigeria
<http://family.jrank.org/pgs1763>.

political offices now feature prominently in campaigns of political parties. Another important step politically is the waiver of expression of interest fees by major political parties for women seeking election into political offices in the country. Almost all sensitive political offices that were earlier thought to be reserved for men have now been occupied by women at one time or the other. Much more importantly, Nigeria now has a full-fledged Federal Ministry devoted to of Women affairs responsible for formulation and coordination of policies and actions that will improve the rating of women in the society.

2. WOMEN'S MOVEMENTS TODAY

Since Nigeria became a democratic nation, the promise of equal participation in politics for women by way of percentage has not been realized; international instruments that Nigeria is signatory to have not been domesticated, the laws that are made to protect and promote the rights of women are not adhered to and injustices against women, whether cultural or religious, are still the order of the day. There has not been the need for riots and protests as such in the past few years, so women's movements have been more of documentation, lobbying, advocacy and media relations etc.

Some Feminist Organizations in Nigeria

Nigeria has a large number of organizations which work towards ensuring equal opportunity for women and girls. These organisations attend to different women's rights issues within the private sphere of the family and in the public arena, in such areas as, sexual and reproductive health; poverty; economic empowerment; violence against women; property ownership; peace and security; leadership development and political participation, among others. The presence of a large number of women organizations in Nigeria is due to the fact that the country itself is the most populous country on the African continent. These feminist movements in Nigeria have defied all the odds of name calling, stigmatization etc and have continued to work hard for the advancement of women's human rights in Nigeria and Africa in general. These organizations have been working hard to ensure that Nigerian women are freed from all forms of oppression and exploitation. They strive to ensure that Nigerian women enjoy their rights as full citizens of the country. Several initiatives by the wives of Presidents,

State Governors and some women's human rights organizations have also been developed to pay more attention to women issues. Some of such organizations are stated below;

National Council of Women's Societies, National Council of Women

The National Council of Women's Societies acts as an agent in the formulation and dissemination of opinions and ideas by Nigerian women. It brings forward issues affecting member organizations to the government and also collaborates with national and international organizations. The National Council of Women acts as a gateway for connecting different categories of women in the country irrespective of class, age, religion or tribe. The National Council of Women is not a political organization, however it encourages women to participate in political and decision making activities in their societies.

Women in Nigeria (WIN)

Women in Nigeria (WIN) was developed by the founding members to be a radical organization that will focus on the initiation and implementation of research to emphasize women's full social, political and economic rights in the country. The aims and objectives of the organization stress the pledge of the socialist ideology-oriented organization to change. WIN has recorded a lot of achievement since its conception however, in the 90s, the organization faced fundamental challenges that crippled it. Regardless of these challenges, WIN still operates in some states in the country. Certain inequalities and segregations, which have been established over the ages and reinforced through the male-dominated structures, still persist, in spite of the various instruments of the United Nations, and the concerted efforts of the Federal Government and a number of non-governmental organizations on alleviating women's discrimination.

Baobab for Women's Human Rights

BAOBAB For Women's Human Rights is a not for profit, non-governmental women's human rights organization, which focuses on women's legal rights issues under the three (3) systems of law - customary, statutory and religious laws in Nigeria. The organization evolved from an ad hoc group of activists, social scientists, lawyers, and specialists in Muslim laws and Arabic who were responsible for executing the Women and Laws Nigeria project, under the auspices

of the International Solidarity Network of Women Living Under Muslim Laws from 1993 to 1996. This three-year multi disciplinary research project on women's legal rights generated a wealth of data which, in order to be efficiently utilized, needed an organizational structure from which outreach work could be planned and executed in the states under study. In 1996, BAOBAB as presently constituted formally came into being.

The Centre for Citizens' Emancipation and Empowerment

The Centre for Citizen's Emancipation and Empowerment was formed in 2002. The main focus of this organization is the liberation of women in purdah especially women in the Northern part of Nigeria. The Centre also tenders legal advice to the oppressed and underprivileged women.

