



MALE FEMINISM, GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN NIGERIA



**AFRICAN CENTRE FOR
LEADERSHIP, STRATEGY
& DEVELOPMENT**

...building strategic leadership for
sustainable development in Africa

Otive Igbuzor, PhD, Hussaini Abdu, PhD & Iroro S. Izu, PhD

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Dedication

This book is dedicated to women in Nigeria who suffer discrimination, marginalization and violence.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

On behalf of the African Centre for Leadership, Strategy & Development (Centre LSD), we extend our heartfelt appreciation to the editors—**Dr. Otive Igbuzor**, **Dr. Hussaini Abdu**, and **Dr. Iroro S. Izu**—for their outstanding leadership and dedication in conceptualising, curating, and producing this seminal volume, *"Male Feminism, Gender Equality and Women Empowerment in Nigeria."* Their commitment to gender justice and social transformation is evident in the quality and depth of this work.

We also express our sincere gratitude to all the contributing authors whose insightful chapters have enriched this volume. Their critical reflections, lived experiences, and scholarly analyses have significantly advanced the conversation on male feminism, gender equality, and women's empowerment in Nigeria.

We acknowledge with deep appreciation the generous support of the **Ford Foundation**, whose funding made the **Male Feminists Project** possible and led directly to the production of this book. In particular, we thank **Dr. Chichi Aniagolu**, the West Africa Director of the Ford Foundation, for her visionary leadership and steadfast support. We are also grateful to **Dr. Izeduwa Derex-Briggs**, Programme Officer, for her strategic guidance, and to **Mrs. Joy Ehinor-Esezobor**, whose commitment and facilitation throughout the project were invaluable.

At Centre LSD, we firmly believe that promoting gender equality and women's empowerment is essential for sustainable development and inclusive governance. This book is a critical contribution to this goal and reflects our ongoing

commitment to fostering inclusive discourse and transformative action.

We remain dedicated to building a society where women and girls are empowered to thrive and fulfil their potential. This vision can only be achieved through collective effort, strong institutional partnerships, and a shared commitment to dismantling gender inequality.

Finally, we thank our partners, colleagues, and friends who encouraged and supported this project. Your solidarity, collaboration, and dedication continue to inspire us in our pursuit of justice and equality for all.

Mr. Monday Osasah, FSM

Executive Director

African Centre for Leadership, Strategy & Development (Centre LSD)

27th July, 2025

PREFACE

The struggle for gender equality and the empowerment of women is one of the most urgent and transformative tasks of our time. In Nigeria, as in many parts of the world, structural and systemic barriers continue to deny women and girls their rights, their voices, and their full potential. Despite progress in policy and advocacy, gender-based violence, political underrepresentation, and economic marginalization persist at alarming rates. Yet, amidst these challenges, a new wave of consciousness is rising—one that calls for a reimagining of gender relations through feminist ideals and inclusive activism.

This book, *Male Feminism, Gender Equality and Women Empowerment in Nigeria*, is a bold and timely intervention. It seeks not only to document the journey so far but to offer clear directions for the future. With contributions from renowned gender advocates, scholars, and activists, the book provides a comprehensive analysis of the theoretical, practical, and lived dimensions of feminism in Nigeria. It covers a wide range of critical themes—from male feminism and gender-based violence to constitutional inclusion and movement organizing—making it both scholarly and pragmatic.

As someone who has worked for decades on governance, social justice, and development issues, I have come to recognize that the quest for a just society must necessarily include the struggle for gender equality. This recognition has informed my advocacy for male engagement as a critical strategy in dismantling patriarchal norms and supporting women's leadership and agency. I am particularly proud that this book elevates the voices of male and female feminists and affirms that feminism is not the exclusive preserve of women—it is a collective human rights agenda.

The chapters in this book are grounded in deep reflection, lived experience, and evidence-based practice. They offer readers—whether activists, policymakers, students, or allies—a robust resource for action, learning, and transformation. Importantly, the book underscores the role of men not as bystanders or gatekeepers, but as partners in building a gender-just society.

