Research article

Adebukola Dagunduro*, Adebimpe Adenugba

Failure to Meet up to Expectation: Examining Women's Activist Groups in the Post-Colonial Period in Nigeria

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Abstract: Women's activism within various ethnic groups in Nigeria dates back to the pre-colonial era, with notable heroic leaders, like Moremi of Ife, Amina of Zaria, Emotan of Benin, Funmilayo Kuti, Margaret Ekpo and many others. The participation of Nigerian women in the Beijing Conference of 1995 led to a stronger voice for women in the political landscape. Several women's rights groups have sprung up in the country over the years. Notable among them are the Federation of Nigerian Women's Societies (FNWS), Women in Nigeria (WIN), Kudirat Initiative for Democracy (KIND) and Female in Nigeria (FIN). However, majority have failed to actualize significant political, social or economic growth. This paper examines the challenges and factors leading to their inability to live up to people's expectations. Guided by patriarchy and liberal feminism theories, this paper utilizes both historical and descriptive methods to examine these factors. The paper argues that a lack of solidarity among women's groups, financial constraints, unfavourable political and social practices led to the inability of women's groups in Nigeria to live up to the envisaged expectations. The paper concludes that, for women's activist groups to survive in Nigeria, a quiet but significant social revolution is necessary among women. Government should also formulate and implement policies that will empower women politically, economically and socially.

Keywords: Empower, Solidarity, Movement, Women, Nigeria

Introduction

Patriarchy and male chauvinism have undermined the rights of women, leading to the exploitation and marginalization of women in the affairs of development both in the private and public spheres in Nigeria. Over the years, the Nigerian political and economic spheres have been in favour of men and characterized by 'patriarchism' which, according to Heywood (2007), is simply the "rule by men". The idea of male supremacy over the female folks has historical evidence in many societies, both during the ancient and modern periods. According to Kamarae (1992) and Aina (1998), the term 'patriarchy' has been used withinpost-1960s feminism to refer to the methodical coordination of male supremacy and female subordination. Women have always lived under the domination of men as a lower group and have endured marginalization. They were considered inferior to the male folks through a combination of gender-biased culture and traditional practices in favour of men. However, in spite of this culture of patriarchy and male supremacy, Nigerian women have participated actively in all stages of the country's development from the pre-colonial period to the post-colonial period (Onyenekenwa and Nkamnebe, 2011). The struggles and intervention attempts by women at every stage of the country's development are a very important aspect of the country's history of economic and political development.

^{*}Corresponding author: Adebukola Dagunduro, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, NIGERIA, E-mail: bukkylizzy2003@yahoo.com Adebimpe Adenugba, Doctorate, University of Ibadan

According to Adamu (2006), feminism has been a distant tool of intellectual discourse and political action to the majority of women scholars and activists in Sub-Saharan Africa. In other words, there have long been some forms of feminist struggle in Nigeria before what is acclaimed and identified as a feminist movement (Madunagu, 2008). Feminism has been around and used as a tool, even though women did not recognise it. The history of women's activism in Nigeria dates back to the pre-colonial era, in fact, women appeared to have been more politically strong in the pre-colonial era. Before British colonization, Nigerian women participated in politics and played prominent roles in decision-making in the Nigerian society. Aina and Olayode (2015) identified some of the political positions occupied by the South Western Yoruba women within the traditional Yoruba political structure as Iyalaje, Iyaloja, Yeye-Oba, Erelu and Iya Osun, among others. Notable Nigerian women asserted their rights and started their own political movements on a low scale. Women's activist movements then were easy to organize through informal associations, like the market women associations that brought so many women together under one umbrella. Women's activist groups then were based on type of trade, age, and kinship and they were able to fight collective cause.

An example of women's activism was witnessed during the Aba riot of 1929 in the South Eastern part of Nigeria, where over fifty women lost their lives in their fight for justice (Uhuo, 2011; Mba, 2009). Another example of women's activism in Nigeria was when Ife and Igala land were invaded and notable women, like Moremi of Ile Ife and Princess Inikpi of Igala land, sacrificed their lives to save their people (Uhuo, 2011). In the northern part of Nigeria, women's activism was also marked by the emergence of Queen Amina, a renowned military and political leader who successfully led her army to the battlefield and saved her people (Olojede, 2008). Also worthy of mention is Madam Tinubu and Madam Funmilayo Ransome Kuti. These women projected and promoted the interest of women in their regions.

