DOI: https://doi.org/10.67862/hjjgs.2023.5xv5fuld

ARTICLE TWENTY

A REFLECTION ON THE ROLES OF NIGERIAN FEMALE ACTIVISTS IN CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENTS

ANGELA OLOFU ADEOYE Ph.D & GRACE ATIM Ph.D

Abstract

Women have been at a disadvantage since the beginning of human history and this is triggered by several prejudices and patriarchal order. Discrimination against women created the concept of feminism as a gender based political and social movement, which advocates for social, political and economic equality and equity for men and women in any given society. Using desk review, the paper reflects on the changing roles of Nigerian women over the years in civil right movements and examines the challenges and prospects vis-à-vis women's rights in Nigeria. The study found evidence of progression in the role of Nigerian women in civil rights movements and it concludes that women have struggled for equality against oppression for centuries and although battles have been won, women are still disproportionally affected by all forms of violence and discrimination in every sphere of life.

Keywords: Activism, marginalisation, movements, oppression, women.

Introduction

Women have struggled for equity and against oppression for a very long time. At different times in history, women have come together to form formidable movements to emancipate themselves from the shackles of oppression, dominion and marginalisation. In the global North, extant literature historicized women struggle in the context of waves- first, second and third. The period between the 1900's and 1920's, witnessed the first wave which focused on legal issues and primarily on securing women's right to vote. The second wave feminism lasted between 1960's and 1980s and this was the period that saw women winning rights such as reproductive rights and decriminalization of abortion. Adu (2008) opines that the third wave feminism emerged in the early 1990s. This wave averred that the issue of women liberation is universal and cuts across all races, class and tribe and discussing it must address the peculiarities of their challenges. A remarkable achievement is that while women in global north were engaged in their own struggle and made significant efforts in their societies to address their issues, African women were holding their own in the struggle for liberation. This struggle for African women are diverse as prior to colonialization, African women were independent and held traditional and political roles in their communities. They participated in the decision-making processes of their communities (Adu, 2008). With the introduction of colonialization in the 1900, came a political oblivion for women in Africa (Adu 2008, Unya & Onya, 2021) that led to struggle for survival. They suffered exclusion and suppression in their respective societies. In Nigeria for instance, women were relegated to obscurity, implying that they had to fight to gain their former glory.

To emancipate themselves from the slavery, women in some cases had to organise themselves to voice out their frustrations and grievances to the colonial authorities as seen in the popular Aba's women riot.

In addition to colonial oppression, harsh traditional and cultural practices were challenges faced by African women. These challenges did not only promote discrimination and oppression but inhibited their personal growth and development. In highly patriarchal societies like Africa, gender roles are socially constructed, where women are expected to be home managers and in charge of the informal sector and their work is not remunerated. Men are ascribed roles like managers of public and formal spheres, which to a large extent accounts for their dominance over women. The prevalence of unequal power relations and gender inequality resulting in unequal distribution of rights to women has been of great concern that has led to interventions by women and women groups to eradicate such inequalities (Nigerian Group, 2011).

Nigerian women against all odds, have emerged strong and successful in the post-colonial era as shown in records of their significant achievements in education, participation in formal sectors as well as politics. It is evident that in the present day Nigeria, the quest for freedom is yet to be won but one fact remains that Nigerian women are shattering the glass ceiling,

Centre for Conflict Management and Peace Studies, University of Jos angelalofu@gmail.com. Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution, Abuja. greiz_k@yahoo.com

Corresponding Author
ANGELA OLOFU ADEOYE
E-mail: angelalofu@gmail.com

venturing into domains and professions that used to be the exclusive preserve of men.

This paper examines the roles and contributions of Nigerian women to national movements. This section covers the introduction, the next looks at the definition of concepts, while the third looks at the history of women and movements in Nigeria, exploring pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial era. The other sections analyse the contribution of Nigerian women in national movements, examine the challenges and the gaps covered for full exercise of their rights, then the conclusion.