Alliances for Africa (AfA)

Alliances for Africa (AfA) pays special focus to women's human rights, most especially in enhancing women's political participation as well as peace-building. AfA was developed to improve and reconstruct the interface between human rights and development with a vision to contributing innovatively to the task of tackling causes of endemic poverty and exclusion in Africa. AfA plays the lead role in the coalition against the Indecent Dressing Bill proposed by a female Senator, Mrs Ekaette.

Women's Rights Advancement and Protection Alternative (WRAPA)

This organization has over 17,000 registered members comprising of women, men and youth. The area of activities WRAPA includes advocacy and campaign on violence against women. The organization has been active in issues of parliamentary advocacy. WRAPA is involved in the advocacy and campaign on violence against women and has been engaged in parliamentary advocacy for enactment of various bills on protection of women's rights. The organization was selected in 2007 to implement the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) programme to improve women political participation in seven states in Nigeria.

Girls Power Initiative (GPI)

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The main focus of the Girls Power Initiative is on the empowerment of women through training programmes targeted at adolescent girls of ages 10 – 18 years. The organization conducts series of dialogue, leadership and communication skills to enhance the girls' full potential. GPI works at using the dialogue to eradicate barriers and constraints which prevent women's full participation in political and decision-making process.

Women's Consortium of Nigeria

WOCON is one of the non-governmental organizations developed to control and fight human trafficking in Nigeria. WOCON pays special attention to the issue of trafficking in girls and women. The organization monitors the status of women's rights. It also educates the public on issues of women's rights and welfare. WOCON fights and advocates against trafficking and child slavery and in addition carries out campaign to eliminate domestic trafficking in Nigeria and other neighbouring countries.

Widening Scope for Rights and Development (WISCORD)

The mission of WISCORD is to enhance the capabilities of women through research, documentation, capacity building and economic empowerment. WISCORD envisions a society of well –informed and confident women who are regarded in society as equal and full citizens. One of the strategies the organization uses to achieve its objective is the development of capabilities of young women and men, especially those in tertiary institutions, to expand access to skills that will improve the quality of their life and foster sustainable development.

Women Advocates Research and Documentation Centre (WARDC) and Alliances for Africa (AfA): Women Advocates, Research and Documentation Centre (WARDC) focuses on the area of promotion of social justice for women. The organization is involved in investigating and documentation of cases of violence against women, especially in the Niger-Delta of Nigeria. Through this, WARDC has helped in developing community-based mechanisms to monitor and avoid further violence in this conflict zone. The organization is also involved in advocacy campaigns to promote respect for women's rights as well as peace.

Women's Aid Collective



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Women's Aid Collective was established in 1997 to assist women and young people in need. The organization pays special focus to provision of legal protection and information to women and young girls who are victims of physical, mental and sexual abuse. It offers services on training, research, advocacy and conflict resolution to mention a few. The organization works towards ensuring gender equality and equal human rights for all citizens.

Project Alert

This focuses on the area of women's human rights abuse. It offers services, including shelter to victims of abuse and also carries out advocacy and sensitization on issues such as practices as Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), female disinheritance, male child preference, Girl-Child marriage, sexual harassment and domestic violence.

Women Against Rape, Sexual Harassment and Sexual Exploitation (WARSHE)

WARSHE works towards eliminating sexual abuse and violence against women and children in Nigeria. It provides human, material and emotional support to victims of rape, sexual harassment and sexual exploitation. It also provides counselling to victims and assists them in obtaining legal and medical services. WARSHE also conducts education and research in the area of its work.

The Nigerian Feminists' Forum (NFF)

The Nigerian Feminists' Forum (NFF) is coordinated by a Steering Committee which consists of women of diverse identities, locations, professions, expertise and generations and co-hosted by Alliances for Africa (AfA) and BAOBAB for Women's Human Rights. It provides a space for reflection and dialogue on the challenges facing the Nigerian women's movement, feminist activists and researchers. The Nigerian Feminist Forum as a project had taken many years to be actualized, its birth had always been in discussions at various international meetings, at the AWID International Forum, Nigerian feminists present agreed to make the NFF a priority, so at the African Feminist Forum at Ghana, the Nigerian Feminists there formed a steering committee to set up the NFF.