This work is part of the broader initiative by the African Centre for Leadership, Strategy & Development (Centre LSD) to promote inclusive leadership and empower all citizens—regardless of gender—to participate meaningfully in the democratic and development processes of our nation. It is my hope that the insights and lessons shared in this volume will inspire renewed commitment, deepen collaboration, and catalyze lasting change in our homes, communities, and institutions.

Together, we can and must create a world where gender does not determine destiny, and where equity, dignity, and justice are the birthrights of all.

Dr. Otive Igbuzor

Founding Executive Director, Centre LSD

July 2025

FOREWORD

It gives me immense pleasure to write the foreword to this important and timely publication, *Male Feminism, Gender Equality and Women Empowerment in Nigeria*. This book represents a critical body of work and the growing recognition that the struggle for gender equality requires inclusive, intersectional, and collective efforts—where men are not merely allies, but partners on the path to justice.

For decades, women in Nigeria have fought valiantly to break down the barriers of patriarchy and oppression. From the women of Aba who resisted colonial injustice in 1929 to the feminist movements that emerged in the late 20th century, Nigerian women have consistently shown courage, resilience, and leadership. We have also learned that the systemic and cultural roots of gender inequality cannot be fully dismantled without the active engagement of men—particularly men who are willing to challenge their own power and privilege. For us to see the change we want, men need to understand and embrace feminist values.

This book makes a significant contribution to the discourse by placing male feminism within the broader struggle for women's rights and empowerment. It brings together diverse perspectives—of activists, scholars, faith leaders, and development practitioners—who boldly articulate the responsibilities and possibilities for men as champions of gender justice. It explains 'male feminism', highlights practical examples of engagement, and offers a clear roadmap for institutional and societal transformation.

What is particularly commendable about this volume is that it does not shy away from complexity. It interrogates not only the external barriers facing women but also the internal contradictions that exist within our homes, cultures, and institutions. It calls on men to move beyond performative allyship and to demonstrate, in concrete terms, their commitment to dismantling

inequality—from the boardroom to the parliament, from the pulpit to the living room.

As someone who has worked for decades in the women's movement and in governance, I know the value of knowledge, the power of collaboration, and the importance of naming the invisible. This book does all three. It is a rich and grounded resource for both women and men who believe in building a just, inclusive, equal, and compassionate society.

I commend all the contributors for their vision, clarity, and boldness. May this book inspire deeper reflection, stronger partnerships, and bolder action in our collective journey toward gender equality.

Erelu Bisi Adeleye-Fayemi

Feminist Activist, Writer, Policy Advocate,

Former First Lady of Ekiti State, Nigeria

Co-founder, African Women's Development Fund (AWDF)

July 2025

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Otive Igbuzor, PhD is a public intellectual, pharmacist, policy expert, and development strategist. He is the Founding Executive Director of the African Centre for Leadership, Strategy & Development (Centre LSD). He served as Chief of Staff to the Deputy President of the Nigerian Senate (2019–2023) and was a Commissioner in the Police Service Commission (2008–2013).

He was Country Director of ActionAid Nigeria and later became the International Head of Campaigns at ActionAid International. Dr. Igbuzor holds a B.Pharm, MPA, MSc in International Relations, and a PhD in Public Administration with specialization in policy analysis. He has authored over ten books and 55 academic publications on democracy, governance, and development.

He is a Fellow of the Pharmaceutical Society of Nigeria and Institute of Strategic Management, Nigeria. He has consulted widely for national and international organizations including DFID, UN agencies, and the Federal Government of Nigeria. Dr. Igbuzor has played key roles in Nigeria's constitutional reform and poverty eradication strategies. He sits on the boards of several NGOs and foundations promoting health, education, and gender equality.

He was appointed to the UN Secretary General's Network of Men Leaders to End Violence Against Women in 2012.



Hussaini Abdu, Ph.D., is a distinguished international development and humanitarian specialist, scholar, and activist. He has provided strategic leadership to several global and national non-governmental organisations in Nigeria, serving at various times as Country Director for ActionAid, Plan International, and CARE International.