The emergence of women's activism in Nigeria can be traced to the demands of women to improve the second-rate status of women, and to remove or reduce those factors that deprive women of enjoying their full human rights as Nigerians. Nigerian women have faced a wide range of problems in getting past the numerous hindrances that have confronted them in religious, cultural and economic aspects.

Despite the active involvement of women politically in the pre-colonial era, the advent of colonial administration was laden with anti-women policies, which gradually transformed the political scene to a male-dominated one (Evans, Marissa K.; Blackpast.org, UNESCO; Women in African History; Pedagogical Unit, 2014). During the pre-colonial era for instance, there were women who occupied very high political and sensitive traditional offices, including the highest political office in the land. There were the Luwo Gbadiya of Ife, who was the Ooni (Oba) of Ife in the pre-colonial days; the Iyayun of Oyo, who was the Alaafin (Oba) of Oyo; Queen Amina, who was the ruler of Zaria; the Eye-Moi, who was a regent-monarch in Akure; Queen Yawaro of Daura; Queen Kanbasa of Bony; and many others.

However, the political situation of women in Nigeria appears to have changed since independence as no woman has been a state governor, vice president or president of the country. The few top political offices, like ministerial appointments, that have been occupied by women have been handed over to them by the men, usually to keep them quiet. Udegbe (1998) argues that women's representation in the three arms of government from the 1960 independence till the late 1990s was merely two per cent of the office holders. Hence, women were continuously grossly underrepresented.

In a way, we can say women's activism has gained more prominence since independence, albeit not in the same esteem as the pre-colonial days. For instance, in the Niger-Delta region, women fought against discrimination, dehumanization, and injustice being perpetrated by the Oil companies in the South-South Region of the country as a result of oil exploration and other activities. They opposed multinational oil companies and the Nigerian military occupation of their lands with the Federation of Ogoni Women Association (Bankor-Wiwa, 1997; Ekiyor, 2001). Women also participated in political rallies during the military era of 1993, enduring violence, beating and torture (Ekine, 2000). Today, women are represented in political parties as well as public and religious spheres in Nigeria. However, in comparison with their male counterparts and judging by their number at about half of the Nigerian population, they are grossly underrepresented. It is on this note that this paper examines women's activist groups and political movements in Nigeria and their failure to live up to expectations as a movement. The paper explores the activities of six women's activist groups in Nigeria During the Post colonial Era, taking into cognizance the

effects of the activities of these women groups in the Nigerian political and economic development over the years. To understand the dynamism surrounding the activities of these women's activist groups, the Nigerian political history is divided into two phases: Pre -colonial and Post-independence periods. The discussion that follows focuses on the historical processes that have influenced Women's Activist Groups in Nigeria before and after Independence.

Women's Activist Groups in Nigeria

With the advent of social media, both online and in reality, women's activist groups are making impacts in Nigeria. Social media has been increasingly used by women's grassroots organisations to reach out to stakeholders and to clamour for greater public accountability towards gender equality. There have not been protests as such in the past few years. So women's activism has been more of documentation, lobbying, advocacy and media relations, and the like (Abdul, Adeleke, Adeyeye et al. 2014). However, unlike other women's activist groups in the Western world, Nigerian women have failed to live up to expectations as rights groups or political movements. Some of these women's activist movements are more radical than the women as traditionally conceived and have tried to raise the struggle to a higher level. But they are still conscious of what the men would say or do to thwart their efforts. Even though these women's activist groups have a common cause, which is to advocate the rights of women in Nigeria, the condition and agenda for activism sometimes varies. For instance, while some went into it to fight economic injustice, like tax extortion, some started their activism to attain political recognition. This paper, therefore, examines the activities of six prominent women's activist groups and their failure to come up to expectations, using their group vision and mission as the yardstick for their assessment.