The NFF does the following;

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- Develop conceptual clarity and address the politics of naming
- Assess our relationship with contemporary Nigerian States and state structures
- Repoliticize the Movement
- Harness feminist knowledge
- Strengthen feminist institutions
- Develop feminist leadership
- Replenish our ranks
- Protect the integrity of feminist space.

Niger Delta Women's Movement for Peace and Development (NDWPD)

By way of background, the Niger Delta Women's movement for Peace and Development is a feminist Non-Governmental Organization in Special Consultative Status with the United Nations ECOSOC based in Delta State and has been in existence since 2005 with a vision to empower the Niger Delta Women and the most vulnerable people in the region.

NDWPD ensures that people especially women have access to safe and healthy environment and that environmental resources are managed in the most sustainable way to achieve socio-economic development. They subscribe to the fact that development cannot be achieved where information about the environment and environmental resources are lacking; hence NDWPD provides up-to date Information and strengthen women voices to search for solutions on the state of the Environment, Climate change and Environmental resources.

The aim of the Climate Justice Hearings is to up-scale local solutions and bringing the voices of those most affected – women and traditionally excluded groups – to influence negotiations and plans of action on climate change at the national as well as the international level during COP17 and Rio+ 20.

Women Centre For Peace And Development (WOPED):

WOPED is a non-governmental organization dealing with the dissemination of information concerning Female Cutting/Female Genital Mutilation (FC/FGM) in Nigeria and evaluating the progress in stopping FC/FGM in Nigeria.

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WOPED focuses on the elimination of all forms of violence against women and the prevention and management of violent conflicts and civil strife. WOPED has established a program which is made up of the following main activity areas:

- (a) The Peace and Anti-Violence Education (PAVE) Clubs in Schools: This aspect of the program is concerned with the socio-economic and political issues affecting the human rights of women, children and youths. .
- (b) Peace building and Conflict Resolution through community training programs, mediation, information dissemination, and group dialogue.

FIDA: compliment the legal services and provide holistic approach in enhancing the status of women in Nigeria.

3. CONTRIBUTIONS OF FEMINIST ORGANIZATIONS / MOVEMENTS TO WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN NIGERIA.

Flowing from above, and having itemized some feminists organizations based on their programme of activities and sphere of influence, from a collective perspective, women's and feminist organizations have influenced the following contributions in Nigeria.

POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

Right from the early 1950s, the concept of affirmative action in Nigeria started with the late Mrs. Funmilayo Ransom-Kuti and Madam Magareth Ekpo together with some other prominent Nigerian women who fought their way into politics. Also during the Nationalist struggle, the demands for democracy and equal participation were also deliberated by these classes of women. These women on their own wisdom believed that women must be given equal treatment and be involved in the political affairs of the country. In the same vein, women today are still agitating for the 35% affirmative action in line with the Beijing Platform for Action 1995. Presently in Nigeria, we commend the government for 33% of women in political appointment and this is as a result of the continuous lobby and influence of government's political will in the country.

LAW AND POLICY REFORM

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The Nigerian Feminists Forum is a feminist collective of organization in Nigeria, dealing with women's human rights issues, concerns and agencies. In Nigeria after the formation of the NFF, feminists have been involved in challenging the social constructs of the society through the mechanism of legislative advocacy. The strategic engagement with the Nigerian National Assembly, led to the abortion of the purported bill that will potentially discriminate against women, viz. the Public Nudity and other related offences Bill. The Bill is proposed to legislate women's dressing in the society. Other Organizations, together with the NFF, like WRAPA, BAOBAB, AFF, and many others, have been key to this push for Laws that reflect on women. The Indecent Dressing Bill, for example, was restructured and redrafted to the Violence Against Women Bill. This has been done by these groups tirelessly, and even though the Bill has still not been passed, they have not ceased the pressure on the National Assembly to still have it on their agendas.

In addition to the this Bill, Nigerian Feminists were actively involved in the Electoral Act reform in 2009 and proposed amendments and addition to the Nigerian Electoral Act to enable it become more gender responsive and to promote affirmative action in politics. Also Nigerian Feminists have been involved in the country's constitutional reform through submission of memorandum.