He also held the position of Director of the Pan-African and Emerging Power Advocacy Office at Save the Children International, where he represented the organisation to the African Union and other continental bodies. A prolific scholar and public intellectual, Dr. Abdu is widely published in books and academic journals. He is the author of *Clash of Identities: State, Society, and Ethno-Religious Conflicts in Northern Nigeria* and *Partitioned Borgu: State, Society, and Violence in a West African Border Region*, works that critically explore the intersection of state formation, identity, and violence in West Africa.



Iroro Izu, Ph.D., is a well-published scholar and Senior Lecturer at the Department of Political Science and International Relations, Nile University of Nigeria (NUN). He has lectured in five other Nigerian Universities among which are University of Abuja, Baze University and Philomath University. Izu has published over 13 books in areas of political science, international relations, public administration and peace, conflict and gender studies; he has also published over thirty articles in local and international peer-reviewed journals,

and contributed over ten book chapters.

His major areas of interest are international political economy, political theory, international wars, gender and Niger Delta studies. He has previously served as Head of Department, Director of General Studies and Director of Academic Planning (DAP).



Rahinatu Adamu Hussaini is a seasoned gender and social inclusion expert and activist with over 20 years of experience in the development and humanitarian sectors. She has worked extensively across diverse countries and contexts, supporting leading organisations such as ActionAid, British Council, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO), and Save the Children.

Her work encompasses program design, gender and power analysis, policy advocacy, and the strengthening of inclusive systems. Rahinatu is currently a Senior Global Advisor for Gender-Based Violence Prevention and Response at Save the Children International.



Vincent Dania, DMS, PMP®, PhD is a social impact strategist, certified project manager, and advocate for social and economic justice with over 14 years of experience delivering value driven development programs across Nigeria and The Gambia.

He currently serves as the Programme Coordinator for the Ford Foundation-funded project, Network Building of Male Feminists in Support of Gender-Based Violence Prevention in Nigeria at the African Centre for Leadership, Strategy & Development (Centre LSD). Vincent has managed multi-million-dollar interventions funded by the United Nations, Ford Foundation, and Christian Aid, with a strong focus on gender justice, organizational strengthening, movement building, and economic and resource justice. He holds a Doctorate in Management Studies, a Master's degree in Information Technology, and multiple certifications in project, program, MEAL, and Lean management.



Ejiro Joyce Otive-Igbuzor, PhD is a scholar, feminist and GESI and M&E expert. She is the MD/CEO of Emerald International Development Services Ltd. and has led transformative assignments with the MacArthur Foundation, UNDP, UNODC, UNOPS, UN Women, Ford Foundation, and others, locally and globally. She was Gender and HIV/AIDS Programme Coordinator for Anglophone West Africa with UNIFEM (now UN Women), Country Director for the Centre for Development and Population Activities and Research

Fellow at the Nigerian Institute of Medical Research. Ejiro is a novelist and uses fiction to interrogate social injustice. Her feminist-inspired novels include the award-winning *Trophy Husband*, *The Travails of Omotejomo*, *Entangled! Japa*, *Love and Rescue*. She founded and coordinates the 2.5K-member Gals Global Hangout and the GESI & M&E CoP, mentoring over 100 mid-level female professionals to achieve competitive advantage.



Ngozi Iwere is a distinguished activist, journalist, and community leader. She obtained her National Certificate in Education (NCE) from the College of Education, Abraka, in 1977, and later graduated cum laude in French from Bayero University, Kano, in the early 1980s. Her early career included work as a journalist for African Guardian and Business in ECOWAS, where she honed her skills in communication and advocacy. In 1992, she founded the Community Life Project (CLP), a grassroots, participatory development organization

committed to empowering local communities. Her passion for civic engagement led to the launch of the Reclaim Naija Grassroots Movement in 2010. Iwere also played a pioneering role in establishing the Society for Women and AIDS in Africa–Nigeria,

where she developed Nigeria's first holistic HIV/AIDS program that engaged entire communities rather than focusing solely on high-risk groups. Over the years, she has become a tireless advocate for social justice and women's rights, combining grassroots activism with strategic policy influence. Prior to founding CLP, she served as an international consultant on participatory and community-driven development, further expanding her impact beyond Nigeria. Her life's work reflects a deep commitment to building informed, engaged, and empowered communities.