Nonviolent Movements

Nonviolent movements, nonviolent direct action, and people-power all refer to a series of techniques ordinary people use to challenge various injustices and oppression with direct action tactics—tactics that operate outside existing institutions and do not involve the threat of/or actual violence. In *Lysistrata*, Aristophanes reveals the often unmentioned potential that those without armies actually hold; thousands of years later, sustained civil resistance campaigns around the world have tapped into that potential, challenging entrenched power and achieving political and social change but the growing body of literature on nonviolent action identifies nuances for each. Aristophanes understands that organized non-cooperation with the status quo can wield great power. In his theory of power, leading theorist of nonviolent action, Gene Sharp, argues that "power is never monolithic in society, nor is it inherently held by a ruler, flowing from top to bottom. Instead, power originates in the "pillars of support" propping up a power-holder, such as the business community, news media, labour unions, organized religion, police, and the military". (Helvey, 2004) In this model, power flows upward to the ruler, given by those it rules through consent, cooperation, and obedience. And just as consent to rule can be given, it can be taken away.

When a large swath of a citizenry revokes its consent through nonviolent direct action, the resulting movement shifts loyalties within the pillars of support and shakes the power holder's ability to maintain the status quo. Sharp outlines 198 methods of nonviolent action, including marches, consumer boycotts, sit-ins, labour strikes, and silent vigils, that have since been built upon and expanded. The most successful movements use a combination of tactics, allowing engagement at various commitment levels so individuals can maintain as much of their routine as they choose. Broad participation in nonviolent direct action through strikes, boycotts, sit-ins, and sharing footage of abuse on social media can draw attention to and create sympathy for a movement. By encouraging shifts within the pillars of support, a nonviolent movement has a better chance at bringing about defections that undermine the power-holder's ability to rule. A major component of what makes nonviolent campaigns more successful than violent ones is what captures global attention: people-power, or mass participation and representation.

Images from the October 2020 peaceful protest at the Lekki toll gates in Lagos created global awareness on the brutality and gross abuse of human rights of the special anti-robbery squad unit of the Nigerian Police Force and called for its proscription. The 2011 uprising in Tunisia shows male and female citizens of diverse ages and professions calling for a change to the status quo. From men and women, children to older adults, doctors, lawyers, people across professions, university students, and the unemployed, nonviolent movements create opportunities to engage large numbers of people in a way violent campaigns do not.

In discussing women and movements in Nigeria, one cannot help but put into perspective the evolution of Nigerian movements in Nigeria. This evolution can be categorized into three epochs or era.

Nigerian Women and Collective Movement: Pre-colonial Era

The history of the contribution of Nigerian women to their country's development dates back to the pre-colonial period. Although traditional beliefs and practices confined women in Africa to subordinate positions, Nigerian women were able to make immense and invaluable contributions to societal development politically. They had individually and collectively played dynamic and constructive roles and thus contributed tremendously to societal development (Awe, 1992). Despite the societal classification of women's role as domestic in the pre-colonial era, women still waxed very strong in political and economic sectors. The virtues exhibited by some women like Queen Amina of Zaria and Moremi of Ife in pre-colonial society is an attested fact. Queen Amina reigned in A.D. 1576 and possessed equal access to authority as the men. Ajayi (2007) notes that she was influential in the political development of the emirate of Northern Nigeria. History has it that she conquered many cities and built walls around them. This she did after the design of her own city of Zazzau, and that is what is called today fortification in Hausa land. In spite of the fact that women's participation in public life are restricted more in the North due to Islamic religion, the legend of Queen Amina cannot be hidden and it still lives on till today. Among the Yorubas, Princess Moremi who lived in the second half of the 16th century earned

herself a political position in Ile-Ife through her solid personal achievement. Also, Madam Tinubu ruled in Lagos from 1830-1887 and was a seasoned political stalwart who used her political weight to support Akintoye, the rightful king of Lagos over his feud with Kosoko and helped in returning him to the throne instead of Kosoko. There were other examples of women in Yoruba land (the western part of Nigeria that made impacts in the 16th and 17th centuries. These women held authoritative positions and possessed ruling powers as male kings. Examples of women Obas (kings) include Ooni Luwo of Ile-Ife who was known for her tyrannical reign and the Lobun of Ondo, a "powerful woman chief who has equivalent power and received same treatment as the male king (Falola, 1995). Other positions women occupied include the "Ayaba and Oloris (King's wives), Iyalodes (Women's leaders), Iyalajes (Market Women's Leaders), Yeye Obas (King's mother), and Iyaoloshas (priestesses) (Ajayi, 2007). These Yoruba women held positions that gave them similar responsibilities as men. According to Nigerian Group (2011), pre-colonial Nigerian women occupied positions that were complementary, rather than subordinate to the men.