Women's organizations, together with feminists in the country, have also influenced private member Bills to become Laws at the National Assembly. Such Laws exist mostly at the State and Local Government levels, viz. Laws on Widowhood Practices, Female Genital Mutilation, etc. At the Federal Level, some Acts exists such as the Law against Human Trafficking which exists to give a legal backing to the provisions of the United Nations Women's Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women 1979, CEDAW and the African Women's Protocol, 2003.

WRAPA embarked on a three year project focusing on Islamic Family Law in seven of the twelve Shari'a implementing states in Northern Nigeria.¹¹ The project was aimed at documenting Islamic Family Law and practices towards achieving and enhancing the recognition of and enjoyment of women's rights under Shari'a with specific focus on key family law issues. The project seeked to further the impact of the results of other interventions by

¹¹ www.wrapanigeria.org

WRAPA in the areas of sensitization, legal aid support for women which have achieved positive attitudinal shifts in perceptions and practices related to women's rights under Shari'a.

Gender and Development Action GADA has become a catalyst for mobilizing women's groups and their allies, linking their popular demands to policy making enclaves and negotiating for appropriate changes. The Gender and Development Action's Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) Centre was opened on February 24, 2010.¹² The purpose of the centre which was established with support from African Women Development Fund (AWDF) is to mediate on disputes related to family, marital and intimate relationship matters.

JUSTICE FOR WOMEN IN NIGERIA

Nigerian women organizing had been very helpful in demanding justice for some female victims nationwide. With the introduction the Shari'a legal system in some States in Northern Nigeria, women were discriminated against and oppressed as a result of misinterpretation of religious texts. Some feminist organizations, WRAPA and WLUML-AME, to name a few, embarked on both national and international advocacy to save the lives of women in these Northern States. As fall out to this out-cry, a moratorium was placed to save the lives of citizens especially women from lapidation.

In addition to situation in Northern Nigeria, the Nigerian Feminists have awakened the Government over its responsibility of human security as a result of the persistence violence against women in the country. An incident which occurred a few years ago when a young woman on National Assignment was gang raped and this led to her death, with the perpetrators of the act unpunished. Several Nigerian Feminist Movements and Individuals organized series of rallies and instigated the prosecution of the offenders. The case is presently in court.

Although other cases exist where different feminist organization have instituted court actions on behalf of women and girls, this case was of a national significance because the young woman was on a one year mandatory National Assignment and the Government has a responsibility to protect its citizens.

¹² www.gadanigeria.org

GRADUAL DEVELOPMENT OF FEMINIST INSTITUTIONS AND LEADERSHIP

Women in Nigeria dating back to the 1950s had started mobilizing to be involved in politics and strategically influenced the nationalist struggles. Women such as Madam Magareth Ekpo and Fumilayo Ransome-Kuti just to sight a few examples were very strategic to the political development and orientation of women in the country. Till date, Nigerian women are still in the business of politics and have greatly influenced the democratic processes in Nigeria since 1999. From a broad perspective, feminists in recent times have been able to influence the political process by challenging the political process and projecting feminist agenda which promotes an egalitarian and human society. For instance, the Nigerian Feminist Forum (NFF) believe women must be integrated into the processes and women's issues are very significant to be on the front burner of national discourse. According to the NFF, "We define and name ourselves publicly as Feminists because we celebrate our feminist identities and politics. We recognize that the work of fighting for women's rights is deeply political, and the process of naming is political too. Choosing to name ourselves Feminist places us in a clear ideological position. By naming ourselves as Feminists we politicize the struggle for women's rights, we question the legitimacy of the structures that keep women subjugated, and we develop tools for transformatory analysis and action." The stand point of the NFF is a very important political ideology because women must speak continuously with a collective voice for any meaningful societal transformation.

GIRL CHILD EDUCATION

Several Feminist Organizations in Nigeria have found that to change the future of women in this country, as well as in the whole world, we have to start by empowering girls and women by educating them. This goes a long way especially when they know their rights and have a proper sense of self-worth. Therefore numerous groups organize educational and training programmes with this view in mind.