Victoria Oseyande Udoh is a seasoned expert in Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) with over 18 years of progressive experience in driving impactful development across Africa. She currently serves as Director of MEL at the African Centre for Leadership, Strategy and Development (Centre LSD) in Abuja, where she leads multi-sectoral projects and strengthens CSOs and BMOs. Victoria has authored over 150 evidence-based impact stories and research reports that influence policy and programming. Her expertise includes

designing MEL frameworks, strategic leadership, and resource mobilization aligned with global development agendas. She advocates for social justice, gender equality, and inclusive governance reforms. Victoria holds a Master of Science in Economics, a Postgraduate Diploma from Germany, and is currently pursuing a PhD. She has advanced training in data science, gender equality, and organizational development. An active member of various professional bodies, Victoria is recognized as a transformative leader committed to sustainable development and evidence-based decision-making.

01

Chapter One

Chapter One
**FEMINISM, GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN
EMPOWERMENT IN NIGERIA:
CONCEPTUALISATION AND CONTEXTUALISATION**

By
Izu, S. Iroro, Ph.D

Introduction

This chapter being the introductory chapter tries to clarify the operational meanings of feminism, gender equality and women's empowerment. It examines the intersections of feminism, gender equality, and women's empowerment in Nigeria through both theoretical and empirical lenses. Anchored on male feminist frameworks, it interrogates the cultural, socio-political, and economic dynamics that shape the experiences of Nigerian women. The study challenges Western-centric paradigms by foregrounding African feminist alternatives that recognize local agency, indigenous knowledge systems, and context-specific forms of resistance. It explores how patriarchy, legal pluralism, economic marginalization, and political exclusion continue to hinder women's empowerment across various regions and social classes. Using a qualitative analytical approach, the chapter draws from documented experiences, institutional case studies, and recent data to highlight the shallow implementation of gender-related laws, including the Violence Against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) Act and the Child Rights Act¹. It finds that gender inequality in Nigeria is deeply intersectional, influenced by ethnicity, religion, geography, and class. The chapter concludes by recommending context-responsive strategies, including the full domestication of gender legislation, the integration of gender-sensitive education, support for women-led cooperatives, and stronger partnerships with traditional and religious institutions to ensure grassroots

acceptance and sustainability of reform.

Historical Insights into Feminism, Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment

The pursuit of gender equality and women's empowerment has become a central tenet of global development discourse. Right from Olympe de Gouges' 1791 Declaration of the Rights of Woman and of Female Citizen² to the renewed momentum through frameworks such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 5 which seeks to "achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls"³. In its strictest sense, Izu views feminism as the belief in social, economic, and political equality between the sexes, aiming to eliminate discrimination, suppression, and inequality faced by either gender. In Nigeria, a nation rich in cultural diversity but marked by deeply entrenched patriarchal structures, the struggle for gender justice is shaped by a complex interplay of historical, social, political, and economic factors⁴. Feminist movements, both indigenous and transnational, have played pivotal roles in challenging the systemic marginalization of women, yet the realization of true equality remains vague.