Nigerian Women and Collective Movements: Colonial Era

Women's marginalization, like many other problems in Nigeria, has a deep root in the system carved and imposed by colonialism. Before the advent of colonialism, women were not seen as "weaker sex" but they were seen as a force to be reckoned with. The traditional system, which gave women the chance to have a say in the public domain was disrupted during the colonial era and the power lost has never been fully regained. The colonial masters came from a society that paid little attention to the role of women, expecting them to play a secondary role that was essentially supportive to male efforts. According to Ezeani (1998), the basic premise of the colonial gender ideology was the domestication of women. They were not to function in

Ransome Kuti Archives.

the public domain like the men. For instance, when western-type education was initially introduced, it was considered useful only because it prepared boys to be able to qualify for employment as clerks, interpreters, teachers, catechists, evangelists, stewards, cooks, etc., either for government offices, commercial houses or service of the missionaries, and girls were not considered fit for such employment opportunities (Onwuka 2008).

The western education brought sharp dichotomy or contradiction in women's role during the colonial era. This however, uplifted men on the social ladder and relegated women to the background. The colonial administration created a patriarchal government in which women were not allowed to hold any authoritative positions (Adu, 2008). The colonialists also 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 1980s in the North. According to Odah (2003), when the colonial government introduced electoral politics, Nigerian women were excluded. Ityavyar (2001) had argued that with the colonial assault on the political right of Nigerian women, one would not be far from being right to suggest

that colonialism is the midwife of the political marginalisation.

However, against these odds, Nigerian women were able to organize themselves in groups like the market women associations, to fight a collective cause. The economic and political suppression of women during the colonial era gave rise to the women's protest in Eastern Nigeria. The Women's protest of 1929 (also known as the Aba Women's Riots) in which market women protested British taxation, was a notable example of women using their traditional power against colonial rulers.

The Abeokuta market women protests in 1948 came almost two decades after the Aba riots. Women revolted against colonial taxes and the failure of the traditional rulers to defend their interests by challenging the colonial masters. For example, the Alake of Egba land in present day Abeokuta was the person ultimately responsible for tax collection, and Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti, dubbed the "Lioness of Lisabi" formed the Abeokuta Women's Union (AWU), where the elite Abeokuta women joined in solidarity with the market women of Egba land to work together to find a way to stop the practice of excess and unnecessary tax collection (Nigerian Group, 2011). It was through such anti-colonial resistance struggles that the different foundations for women's emancipation, equality and empowerment were initially laid, such as the National Women's Union (NWU), the first national women's organisation founded in 1947. The Union had prominent female leaders such as Margaret Ekpo and Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti, who created a political niche for Nigerian women through their active roles in mainstream political movements and individual organisations.

This period was known to encompass series of protests and petition writing towards the need for women's inclusiveness in politics and also the issue of taxation in Abeokuta.

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. She, alongside Margaret Ekpo, Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti, 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, which later came into place in 1960.

The Benin Salaried Women Association Collective Action

The case of the Benin Salaried Women Association which has received scant attention is also a good example of non-violent protest. In 1950, the Benin Salaried Women Association were informed that they were to be taxed, they protested and the idea was put off. Again, in 1951, they were asked to pay tax without due notice. The women groups were mobilized and they protested against this move writing a petition to the Resident through the DO. The letter is titled Protest and dated 26th March 1951. The opening line reads: "We object to the payment of tax for the following reasons": (Letter by SWA: 1951 R.089)