BAOBAB, for starters, engages in outreach activities like public awareness, paralegal training, and so on¹³. GPI, also, focuses on empowering young women through their Internship Programme, "which assists interns to learn and contribute to the planning, implementation,

¹³ www.baobabwomen.org

monitoring and evaluation of comprehensive adolescent sexuality education programs.” One of their objectives is to enlighten and educate more adolescent girls on gender, sexuality issues and personal empowerment.

ADULT LITERACY CLASSES FOR WOMEN

Also tackling women’s issues from the other angle, Feminist organizations have tried to make women more empowered by running programme for adult women. **WRAPA, for example**, has a total of 22 adult literacy centers in 12 states, 10 legal aid centres in 10 states, and 11 vocational training centers in 9 states. **They also** enjoy the support government agencies in the operations of its centres especially the National Commission for Mass Literacy Education, the National Directorate for Employment (NDE) and the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP), the National Human Rights Commission, the Nigeria Legal Aid Council Corporate bodies in the finance and media sectors.

OVERALL EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN

The Gender Development Institute is one of the tools created by GPI to increase public awareness and promote gender equality discussions among several sectors of stakeholders including NGO functionaries, technocrats, teachers, government functionaries, media practitioners, private sector and politicians, both female and male.¹⁴ The GDI has proved to be an important opportunity for creating understanding of the concepts of gender, gender equality and gender mainstreaming which have been largely misunderstood.

PROMOTING THE VISION ON GENDER EQUALITY

All of the Feminist Organizations have the underlying goal of Gender Equality. Programmes geared this include, but are not limited to:

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¹⁴ www.gpinigeria.org

be an important opportunity for creating understanding of the concepts of gender, gender equality and gender mainstreaming which have been largely misunderstood. This is in line with the objective of increasing the number of girls who would in turn impact on their peers and communities to meet the long term social goal of gender equality.

GADA has been in the forefront of the struggle for gender-equity and equality in politics and development in Nigeria. Over the years, the organization has developed cutting – edge expertise working with a wide range of local and international partners to implement actions around women’s social, economic, cultural and political rights.

Centre For Women's Research And Development, located in Lagos, Nigeria; in the forefront for the propagation for the upliftment of the status of women, fighting against harmful traditional practices against women, and also have vocational training centres for the less privileged women where skill are acquired after which micro credit facilities are given to establish small businesses.

TRAININGS IN BEST PRACTICES

Some Organizations focus on trainings for women at the community levels in Best Practices. IWEI, for example, ran a programme which was meant to train Traditional Birth Attendants on safe motherhood practises, management of normal delivery, timely detection and referral of women with obstetric complications, importance of breast feeding methods and family planning/spacing and hygiene.¹⁵ 26 women participated in the 4-day programme, facilitated by two staff members of the Ministry of Health, Kano using the States training program. As majority of the Participants were illiterate, teaching methods used were verbal repetitions, the use of songs, pictorial leaflets and so on. Other Projects are Basic Literacy Programme, Reproductive Health, Health and Nutrition as well as the Children’s Club.

4. CHALLENGES FACING FEMINIST ORGANIZATIONS IN NIGERIA

While feminists have a common target for the emancipation of women and deconstruction of patriarchy in the polity, challenges faced by feminists can be classified as both external to the

¹⁵ www.iwei-ng.org

movement and within the feminist's collectives. Some examples of external challenges mainly stem from the societal perceptions about feminism on the one hand, and the broad governmental policies and laws towards women on the other hand.

4.1 Poor Recognition of Feminist Issues by Government

Nigerian feminists and some women's organizations, have collective views on demanding for an egalitarian society. With the male dominated structure of government, the approach of feminists in the advocacy on broad human rights is yet to be politicized and institutionalized. Nigerian government's interventions on women's issues have not yet attained a front burner issue in the national debate and this is a concern of feminists that the government needs to address.