Table 1: Notable women groups in the Pre-independence Era

S/N	Name of Group	Acronym	Year Founded	Purpose	Current Status
1.	Lagos Market Women's Association	LMWA	Mid 1920s	An organized pressure group designed to ensure market women's economic interests	· ·
2.	Nigerian Women's Party	NWP	1944	To protect women's interest and participation in political representation	•
2.	Women Movement in Nigeria	WM	1952	To obtain political recognition To secure equality and fair representation	No longer active
3.	Federation of Nigerian Women Societies	FNWS	1953	To fight the government's introduction of separate tax rates for women.	No longer active
4.	National Council of Women's Societies	NCWS	1959	To unite Nigerian women under one umbrella in a bid to seek political recognition	No longer active

Complied by: Authors

Table 2: Notable Women Groups in the Post-Independence Era

S/N	Name of Group	Acronym	Year Founded	Purpose	Current Status
1.	Women in Nigeria	WIN	1983	Initiation and implementation of research to emphasize women's full social, political and economic rights in the country	No longer active
2.	Better Life for Rural Women		1987	,	No longer active
	Women's Consortium Of Nigeria	WOCON	1995	To focus on gender, health and human rights	Active
١.	Kudirat Initiative for Democracy	KIND	1999	To promote women's participation in forging a democratic state in Nigeria	No longer active
5.	Women in Business	WiMBiz	2002	To work towards women and leadership in the corporate organizations	Active
5.	Women Arise for Change Initiative		2003	To help and encourage women to come together and stand up against misuse and abuse by a male dominated society	
5.	Moremi Initiative	MILEAD	2004	To provide mentoring, research and advocacy support for Nigerian women	Active
•	Wellbeing Foundation Africa	WBFA	2004	Empower women on the fundamental necessity of gender equality and improve access to quality health services and health outcomes	Active
	Women's Technology Empowerment Center	W-TEC	2008	Use technology to nurture Nigerian girls and women to increase their economic power and to speak about issues that affect their lives as female	Active
) .	Women for change initiative		2010	To promote total restoration of the dignity of womanhood politically	
0.	She Leads Africa	SLA	2014	Empowering African Women in leadership and financial independence	Active
1.	Female in Nigeria	FIN	2015	An online safe space for women to share their struggles with being female in Nigeria	Active

Complied by: Authors

Feminism and Women's Activist Movements: Conceptual and Theoretical Clarifications

Women's organizations are making significant contributions across Africa and are networking to ensure the formation of laws and constitutions that are gender-friendly. Abdulkadir (2003) defines feminism as an

ideology which seeks to assert the principle that women should have political, economic, and social rights equal to those of men. The concept of feminism takes many forms and cannot be characterized in one definition. As noted by Udokang and Awofeso (2012), feminism can be considered both as a critique and an ideology. As a critique, feminism opposes patriarchy. As an ideology, it is a belief system which preaches equal rights for women and their emancipation from all forms of domination exerted by men (Awofeso and Odeyemi, 2014). Whether as a critique or as an ideology, feminism encompasses the struggles of women to secure their economic and political freedom.

Feminism however cannot totally be separated from women's activism, even though the term feminism is relatively new to the Nigerian clime. At the early stages of feminism, it was perceived in a negative form; women who associated themselves with feminism or feminist movements were stigmatized as frustrated or divorced men-haters who have nothing better to do but 'cause trouble' (Abdul, Adeleke, Adeveve et al., 2014). Ezeigbo (1996) argues that feminism is often misunderstood. For some people, feminism gives a picture of aggressive women who try to be like men, dress carelessly and abandon essential feminine attributes. However, feminism as an ideology only means agitation for women's economic, social, legal, political, educational rights leading to their political and economic development.

Defining women's movements can be complex. While feminism is characterized by its challenge of patriarchy, women's activist movements seek to protect women's rights. Activism refers to the intense activities of a person or group for the purpose of gaining certain values that are laden with social, economic and political flavours. From the point of view of political behaviour, activism often manifests in antiestablishment or radical group actions, such as protests, demonstrations, rallies and strike (Eesuola, 2017). A women's activist movement, therefore, consists of the concerted efforts of an organized group of women to promote or to challenge certain social issues around them while demanding reform that will remove gender disparity. Women's activist movements may operate using several methods, like letter writing, demonstration, and solidarity movements, to air their grievances. However, their demands may also take some other forms, including violence.

Theoretical Positions

This paper is anchored in Patriarchy and Feminist Theories. This is necessary because of the advantages they present in analysing the activities of women's activist groups in Nigeria. While Feminist Theory aims to understand gender inequality and focuses on gender politics, power relations, and sexuality, Patriarchy Theory is the opposite.