They proceeded to give 5 reasons why they reject taxation; they rejected tax because women were not represented in any council, they wrote, "it is unjust for anybody or bodies of persons or group or council to tax us without giving us the avenue to make our voices heard" (R.809). They went ahead to accuse the Government of discrimination saying: "We cannot boast of real democratic institution, until and unless we establish a government of the people, by the people and for the people. Democracy and discrimination are incompatible" (R.809). They specifically stated that "No nation can afford to advance above its womanhood" (R.809). In support of SWA, the Benin Women's Union (BWU) also wrote a protest letter to the Resident of Benin Province on the 7th of September 1951, titled "Protest against Undue Taxation of Benin Women". Though a one-page letter, their thoughts were well articulated. In solidarity with SWA, they wrote, "That we are in full support of the Protest made by the Women Association in their petitions dated 16th and 26th March 1951" (R.809). With these submissions, the women were invited to a meeting by the Assistant DO of Benin Division. He concluded that due consultations should be made with women before any imposition of taxes. It was also agreed that if women agree to pay tax they will be enfranchised. The tax as a result of this protest was suspended.

Nigeria Women Movements in the Postcolonial Era:

A closer look at post-colonial Africa shows that women are making great and significant impacts in their respective communities or countries as the case may be. While the battles of women liberation and full representation are yet to be totally won, the 21st century African women are already breaking the glass ceiling. Today, the journey of liberation struggles for African women is changing the face of Africa, with women elected or appointed as Heads of State in countries like Liberia and Central African Republic, and great numbers elected as members of parliament. Different from what was seen in the colonial era (when women had no say or place in the governing of the society; when women were

only meant to be seen in the kitchen and home fronts; when women only had to manage with the informal sector; when women were denied access to education with the belief that they were only meant to marry and bear children; when women were rarely seen in the political participation), Africa women have ventured into areas once seen as sacred and exclusive reserve of men. The roles and responsibilities of African women in post-colonial period have witnessed tremendous changes than it was in the pre-colonial and colonial era (Aina, 2004). In 21st century Nigeria for instance, changes have been witnessed in the enrolment of women in education, employment in formal sectors as well as participation in politics. These changes have seen women mobilizing better to create awareness and bring about change. Such mobilization as will be seen below was to draw attention to different kinds of marginalization and discrimination.

Plateau State Women and Collective Movement:
In 2001, Plateau State was engulfed in ethno-religious conflict, which brought untold hardship, death, loss of lives and property to residents. Sadly, it was a double jeopardy for women because they bore the greater burden of the conflict, losing children, husbands, sources of income and assuming the double role of bread winners and care givers. These unpalatable circumstances and continued conflict led to the mobilization of women within and outside the state for collective action to bring an end to the conflict. The National Council for Women Societies (NCWS), Jos chapter organized a peaceful rally and procession for peace with over 500 women all wearing black clothes, hence, the tagging "Black Wednesday". This collective action established the precedence for more of such actions on the Plateau, The Wailing Women and the Eagle Square women peace rally all demanding for government intervention in the conflicts.

Wailing Protest:
In another development, in 2010, women in Jos organized a peaceful "wailing" protest demanding for peace and justice. Women both old and young came out for this rally. There were about 5000 women in the rally; all of them were dressed in black. Some of the women were wailing the death of loved ones, of peace, and security. They prayed for peace to return to the land. At the Government House, they were received by the Deputy Governor, a woman, Pauline Talen. They also presented their call for peace and harmony in Jos to the Speaker of the State House of Assembly. The women were both Christians and Muslims.

Eagle Square Women's Collective Peace Rally:
August 2013, the National President of NCWS mobilized over 20, 000 women from every State of the federation, in a peace rally at the Eagle Square in Abuja. Renewing their loyalty and solidarity with the President, Goodluck Jonathan, the women requested that the he should work to improve the state of security in the country and to ensure that women are adequately represented in the peace processes and the political structures in the country.

Escravos Women's Collective Movement: The women's intervention at the Chevron-Texaco terminal in south eastern Nigeria in July-August 2002 is now seen as a landmark in the evolution of women's role in preventing violence in the Niger Delta. Their non-violent demonstrations and sit-ins at the facility mobilized international media and provided a tool for negotiations, which enabled women to obtain more concessions from the oil companies in one week than men had achieved in more than 30 years; among their achievements were the pledge to build schools, clinics, town halls and the building of electricity and water systems in their communities.