4.2 Gross Misconception on the Feminist Agenda

From an objective perspective, feminism in Nigeria does not exist to disrupt the status quo of the society but merely challenges the misrepresentation of religious text and the unjust use of culture to further subjugate women. Feminists believe that religion and culture are good for the growth of the society but must not be a tool for discriminatory and unfair treatment towards a particular gender. Due to the desire to arrest and remedy these anomalies which adversely affect women, feminists are construed as mercenaries to disturb the assumed peace and fabrics of the society.

4.3 Negative Press:

The feminist's movement after taking the initiative to become a recognized body in Nigeria, there are still concerns about the negative press and societal orientation against feminists. Based on the traditional and cultural stereotypes on the roles of women, women especially those who identify as feminists are considered rebels and dissidents due to the feminist ideologies that challenge the patriarchal status quo.

In Nigeria we have different categories of feminists. There are groups who term themselves as feminists but are constrained by cultural and religious ideologies, while there are those who although they have a culture and religious orientation yet propound that some aspects of

religious and cultural trend reduces the status of women in comparison to their male counterpart. Based on this difference in thinking, there seem to exist an artificial barrier between feminists sisters and this tends to prevent a united stance on issues affecting women.

4.4 Double Standards within and outside the movement

Most Nigerian feminists are caught in the web of practicing double standards due to the negative press and societal consciousness about feminists concerns. It is observed that when within the movement, it is easy to discuss and advocate on feminist issues without restrictions but within the domestic sphere due to the public opinions on the family structure and gender division of labor, it becomes difficult to fully introduce the feminist belief system in such instances as it is seen to disrespect the family structure. This is a very serious issue that calls for continuous societal sensitization on the benefits of feminism.

5. CONCLUSION

The contributions from this group is a pointer to the fact that feminism is a world-wide movement and Nigerian Feminists have been part of the country's history, right from pre-colonial times. In concluding, this paper described the various era of feminists intervention in Nigeria and based on the historical overview, we can rightly assert that feminism in Nigeria is not a new concept. Nigerian women are visible in the traditional society before colonization and this is evident from their heroic acts, political and religious activities. Although the recognition as feminists is still an emerging idea, the women with exemplary lives in the historical context though not addressed as feminists demonstrated what feminism entailed. Today, Nigerian feminist are all over the country, demanding for a common cause, which is the emancipation of women and an egalitarian society. These feminists are represented individually or through organizations and have been critical in influencing the direction of National issues especially on how it affects women. A plethora of contributions have and are being recorded on these feminists' initiatives as stated in the body of this presentation. Feminism is now an ideology that is here to stay in Nigeria under the auspices of the Nigerian



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Feminist Forum, (NFF), however there are challenges the movement need to tackle collectively to retain its relevance in the polity.

LIST OF ACRONYMS

- ADR- Alternative Dispute Resolution
- AFA- Alliances for Africa
- AWDF- African Women Development Fund
- AWU- Abeokuta Women's Union
- CEDAW- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Violence Against Women
- FGM/FGC- Female Genital Mutilation/ Female Genital Cutting
- FIDA- Federacion Internacional De Abogadas
- FNWS- Federation of Nigerian Women Societies
- FOWA- Federation of Ogoni Women Association
- GADA- Gender and Development Action
- GPI- Girl's Power Initiative
- IWEI- Isa Wali Empowerment Initiative
- MDG- Millennium Development Goals
- NAPEP- National Poverty Eradication Programme
- NCWS- National Council of Women's Societies
- NDE- National Directorate for Employment
- NDWPD- Niger Delta Women's Movement for Peace and Development
- NFF- Nigerian Feminist Forum
- NPC- National Population Commission
- PA- Project Alert
- PAVE- Peace and Anti-Violence Education
- WAC- Women's Aid Collective
- WARDC- Women Advocates Research and Documents Centre
- WARSHE- Women Against Rape, Sexual Harassment and Sexual Exploitation
- WEF- World Economic Forum
- WIN- Women in Nigeria
- WISCORD- Widening Scope for Rights and Development
- WLUML-AME- Women Living Under Muslim Laws- Africa Middle-East
- WOCON- Women's Consortium Nigeria



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WORDOC- Women's Research and Documentation Centre

WOPED- Women Centre for Peace and Development

WRAPA- Women's Rights Advancement and Protection Alternative

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