Feminist Theory and Patriarchy

The two key terms central to the feminist discussion are 'gender' and 'patriarchy'. The term feminism was coined by a French socialist named Charles Fourier in 1837, and was first used in 1872 in France and in the United States in 1910 (Offen, 1988). As observed by Carlson and Ray, feminism as a theory has evolved over the years and has developed into two major shifts. The first is particularizing and contextualizing the different experiences as they affect women. This is unlike the previous approach which universalized the struggle, losing elements in the way. The second dimension involves the shift from seeing women as categories to be focused on, to getting into such categorization, while exploring what makes up oppressive gender practices (Carlson & Ray, 2001). The feminist theory is designed to explain issues and phenomena as they affect women towards achieving gender equality with men. Feminism encompasses the struggles of women to secure their economic and political agency while attaining equality with men in the political, economic and social and developmental spheres.

In the feminist context, gender refers to the power relations between men and women, how the relations have been socially and habitually implemented, and how the power is deployed (Ruiz, 2012). While the central message of feminist theory remains the call for equality among the sexes in terms of power and status, patriarchy refers to the system where the female is subordinate to the male in power and status. Patriarchy as a social system gives men primary power and predominant leadership over women. It is associated with a set of ideology that justifies male domination as a result of the inherent natural biological differences between both genders.

In a patriarchal patrilineal society, properties and titles are inherited only by the male. In the time past, Nigerian women faced a lot of problems in relation to gender as a result of the patriarchal nature of the society. The culture of patriarchy, male chauvinism, and belief in male superiority undermined the rights of women, leaving them in servitude to the men. This still abounds in widowhood practices, politics and even in the education sector. For instance, until recently, in the south-eastern part of Nigeria, female children were not allowed to inherit lands and titles. Worse still, they cannot inherit their husband's property unless they have a male child (*The Tide*, February 2015).

Feminist theory can, therefore, be understood in the context of being both a normative and intellectual discourse, shining its light on the social phenomena, issues, and experiences as they concern women that are swept under the carpet, following years of dominant male perception (Crossman, 2017). The feminist theory is not only aimed at understanding and explaining the intricacies that surround the subject of gender inequality and gender roles in the society, but it is also meant to explain the blurred lines that exist between men and women in society. Feminism has existed in Nigeria long before what is clearly known today as feminist ideologies, hence, feminist theory will throw light on the circumstances that have affected women's activist groups in Nigeria by examining it through patriarchal lens.

Methodology

The study adopted the use of secondary materials to source information on the women's activist groups. Materials were sourced from archives, books, online journals and periodicals. The six women's activist groups examined in the paper were selected based on their missions and goals which involve women liberation. Also, they were selected based on availability of data and information and their relevance to this study. The relevant data were divided in thematic groups, content analysed and presented based on the objectives of the study.

Women's Activism in Nigeria: the Historical Perspective

Since Nigerian women's activism has become driven by international donors it has been labelled feminism (Adamu, 2006). Women's activism in Nigeria has been around and active long before the recent stream of feminism that exists in Nigeria today, as far back as the pre-colonial and pre-independence periods. There has been significant courageous resistance to colonial policies in different parts of the country, most especially in the southern part, particularly the Aba Women Riot of 1929 and the Abeokuta Women Riot of 1948.

Although the focal point of this paper revolves around women's groups, it is important to note that activism of women in Nigeria is not limited to groups alone, significant efforts have also been put up by individual women who made history in their activism. Notable among these women are Queen Amina of Zazzau, Efunsetan Aniwura and Ebele Ejaunu.

Women's activism in Nigeria took a major swerve during the independence period, with women becoming more politically conscious, a higher representation of women in the public sphere, and women's participation in political affiliations. The contemporary period of post-independence Nigeria witnessed the upsurge of more organized women's activism addressing past and current issues that perturb the female welfare. Ironically, their organizational strategies have not been yielding corresponding effects on various social and cultural menaces that surround the existence of female folks in the country. Their failure necessitates an exploration of women's activities in Nigeria from a historical angle. (Abdul, Adeleke et al., 2011).

Women's Activism: Pre-independence Era

The pioneer women group to challenge the British policies during the colonial period was the Igbo women, who have a history of organizing themselves for social and communal development. Aba women were able to use indigenous mechanisms and strategies to organize, mobilize, and wage the Women's War of 1929 against the colonial government and its native authorities (Okome, 2016). The riot primarily centred on the protest against the imposition of tax by British colonial representatives and collective defence of women's role in the sphere of authority. In the British colonial records, the women's war (as popularly referred to by the southeastern indigenes) which was named the Aba Women's Riot of 1929, was a strategically executed anti-colonial revolt organized by women to fight against social, political, and economic injustices meted out to them.