Ogbakiri Women's Collective Movement
Worthy of mention and commendation is the peace-building role played by the Niger Delta Women for Justice in 1999 and Ogbakiri Women's Peace Forum. Drawing on religion as a foundation for their activities, this Forum mobilized grassroots and elite women in collective actions, letter writing campaign to the Rivers state government and advocating for the restoration of law and order in Ogbakiri land during the 2004 crisis. Also in response to the Ijaw/Ilaje conflict in Ondo State, the Argbo Ijo Iyoro Beni (Arbgo Ijo Women's

Development Association) carried out a project titled "Let the Widows and Orphans Live," which aims to promote peace through supporting the widows and orphans of the communal war between the Ilajes and Ijaws. This project has led to the opening of the waterways linking the two ethnic groups, which was blocked as a result of the conflict.

Mpape Women Collective Movement:
In July 2012, women in Mpape, a satellite town in the Federal Capital Territory collectively protested the planned demolition of houses. Numbering over 2000 and defying security agents while holding posters, they stood their grounds and got the attention of everyone.

Boko Haram and Women's Collective Action:
The recent Boko Haram crisis has led to protest by both Muslim and Christian women condemning the dastardly acts and pleading for peace and love.

Chibok Girls and Women's Collective Movement
In April 2014, the Jama'at Ahlus-Sunnah Lida'awati wal-Jihad, commonly known as Boko Haram (which means western education is sinful) kidnapped nearly 273 schoolgirls in the northern Nigerian village of Chibok with 98 yet to be found. The scale of the attack on Chibok girls shocked the entire world and sparked a #BringBackOurGirls Twitter campaign creating the social movement "Bring Back Our Girls" that drew the attention of international celebrities and personalities like the wife of President Barack Obama, Michelle Obama, the world number one First Lady, and Madonna, the Queen of Pop, Malala, the renown Pakistani schoolgirl who stood up to the Taliban and defended her right to an education. Their kidnapping sparked a worldwide outcry, Chibok girls were not the first to be abducted. It is estimated that at least 2,000 women and girls have been kidnapped since the start of 2014. Prior to the abductions from Chibok, women activists in North-East had collectively been trying to raise awareness of what is happening, urge political action and provide services and assistance to those who escaped or were rescued. In many cities across Nigeria, including Abuja, Lagos, Kano, Port Harcourt, Akure, Abeokuta, Benin, Makurdi, Jos, etc, different women groups went out on the streets, demanding that the government "Bring Back Our Girls". These included market women, women NGOs, women parliamentarians, etc. Nigerian embassies across the world became a beehive of activities as host nations identified with Nigeria and the Chibok parents in their grief. There were marches and protests across the world. Syrian women in a refugee camp spoke out in solidarity. On Monday, 12 of May 2014, dozens of Senegalese women's rights activists in Dakar staged protest over the abducted Chibok girls. Women of over 20 organizations gathered at the Nigerian embassy in Dakar but they were stopped by police. However, two protesters were allowed into the embassy to submit a letter of protest. Over 50 women, led by Fatou Camara of the Association of Senegalese Lawyers, mostly dressed in red, showed their solidarity and indignation and added their voices to the unanimous denunciation.

Women from Borno State have collectively played important role in hostilities – as security officials, fighting Boko Haram and being members of community security groups. They walk the line between different sides of the conflict, negotiating for the return of women and girls, for access for humanitarian workers to give medical care, they also help create access for aids to reach those who need them, and for the end of the fighting itself. Acting as mediators, they try to negotiate peace between Boko Haram and the government. They have also supported those who have experienced the brunt of the violence. They have helped to provide services to survivors of rape and sexual violence and speak out against the stigma and shame they experience. The University of Maiduguri Muslim Women's Association has been magnanimous in their service; they have provided food and shelter to those who have fled rural areas for the state capital. The Centre for Women and Adolescent Empowerment, and Tapestry, have set up a support network to address trauma in girls and women, training lay counsellors in communities across the north-eastern states affected by the insurgency. Working together across ethnic and religious lines, women have repeatedly marched and protested in the streets of Maiduguri, against the continued detention of their family members, for human rights, and for peace and justice.