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1. The Violence Against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) Act (2015) and the Child Rights Act (2003) are two very important Nigerian legislations aimed at protecting individuals from violence and abuse.
 2. Izu, I. S., (2024). Maze of Political Theory: Eurocentrism, Afrocentrism and the Rest of the Thinking World. Kaduna: Joyce Graphic Printers & Publishers, Pp. 419-422
 3. SDGs.UN, (2016). The Sustainable Development Goals. Department of Economic and Social Affairs. <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>; UN Progress Report on SDGs (2025), Pp. 11-12, https://docs.un.org/en/a/80/81&i=A/80/81_1748035261784
 4. Jaiyeola, O. E. and Aladebol A.I . (2020). Patriarchy and Colonization : The "Brooder House" for Gender Inequality in Nigeria, Journal of Research on Women and Gender Volume 10, Pages 3 -22

Feminism in Nigeria has evolved as a multifaceted and often contested ideology, drawing from diverse schools of thought including liberal, radical, African, and postcolonial feminist frameworks. These paradigms offer distinct yet interconnected perspectives on the roots and remedies of gender-based oppression. While liberal feminism focuses on legal and institutional reforms to ensure equal rights, radical feminism critiques the deeper structures of patriarchy that permeate everyday life. African feminism, contrast significantly from Western feminism, emphasizing indigenous socio-cultural realities and addressing context-specific challenges⁵. Postcolonial feminism further deepens this critique by examining the legacies of colonialism and the continued marginalization of African women in global feminist narratives⁶.

Gender inequality in Nigeria manifests in various dimensions, from political underrepresentation and economic exclusion to educational disparities and widespread gender-based violence. Despite constitutional guarantees of equality and a growing number of gender-sensitive policies, the implementation gap remains wide. Structural barriers, cultural norms, religious interpretations, and institutional inertia continue to constrain the full participation of women in national development, employment opportunities and economic roles⁷. Despite its limitations in driving substantial social change, the resilience of Nigerian women is evident in the rise of feminist activism, digital advocacy, women-led enterprises, and community-based empowerment initiatives that continue to promote women-centered issues⁸.

This chapter seeks to interrogate the theoretical foundations and practical expressions of feminism, gender equality, and women's empowerment in Nigeria. It aims to bridge the gap between theory and practice by engaging with both scholarly

perspectives and empirical realities. Through a critical analysis of policy frameworks, socio-economic indicators, and grassroots movements, the chapter provides a nuanced exploration of how Nigerian women navigate and negotiate power, agency, and transformation in a rapidly changing society. Ultimately, the chapter argues that a contextual, intersectional, and inclusive approach to feminism is essential for meaningful progress toward gender justice and sustainable empowerment.

Conceptual Deconstruction

Feminism

Feminism is a belief system, movement and global struggle against all forms of patriarchal oppression to ensure political, economic and social equality of the sexes. To this end, the thrust of feminism revolves around the conscious determination to inculcate the necessity and urgency to balance the roles, responsibilities and opportunities between the male and female genders⁹. It seeks to create symmetry between the sexes by way of showing that one is not exclusively disadvantaged and the other is not naturally above and beyond in content, context and character, whether in the choice of career, pursuit of education or desire for marriage.

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5. Onwuliri, A.C. (2024). The Concept of Feminism within the Specificity of African Philosophy. *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science*, Pp.1-3.
 6. Khan, K. (2025). Postcolonial Feminism. In *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology*, G. Ritzer (Ed.). <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781405165518.wbeost023.pub2>, Pp. 40-44
 7. Jayachandran, S. (2020). Social norms as a barrier to women's employment in developing countries (NBER Working Paper No. 27449). National Bureau of Economic Research. <http://www.nber.org/papers/w27449>
 8. Popoola, R. O., Egharevba, M., & Fayomi, O. (2020). Cross-Examining The Effectiveness of E-Advocacy As A Tool For Advancing Women's Rights In Nigeria. *International Journal of Electronic Governance*, 12(4), 356-370. <https://doi.org/10.1504/IJEG.2020.112075>
 9. United Nations. (2020). Gender equality and women's empowerment. <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/gender-equality/>

As an ideology, practice and movement, feminism is both diverse and evolving. It seeks to challenge the patriarchal structures that have historically and systematically marginalized women and other gender minorities. It is not a monolithic entity but a spectrum of theories and actions that encompass liberal feminism, radical feminism, Marxist feminism, socialist feminism, ecofeminism, and postcolonial feminism, among others. Each strand of feminism interrogates gendered power relations through a distinct lens: liberal feminism prioritizes legal and political reforms; radical feminism highlights systemic oppression rooted in patriarchal institutions; and postcolonial feminism challenges Western-centric narratives by foregrounding the voices and experiences of women in the Global South¹⁰.