One of the most powerful women's activist groups in colonial Lagos was the Lagos Market Women's Association (LMWA). The LMWA was able to resist colonial attempts to tax women in 1932, using indigenous grassroots organizing tactics and the negotiating skills of a representative committee composed of women leaders like Madam Pelewura, who met with C.T. Lawrence, the administrator of Lagos Colony (Okome, 2016). The group fought the colonial government on two fronts: increase in taxable income and price control. As a result of the determined resistance of the LMWA, the colonial government was unable to effectively implement its policies and ended price control in September 1945. The concerted effort made by women's activists in gaining independence for Nigeria mapped their shifted focus from primarily rejecting exuberant taxation and policies of colonial representatives to the total rejection of British colonial rule in the country. This was carried out alongside other prominent male nationalists, which led to independence in 1960 and brought about the call of women's activist groups for political participation and full representation of women in all legislative houses.

Women's activism took a definite shape in the political landscape in Nigeria with the formation of Nigerian Women's Party (NWP) in 1944 (it existed predominantly within Lagos State) and the appointment of the first Nigerian woman parliamentarian, Lady Oyinkan Morenike Ajasa (later Abayomi), a leader of NWP in 1953 (Johnson, 1982). The Action Group's (AG) appointment of Mrs. Remi Aiyedun in 1956 made it the second time a Nigerian woman was appointed as a parliamentarian. With the prior involvement of notable women in political parties before independence, existing women's groups continued to find their foothold in those political parties.

In the bid to put an end to the practice of excess and unnecessary tax collection, another pioneering effort was made by a group of Abeokuta market women in 1948. This action was a combined effort of both the elite class and market women, with the elite coming into the struggle through the initiative of the then head teacher of Abeokuta Grammar School, Olufunmilayo Ransome-Kuti, who formed the Abeokuta Women's Union (AWU). Under the inspirational leadership of Mrs. Ransome-Kuti, the Abeokuta Women's Union became a model organization for the struggle for women's rights in Nigeria, Africa and across the world (UNESCO, 2014). This women's group coordinated by Mrs. Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti recorded enviable achievements. It was able to question the colonial government's mode of operation with regard to its authoritativeness and inhumane nature of making decisions. This later grew to a movement that became a string component of the independence movement. Also, through this development, women were able to get a clear voice in questioning the repercussion of existing policies on the quality of life and status of women (Abdul, Adeleke, Adeyeye et al. 2014; Newey.net, 2011).

The continued resistance of colonial policies by Nigerian women ushered in different activist groups for women's emancipation, equality and empowerment, with the National Women's Union (NWU) of 1947 as the first female activist group. The leading figures of the union were Olufunmilayo Ransome-Kuti and Margaret Ekpo; these two figures were among the nationalists that fought for Nigeria's independence. This group brought about other women's activist groups in the country, as such, an umbrella for women's organizations across Nigeria was formed in 1959, with the name the National Council of Women's Societies (NCWS). Although these groups' aims were achieved, they did not venture into the space of women's marginalization and male dominance. A glaring distance that was also maintained by the women involved in activism during this period was the application of the feminist label to their struggle, which could have resulted from the fear of societal exclusion.

Women's Activism: Post-independence Era

Women in Nigeria (WIN)

This women's group was founded in 1982. Like other women's activist groups in Nigeria was developed by the founding members to 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 recorded a lot of achievements but faced series of challenges in the 90s that crippled its activities. However, through the help of government and other organizations, WIN has managed to retain her presence in some states of the federation.

Better Life for Rural Women

During the Ibrahim Babangida regime, Maryam Babangida institutionalized the office of the First Lady, thereby marking an indelible point in the history of women struggle in Nigeria. She became the first working First Lady and launched the "Better Life for Rural Women" in September, 1987, a programme, which was aimed at economic empowerment of Nigerian women. When she became Nigeria's First Lady, she transformed an erstwhile mainly ceremonial position into a movement for the improvement of women both in urban and rural areas (Ejovi and Mgbonyenbi, 2013). The First Lady's programme served as an umbrella for women's activism in dealing with issues affecting women even under a military dictatorship that was unparalleled in Nigerian history. Her programme helped other women's activist groups to be able to lift the barriers of ignorance, lack of self-confidence and lack of self-reliance facing Nigerian women. It successfully brought to national and international glare abuses against women.