In Accra, Ghana, hundreds of women turned out en-mass on the streets to protest the abduction of 273 school girls in Chibok, Nigeria. The women staged a peaceful protest, chanting random #BringBackOur Girls slogans and carrying placards with various inscriptions on them, all demanding the rescue and release of the abducted girls. The protesting women made their way through various streets in Accra and then visited the Nigerian High Commissioner to Ghana, where they submitted a petition signed by over 300 people, demanding that the girls be rescued as soon as possible, as every second spent not finding them was one second too many. The Chief Executive Officer, Young Educators Foundation, Eugenia Menson, who spoke on behalf of the protesting women called for the immediate release of the girls, adding that they had the fundamental human right to be educated and that right should be respected by everyone.

In commemoration of the one-year anniversary of the abduction of the Chibok girls, women from the state capital, Maiduguri gathered in Chibok, to support and comfort families through the anniversary. The

indefatigable #BringBackOurGirls movement made up of more women than men, held protests. Rallied people all around the world, they called for action in solidarity. The anniversary saw the Empire State building in New York lit up in purple and red. There was a Global School Girl March, in Tasmania, Australia to Stavanger in Norway, from Santiago in Chile to London in the UK – and, of course, in cities across Nigeria.

There have been several collective actions in solidarity with #BringBackOurGirls movement and others. Below, for lack of space, a few of them have been cited:

- On May 8, 2014, at the peak of the abduction of the Chibok school girls, dozens of concerned female NSCDC and police officers also joined the #BringBackOurGirls movement in the capital city of Nasarawa State, Lafia. They joined scores of other women chanting "We Want Our Daughters, Bring Back Our Daughters," and carrying multiple placards with such inscriptions as "Rescue Our Daughters", "Enough is Enough", "Stop Bombings and Killings". Some other messages expressed anger against the government's slow handling of this horrible crime. Amongst them were two female Assistant Superintendent of Police who justified their inclusion in the campaign, saying that as women and mothers, they feel the pain of the Chibok parents.
- In Ogun State, hundreds of women flooded the streets of Abeokuta dressed in black outfits and carrying placards with different inscriptions, protesting the abduction of 273 Chibok school girls by Boko Haram members. The women accused the Federal Government of not doing enough on its rescue mission. They also condemned the high rate of insecurity in the country. Led by the wife of the State Governor, Olufunso Amosun and the wife the former president, Bola Obasanjo, they marched round the major streets of Abeokuta and delivered their letter of protest to the Speaker of the House of Assembly.
- In Ondo State, the All Progressive Congress (APC) party's women's wing numbering over 1000, in October 2014, marched the streets of Akure, from Adegbemile centre through Oba Adesida-Oyemekun to Ilesa Garage, to protest the continued abduction of Chibok school girls by terrorist group, Boko Haram. They were dressed in red uniforms and head gears, and carried placards with various inscriptions chanting solidarity songs and praying in different languages for the quick release of the girls. The group was led by Mrs Kehinde Adeniran and former Action Congress of Nigeria woman leader, Erelu Modupe Akindele-Johnson.
- On the 27th of May 2015, over 5000 of women also protested in a mass rally in Abuja, tagged #ReleaseOurGirlsNow. The rally which was led by the Honourable member of the House of Assembly, and Chairperson, House Committee on Human Rights, Hon. Beni Lar, demanded the unconditional release of the Chibok girls. She pleaded that Nigerians should unite against terrorism. The rally which was made up of women from various organisation also had some men in attendance. The leader of the market women, Mrs. Felicia Sani, was in the rally with her women, lamented that the violence unleashed on the country has reached an unbearable state, condemning it in totality, she asked Nigerians to be united against terrorism and to join the government and military to fight Boko Haram.
- Some Nigerian female celebrities were not left out as they took to the streets in Lagos, protesting the abduction of over 273 school girls from Government Girls Secondary School, Chibok, Borno State. The list includes popular actress and singers like Tonto Dike, Tiwa Savage, Toke Makinwa, Elohor Aisien, Debola Williams and many others. They marched from Falomo Roundabout to the State house, Onikan where they met with Lagos state governor, Babatunde Fashola.