Feminism also critically engages with the intersections of gender, race, class, and sexuality, a concept known as intersectionality. This perspective recognizes that gender-based discrimination does not operate in isolation but is compounded by other forms of social stratification. In Nigeria, feminism has evolved in dialogue with indigenous struggles, reflecting local realities and resisting colonial legacies that reconfigured gender hierarchies. Izu opines that it has become a major determinant of state policies, corporate actions, and transnational/international engagements¹¹.

Gender Equality

Gender equality is a principle, creed or doctrine that attempts to motivate men to appreciate women and encourage women to see men as ally and not adversaries. It seeks to show that the strength, wisdom, determination and discipline that men have are not lacking in women; that women equally possess such pristine features and could be used for the advancement of society. Gender equality also attempts to show that the compassion, affability, care, empathy and love that women exhibit and implement as ablest and solemn traits are not naturally exclusive virtues to women

but that men also possess and could display same.

More technically, gender equality refers to the principle that individuals of all genders should have equal rights, responsibilities, and opportunities, and be free to pursue their aspirations without facing discrimination based on gender¹². It goes beyond equal treatment in law to include equitable access to resources, decision-making power, and freedom from gender-based violence.

Scholars argue that gender equality entails dismantling both structural and cultural norms that reinforce male dominance and perpetuate gender-based disadvantages. In Nigeria, achieving gender equality is complicated by plural legal systems (statutory, customary, and religious laws) that often reproduce patriarchal values and limit women's agency¹³.

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10. Mohanty, C. T. (2003). *Feminism without borders: Decolonizing theory, practicing solidarity*. Duke University Press . Retrieved from <https://hamtramckfreeschool.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/mohanty-chandra-feminism-without-borders-decolonizing-theory-practicing-solidarity.pdf>
 11. Izu, (2024). *Maze of Political Theory: Eurocentrism, Afrocentrism and the Rest of the Thinking World*. Kaduna: Joyce Graphic Printers & Publishers, Pp. 419-422
 12. United Nations. (2020). Gender equality and women's empowerment. <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/gender-equality/>
 13. Okeke-Ihejirika, P., & Franceschet, S. (2002). Democratization and state feminism: Gender politics in Africa and Latin America. *Development and Change*, 33(3), 439–466.

Furthermore, gender equality is context-specific: what constitutes equality in one region or community may differ in another, reflecting the complex interplay of religion, ethnicity, class, and geography. The pursuit of gender equality thus requires policies and practices that address these multiple dimensions of inequality, ensuring that transformative change is both systemic and locally resonant.

Women's Empowerment

Women's empowerment refers to the process by which women acquire the ability and agency to make strategic life choices, control resources, and participate meaningfully in decision-making processes. Empowerment can be conceptualized along multiple dimensions: economic empowerment (access to income, assets, and employment opportunities), political empowerment (participation in governance and decision-making), social empowerment (education, health, and mobility), and psychological empowerment (self-confidence and collective agency)¹⁴.

Women's empowerment is both an outcome and a process: it involves not only tangible gains in resources but also shifts in gender norms and power relations that enable women to challenge oppressive structures. In the Nigerian context, empowerment initiatives range from formal legal reforms to grassroots organizing by cooperatives and market women's associations¹⁵. However, these efforts often contend with persistent challenges, including patriarchal resistance, cultural practices, and state inaction. True empowerment, scholars argue, must be locally defined and culturally grounded, respecting the agency of women while challenging unjust power relations¹⁶.

These conceptual clarifications provide the analytical scaffolding for the paper's examination of how feminist thought, gender equality principles, and

empowerment initiatives intersect and shape the lived realities of Nigerian women. They also underscore the need for context-sensitive, culturally resonant strategies that engage with both local and global discourses in the pursuit of gender justice.