This period however witnessed another post-independence resistance from the Federation of Ogoni Women (FOWA). Resistance was incorporated into every part of the daily life of the Ogoni women as they lived through Shell's destruction of their environment and the presence of the Nigerian military (Sokari, 2010). It is quite important to know that the Federation of Ogoni Women (FOWA) was at the forefront of the struggle of the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP) in the early 1990s. These protests were especially important as both the oil companies and the Nigerian military were unable to use their usual divide-and-rule tactics to break the women's occupation (Sokari, 2010). Several professional and religious women groups such as Medical Women's Association of Nigeria, Young Women Christian Association (YWCA), Federation of Muslim Women Association (FOMWON), jumped into operation during this period.

Women's Consortium of Nigeria (WOCON)

Founded in 1995 by late Chief Olabisi Olateru-Olagbegi, this women's group has engaged in various activities for the enforcement of rights of women and children particularly the girl-child and for the entrenchment of sustainable democratic and advocacy with Human rights education in Nigeria and the sub-Saharan region system and good governance in Nigeria. WOCON is the foremost centre to focus on gender, health and human rights, and combines strong commitment to service of African women.

Women Arise for Change Initiative

Women Arise for Change Initiative was established in 2003 by Dr Joe Odumakin. The foundation was established with the purpose of helping women and encouraging them to come together to stand up against misuse and abuse by a male dominated society. Breaking the culture of silence and finding expressions for themselves in the social political and economic relations in Nigeria and it requires organizing women to assert their rights and taking their destiny in their hands rather than being apologetic.

Unlike many other women's organizations in Nigeria, the women arise for change initiative had managed to survive the years and they have managed to remain operational till date. However, the journey has not been rosy all the way through. The organization was applauded in 2016 when it showed interest in the case of the sick veteran news caster, Sadiq Baba and helped raise funds for his travelling abroad for treatment.

Women for Change Initiative

This project was initiated by a former First lady of Nigeria, Dame Patience Jonathan in 2010. It aimed at promoting and encouraging women's participation in the socio-economic and political atmosphere in Nigeria. It encouraged Nigerian women to be more actively involved in Nigerian political sphere by taking up more leadership roles and checkmating the men's excesses in the politics. The Women for Change Initiative barely survived after the 2015 presidential election after Dr Goodluck Ebele Jonathan was voted out of office. An article published in Vanguard News (February 10, 2011), titled "Crisis Looms in First Lady's Camp" captured the apparent failure of the Women for Change Initiative to encourage and motivate women in politics.

Female in Nigeria (FIN)

This is a women rights group founded by Lola Omolola in 2015. FIN creates an online safe space for women to share their struggles as being female in Nigeria and it currently has over 1, 500,000 members in its online community. This online community has continued to use its huge online presence to fight for the causes of women in Nigeria. According to the FIN Facebook page, the group is focused on building compassion, providing support and nurturing the power of self-expression, with a core mission to end the culture of silence. FIN has gained global recognition and is one of the few activist groups in Nigeria that has succeeded in achieving its goals of lending a voice to women in crises.

FIN was inspired by twitter activism hash tagged #BeingFemaleinNigeria, which in itself was inspired by Chinamanda Adichie's feminist pamphlet, 'we should all be feminists'. The new group was identified as an online space for self-identified feminists and women interested in gender equality and women's rights (Feminist Africa, 2018). By its sixth week, there were over 2,000 members and a lot of requests from prospective members, prompting the administrators to change the group setting to 'secret group' due to the number of requests they were getting from men who wanted to be part of the group.

The availability of the internet made the activities of FIN easier and far-reaching, and due to the support and compassion women got through the FIN platform, smaller groups emerged online, some leading to real-life interactions through offline meetings and hangouts with FIN members.

FIN set out to help women connect on a deeper level, provide a non-judgemental atmosphere for sharing FIN has recorded success on most fronts, but they have also had their fair share of challenges. According to some of the members, one of the downsides today is the large number of memberships which have made it nearly impossible to enforce group rules, also leaving out the sense of sisterhood (Feminist Africa, 2018). Another point observed by the report by Ayodele Olofintuade on Feminist Profile was the narrative that emerged over the first six months about the hidden activities of the group which was alleged to be a cult group, a group for lesbians and devil worshippers. Okolie (2016) dismissed the reports in her article. Despite the allegations and rumours, the group has moved on, amidst controversies like the issue of confidentiality within the group, religious concerns and many more.