The campaign has been successful in bringing to public view, the plight of the abducted girls, some escaped, some were rescued by the military and security operatives while some were released after negotiations with their abductors and 98 are still in captivity. The campaign has made a huge impact on the Nigerian political landscape; leaders are beginning to realize that they have a responsibility to their citizens.

Nigerian Women Movements and the #EndSARS Protest:

Again, Nigerian women made history with the #EndSARS movement that spawned over 150 mass protests in cities across the country, with demonstrations intensifying after soldiers reportedly fired live rounds into protesters at the Lekki toll plaza in Lagos on the 20th of October 2020. The movement also inspired solidarity protests in major cities of the world, including London, New York, Berlin and Washington.

Women played a leading role in the #EndSARS movement against police brutality and government violence in Nigeria, specifically seeking to abolish a federal police unit called the Special Anti-Robbery

Squad. One nascent women's group in particular, the Feminist Coalition, used digital platforms to mobilize funds and design strategies to support protesters across Nigeria.

The Feminist Coalition's work in the #EndSARS movement continues a long history of women leading and supporting political mobilizations across Africa. However, this engagement, has been minimized or ignored outrightly in the retelling of the events

In July,2020, Damilola Odufuwa and Odunayo Eweniyi, both under 30, formed the Feminist Coalition activist group alongside 12 other young women. The group advocates equality for women in Nigeria through a focus on advancing education, financial freedom and representation in public office. Based in Lagos, the group uses online platforms for its work.

The group gained popularity when it took on a central role in the #EndSARS protests just two months later. It raised and managed funds for the movement, established a legal aid service made up of volunteers, and coordinated help lines to align efforts across the country.

Communication technology was employed to facilitate the #EndSARS protests. The online mobilization effort garnered global support, generating over 28 million tweets within 48 hours of the online campaign's kick-off on October 8, 2020.

The speed and spread of new technologies enabled efficient communication of information for community building and collaboration. These technologies also helped the #EndSARS movement navigate the Nigerian government's responses to the protests.

Through social mediums like WhatsApp and Twitter, activists shared information, reaching a wide network of supporters. Real-time transmission of texts, pictures and videos of the protests and violence by police and soldiers also prompted swift domestic and international condemnation of the Nigerian government.

Using traditional money transfers and BTC Pay, a platform that converts cryptocurrency to cash, activists raised money to help pay for food and drinks for protesters, as well as legal and medical services. After the Nigerian government shut down traditional payment channels, the group pivoted to the bitcoin crypto-currency. The Feminist Coalition mobilized significant financial resources from across the world through these platforms, raising an unprecedented 147,855,788 Nigerian naira (about $388,000) between October 8 and October 22.

Women's leadership in the #EndSARS movement builds on a long, albeit under recognized, history of women's mobilizations in Nigeria as enumerated above.
The ENDSARS protest witnessed Nigerian women taking to the streets of major cities both at home and abroad to demand an end to the menace of police brutality and harassment of the youth. The call for an end to police brutality, cuts across religion, race or ethnic affiliations. For example, Ms Aisha Yesufu was among

the protesters and in emphatic terms described women as the backbone of the Endsars protest. According to her;

> *"Women have always been the ones who get things done. Any protest that led to change has always been women-led. The EndSars protest went as far as it did because of the role women played. Especially the Feminist Coalition, those women were amazing. Their co-ordination was impressive."* BBC online report December 1 2020.

One thing that stood out during this protest was that women explored the resources within their reach to mobilize support. From rallying people on the social media to crowd funding, provision of legal aid to protesters arrested and prosecuted for role played during the protest, to provision of blankets, food and medical aids. Nigerian women showed it is a new dawn for the country and they are unstoppable in their struggle.

As with other movements, the Endsars protest did come with some price and consequences for the women folk. They were arrested, banks accounts were frozen and social media accounts of both corporate and individuals were blocked all in a bid to discourage and break the ranks of governments and coalition during the protest but actions displayed during and after showed that Nigerian women in collaboration are resolute to end all forms of discrimination and oppression

Nigerian Women Movements: The Journey So Far

So far, the above discussion on the evolution of women's roles in activism movements in Nigeria civil rights movements shows three major era of women movements based on their programme of activities and sphere of influence. From a collective perspective, women's movements in Nigeria have influenced the following contributions:

Political Development in Nigeria

Right from the early 1950s, the concept of affirmative action in Nigeria started with the late Mrs. Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti and Madam Margaret 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 them. These 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.