Patriarchy

Patriarchy, rather than being a mere cultural artifact or contested social relic, constitutes a foundational logic of civilizational design. It is not simply the domination of men over women in interpersonal terms, it is a deeply inscribed system of meaning, power, and institutional ordering, one that has historically defined what is deemed authoritative, rational, and legitimate. As Stopler aptly notes, patriarchy often masquerades not as oppression but as order, anchored in tradition, consecrated by religion, and codified in law¹⁷. Within this framework, Walby captures its essence as a political economy of gendered hierarchy concealed beneath moral consensus¹⁸.

Historically, patriarchy arose in tandem with the consolidation of agrarian civilizations, where control over land, reproduction, and labor necessitated fixed structures of descent and authority¹⁹. This control was not incidental, it was structural. The privatization of property and the domestication of women served to ensure paternity certainty, thereby entrenching male lineage as a basis for political and spiritual succession. As Lerner²⁰ argues, patriarchy is not simply a feature of history; it is history, constructed through institutions that normalize male supremacy across generations.

14. Ekhtor, E. O. (2015). Women and the law in Nigeria: A reappraisal. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 16(2), 285 –296

15. Cornwall, A., & Edwards, J. (2010). Introduction: Negotiating empowerment. *IDS Bulletin*, 41(2), 1 –9.

16. Crenshaw, K. (1991). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. *Stanford Law Review*, 43(6), 1241–1299.

17. Stopler, G. (2008). "A rank usurpation of power" —The role of patriarchal religion and culture in the subordination of women. *Duke Journal of Gender Law & Policy*, 15, 365 –398. Retrieved July 03, 2025, from <https://scholarship.law.duke.edu/djglp/vol15/iss1/5>

18. Walby, S. (1989). Theorising Patriarchy. *Sociology*, 23(2), 213-234. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038589023002004>

Contemporary iterations of patriarchy retain the architecture of control, though the aesthetics have evolved. Today, patriarchy is not always enforced through explicit legal discrimination but through institutional inertia, symbolic erasure, and cultural normalization. In corporate hierarchies, the gender pay gap persists beneath the rhetoric of meritocracy. In political life, women's representation is often performative, subsumed under masculinist leadership models that reward aggression and dominance over empathy and care. In academic spaces, male-centered epistemologies still dominate the intellectual canon, while feminist knowledge systems are ghettoized or dismissed as peripheral. What we are dealing with, then, is not the decline of patriarchy, but its concealment beneath democratic forms²¹.

Perhaps more insidiously, the neoliberal moment has not dismantled patriarchy but merely repackaged it. Feminist rhetoric has been appropriated by corporate and state structures that celebrate the “empowered woman,” yet demand she thrive within systems architected against her. The so-called “independent woman” is now valorized only insofar as she performs masculine-coded success, while bearing the disproportionate burdens of care, workplace hostility, and reproductive exploitation. Fraser²² argues that this is not gender liberation, it is patriarchy in its neoliberal costume: flexible, adaptive, yet structurally unrepentant.

In the Global South, patriarchal formations assume even more entrenched character, colliding with colonial legacies, religious orthodoxy, and economic scarcity. In Nigeria, for example, statutory provisions on women's rights often collapse before the weight of customary law. Inheritance rights remain deeply gendered, and institutional structures (from law enforcement to legislatures) continue to reproduce masculinist logics. This is not a simple case of cultural delay; it

is a strategic preservation of male privilege under conditions of economic and political fragility. As Amadiume²³ contends, gender in postcolonial African states becomes not just a social category but a metaphor for national order, where the subjugation of women serves as a proxy for institutional control.

Nevertheless, the endurance of patriarchy has not gone unchallenged. Across continents, women and gender minorities have mounted systemic resistance, through protest, policy, pedagogy, and alternative imaginaries. From *Ni Una Menos* in Latin America to feminist movements in East and West Africa, there has been an ongoing rupture of the patriarchal consensus. These struggles insist that patriarchy is not natural, it is constructed; and that what is constructed can be deconstructed. But as history warns, resistance that merely seeks reform risks being absorbed by the very order it seeks to confront. The goal cannot be symbolic inclusion alone. It must be a radical interrogation of who holds power, how it is distributed, and whose realities are made visible within public life²⁴.