Factors Affecting Women's Activist Groups in Nigeria

According to The Focus Magazine (2018), there are treaties and activities in place for the advancement of women and for them to take up their place in governance. The Beijing women's conference of 1995 typically

emphasized full empowerment of women in order to have equal rights and opportunities as the men. It is noteworthy that Nigeria keyed into this 1995 Beijing platform with the 2006 National Gender Policy, as well as the Millennium Development Goals which emphasized the need for women to be part of the decision-making process (Afolabi, 2019). In spite of the efforts and successes however, it is not freedom for Women's activist Groups in Nigeria. This paper identified four factors affecting women's activist groups in Nigeria. These were **a** lack of solidarity among women groups, financial constraints, political and social practices as well as religious constraints.

Lack of Solidarity among Women Groups

Due to the patriarchal belief which has been enshrined in the women from childhood, forming solidarity and sisterhood has been a difficult task for women groups to achieve in Nigeria. The current struggles of African feminists are connected to the past era diverse pre-colonial contexts, slavery, colonization, liberation struggles, neo-colonialism and globalization (Maduagu, 2008). One factor that works against the success of women's activist groups and political movements in Nigeria is the presumed lack of solidarity among the womenfolk generally. In order to experience the true value of sisterhood, women must stand in solidarity; they must fight the battle of oppression as a team. According to Hooks (1984), 'solidarity's strengthens resistance struggle...women must take initiative and demonstrate the power of solidarity'. In 2011, there were only three presidential aspirants in the then ruling Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) primaries in Abuja: President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, former Vice President Atiku Abubakar, and a well-respected and popular Nigerian female politician, Mrs. Sarah Jibril. Of over 5000 votes cast and the female delegates present, only one vote was cast for Mrs. Jibril, the one vote she gave herself. The one-single vote calls to question the sincerity and commitment of women to their campaign for equality in the political scene. Mrs Sarah Jibril herself asked her co-women a rhetoric question: "What offence have I committed against the women of Nigeria? They should tell me so that I will know....'

Another example was the agenda of one umbrella group for female political platform by the National Council of Women's Societies (NCWS) that was opposed by the women fraction of the then Action Group (AG). The issue of solidarity must be addressed for women's activist groups and solidarity movements to be successful. Nigerian women must imbibe the team spirit and stand together in solidarity. Women need to have the experience of working through hostility to arrive at understanding and solidarity (Hook, 1984). Women's legacy of woman-hating has to be eliminated in order for women to be able to come together successfully to fight a common cause.

Financial Constraints

Forming and sustaining political movements anywhere in the world requires funding. However, forming and maintaining it in Nigeria requires huge financial back-up because politics in Nigeria is highly monetized. Most Nigerian women who come together to form political movements find it difficult to meet up with the financial obligations involved in playing politics in Nigeria. Despite the waivers given to women aspirants by some of the political parties, for instance, financial burden is still unbearable for female politicians. And so, they could do little or nothing to outweigh their male counterparts. Often, the female gender is easily mobilized for the election victory of male candidates who are more financially buoyant than their female counterparts (Okoronkwo-Chukwu, 2013)

Most of the women's activist groups mentioned earlier rely heavily on funds given by men as most of the public offices where women seek for fund are headed by men. Women are being marginalized in Nigeria politically and economically. The implication of which is financial dependence and subsequent failure of groups which are perceived as confrontational by the men in charge of these institutions. Without external aid, most women's activist groups die a natural death, unless there is an inclusion of men. Banks rarely give credit facilities to women who until recently by culture cannot own land or properties. At the initial stage,

women who own properties or land are believed to be owned by their husbands – "Eniti O leru lo leru" translated as he who owns the slave(woman) owns the property. Even though the tradition culture seems to be changing the society still frowns at Women having more financial standing than the man. Feminist theory points at the gender discrimination that exists here.

Aina (2012) asserts that the socio-cultural oppression plaguing the woman creates the barrier that denies her access to information and formal education. This limits the probability of accessing wealth-creating assets, which include land, capital (such as loan facilities) labour, and ground-breaking skills needed in the pursuit of economic empowerment. These constraints created by society are major impediments to the success of women's activist groups and political movements in Nigeria.

Political and Social practices

In most societies in Nigeria and in Africa as a whole, the position of the woman is that of a supporter, a subordinate, while the man is regarded as the decision-maker and person of authority. Women are seen culturally as quite submissive and images of virtue. However, they are not to be seen in public domain. This hinders women's participation in political groups and activist movements. Attributions to Gender and cultural expectations shape specific identities which restricts women's mobilisation and participation in activism (Bouilly, Rillon & Cross, 2016).