Women's movements have also been crucial to more recent anti-government protests in Nigeria, playing visible roles in the 2010 Enough-is-Enough protests against corruption and government ineffectiveness and #OccupyNigeria movements against the removal of fuel subsidies in 2012.

Law and Reforms

Women movements in civil rights in Nigeria 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 Organisations, like WRAPA, BAOBAB, and many others, have been key to this push for Laws that protect the right of women. The Indecent Dressing Bill, for example, was restructured and redrafted to the Violence Against Persons Prohibition Act signed into law in 2015. In addition to this, Nigerian women movements 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 movements 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.

Justice for Women in Nigeria:

Nigerian women movements have 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 are 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 advocacies 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 the situation in Northern Nigeria, Nigerian Feminists have awakened the Government over its responsibility of human security as a result of the persistent violence against women in the country. An incident 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 organisations 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.

Conclusion

Women's movements in Nigeria are all over the country demanding for a common cause, which is the emancipation of women and an egalitarian society. These civil rights movements 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 women movements as related in this study. Women movement is now an ideology that is here to stay in Nigeria. However, there are challenges of men's unaccountability for gender equality, women's land right act, economic oppression and sexual violence which the movement need to tackle collectively.

References

Adu, Oluwabusayo (2008), "The Missing Link: Women's Representation and Participation in Nigeria's Electoral Politics and Their Effect on Nigeria's Development", http://www.thesis. haverford.edu Accessed April 20, 2021

Aina, A. D (2004), "Problems and prospects of gender equality in Nigeria", In Akinboye (ed.) *Paradox of Gender Equality in Nigerian Politics*, Lagos*: Concept Publications*

Ajayi, K. (2007), "Gender self-endangering: The Sexist Issue in Nigerian Politics", *Journal of Social Sciences 14(2), 137-139 5*

Awe, Bolanle. (eds.) (1992), *Nigerian Women in Historical Perspective, Ibadan: Sankore/Bookcraft.*

BBC online report December 1 2020.

Ezeani, O.E (1998), "Gender and Political Participation in Nigeria", *International Journal of Studies in the Humanities (IJOSH), Vol. 1, No.1, pp. 96-107.*

Falola, Toyin (1995), "Gender, Business, and Space Control: Yoruba Market Women and Power". In House Midamba, Bessie and Ekechi (Ed.), *African Market Women and Economic Power: The Role of Women in African Economic Development, Westport, CT: Greenwood Press*

Ityavyar,Dennis, (2001), "The Nigeria Woman in Politics". In Faseke, M. (ed.) *The Nigeria Woman: Her Economic and Socio Political Statistics Time Perspective.* Ibadan: Agape Publisher

Nigerian Group (2011), Analysis of the History, Organisation and C, Dennisihallenges of Feminism in Nigeria Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation

Obaseki et al (1951) "Protest Against Undue Taxation of Benin Women" Unpublished letter: Benin City

Odah, A.A. (2003), Military Rule and Nigeria Women, Lagos: Frankad Publishers.

Olaoluwa,A. Women's Affairs Reporter, December 2020 https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-55104025

Onwuka, U. (2008), "Igbo women in Education", In E. Otagburuagu and A.E. Afigbo (eds), *New Brides, More Hopes: Igbo Women in Socio-Economic Change.* Nsukka: Institute of African Studies, University of Nigeria, Nsukka

Unya, I.U, Onya.U (2021) Feminism *and the role of women in today's Nigeria: A historical Perspective. Journal of History and International Relations, Vol.5, No 2.*

Robert Helvey 2004), "On Strategic Nonviolent Conflict: Thinking About the Fundamentals." Albert Einstein Institution

Sharp, G (2005) "*Waging nonviolent Struggle" 20th Century Practice and 21st Century Potential*. Extending Horizons books.