To this effect, women have been discriminated against at home, at work and in the political atmosphere. The Patriarchal culture that obtains in most African societies has equally limited the participation of women in politics and activism generally. Okpe, (2005) argues that patriarchy is a broad network or system of hierarchical organization that cuts across political, economic, social, religious, cultural, industrial and financial spheres, under which the overwhelming number of upper positions in society are either occupied or controlled and dominated by men. Thus, any system that operates in line with patriarchy, which accords men an undue advantage over women, will not give room for the success of women's activism.

Religious Constraints

Patriarchal beliefs have been advanced through various religious interpretations that mostly favour men over women, having many Nigerian women concentrate their life activities around their homes and leaving the men in charge of affairs. The multi-religious set-up of the Nigerian society and the unwavering influence of religious leaders on their followers have been a contributory factor in gender dominance of women. Udegbe (2010) asserts that the pervasive gender stereotypes and religious interpretations in many societies have contributed largely to undue subordination of women under the tutelage of men. The issue of submissiveness that is being emphasised leaving out the fact that God expects Husbands to love their wives as God loves His Church to the point of giving His life for her. Women's activism or any form of agitation is seen as rebelliousness. Religion plays a vital role in the cultural life of Nigerians; the status of women in the society is a reflection of the interpretation of religious texts and beliefs (Clifford, 2017). For instance, the Old Testament texts in the Holy Bible (Genesis 2:18) has been interpreted to see women as helpmates for men and not leaders themselves, while leaving out other instances where women leadership reflected. This position is also reflected in the Quran, that "Men are guardians over women by what Allah has favoured some over others..." (Surat al-Nisa 4:34).

Conclusion and Recommendations

Women's activism have somewhat survived in the past with the introduction of various women's activist groups attending to different women's issues within the private and public arena geared towards the advancement of women's rights and a voice in Nigeria and Africa as a whole. These activist groups have been

striving to integrate women in the developmental process of Nigeria through socio-economic empowerment and lightening the burden of women by standing against both mental and psychological abuse and trauma that besiege the lives of Nigerian women. However, their influence on governmental policies and actions that have been the source of problems facing women have not largely been effective.

These activist groups have been confronted with difficulties in executing their projects and programmes successfully as a result of their failure to recognize the need to take up political issues which are mostly regarded as secondary issues. The political problems that confront women include ensuring personal safety, security and autonomy, reproductive rights, maternal and child health programmes, ensuring equal access to public, communal and market resources for problem-solving, empowerment and remarking the political and legal rules of the game (Yusuf, 2014). More importantly, as Nigeria's economic situations remain worrisome and as budgetary concerns grow, many programmes that support women and girls are likely to be cut or deemed unimportant (Olusoga, 2016). Despite the constraints to the full implementation of the Beijing Declaration and plan of action (1995), there are important changes, like the creation of the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs to ensure protection of the rights of Nigerian women and children. However, much still has to be done in fully implementing policies that will ensure protection of women's rights. Women are still held back by factors identified in this paper.

The paper has also established that gender inequality is a major factor that prevents women's activist groups from living up to expectation. The paper has also identified factors responsible for this poor state of women's activism and political movements in Nigeria, particularly the cultural factors that impinge on women's political participation in Nigeria. It is the position of this paper that women's activist groups and political movements in Nigeria have continued to face challenges that prevent them from living up to expectations. The paper concludes that the future of women's activist groups and political movements in Nigeria is bright, once the identified barriers are broken. The 2011 census figures update showed that women are almost numerically ahead of men.

Some of the barriers highlighted above can be easily overcome. The paper, therefore, recommends the need for a quiet but significant social revolution among women themselves. To do this, women's activist groups need to emphasize and sensitize women on solidarity and sisterhood.

Government should implement existing gender policies that will empower women politically, economically and socially by combating cultural practices that oppress women. These include widowhood practices, gender stereotypes, male domination and other cultural taboos that predispose women to male domination. This way, the personality and character of women will be respected and women will be financially empowered to stand on their own.

Social media should be seen as a valuable tool to project women's activism in Nigeria. The paper, therefore, recommends the use of social media platforms to develop, expand and improve on local women's movements in order to further strengthen women's voices, not only in Nigeria, but also at the global level.

Government should also ensure full implementation of policies that will eliminate gender discrimination at work and in the society. This will enable women to have access to career advancement and political participation.

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