Ultimately, patriarchy is not just a gender framework, it is a civilizational schema. It shapes how leadership is conceptualized, how institutions are built, and how value is distributed in society. To dismantle it is not only to advocate gender justice, but to reimagine the architecture of social order itself. Patriarchy thrives not merely through violence, but through normalization. It survives not only in law, but in language. And so, the task before us is not just to expose its injuries, but to unsettle its very grammar²⁵.

19. Hansen, C. W., Jensen, P. S., & Skovsgaard, C. V. (2015). Modern gender roles and agricultural history: the Neolithic inheritance. *Journal of Economic Growth*, 20(4), 365–404. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44113711>

20. Lerner, G. (1986). *The creation of patriarchy*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

21. World Economic Forum. (2023). *Global Gender Gap Report 2023*. Retrieved July 04, 2025, from <https://www.weforum.org/reports/global-gender-gap-report-2023/>.

22. Fraser, N. (2013). *Fortunes of feminism: From state-managed capitalism to neoliberal crisis*. Brooklyn. New York

23. Amadiume, I. (1997). *Reinventing Africa: Matriarchy, religion and culture*. Zed Books.

Aspects of Feminism

It is worth noting from this onset, that the dynamics to understanding feminism, gender equality, and women's empowerment in Nigeria requires an engagement with diverse feminist traditions with complementary and sometimes contrasting insights. Consequently, several strands of feminism abound, namely, liberal feminism, radical feminism, postcolonial feminism, eco-feminism, African feminism and Male Feminism; some of these are discussed in what follows.

Liberal Feminism

In their work *Liberal Feminist Jurisprudence: Foundational, Enduring, Adaptive*, featured in *The Oxford Handbook of Feminism and Law in the United States*, McClain and Hacker²⁶ emphasized that liberal feminism is rooted in Enlightenment ideals of individual rights, equality before the law, and the belief that social change can be achieved through legal and institutional reform. This feminist perspective opposes gender-based limitations and biases, promoting individual freedom, respect, and equal treatment. It makes use of liberal values and tools to advance women's rights, focusing on legal reform, scholarship, and grassroots organization. In the view of Pramanick²⁷, John Stuart Mill's utilitarian and liberal principles in his work such as *The Subjection of Women* (1869) constitute a direct contribution to liberal feminist thought, as it argues for gender equality. In the Nigerian context, liberal feminist ideals are reflected in campaigns for gender parity in governance, access to education, and constitutional protections for women's rights.

24. Aina, I. O. (2012). Two halves make a whole: Gender at the crossroads of the Nigerian development agenda. *African Sociological Review*, 16(1), 46–62

25. Alawode, O. O. (2024). Socioeconomic Determinants of Domestic Violence Against Women in Nigeria: Empirical Evidence from National Demographic and Health Survey Data. *Science Frontiers*, 5(4), 175–187. <https://doi.org/10.11648/j.sf.20240504.15>

26. McClain, L. C., & Hacker, B. K. (2022). Liberal feminist jurisprudence: Foundational, enduring, adaptive. In D. L. Brake, M. Chamallas, & V. L. Williams (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of feminism and law in the United States*. Oxford University Press. https://scholarship.law.bu.edu/faculty_scholarship/1153

27. Pramanick, S. (2022). John Stuart Mill's Liberal Feminism: Assessing its Impact on Gender Equality and Individual Freedom. *RESEARCH HUB International Multidisciplinary Research Journal*. 9. 47–51. 10.53573/rhimrj.2022.v09i12.008.

However, liberal feminism is often criticized for being overly focused on formal equality while neglecting deeper structural inequalities and cultural specificities. Thus, while liberal rights are essential for a just society (and rightly so) they are not, by themselves, sufficient tools to ensure human flourishing and solidarity²⁸.

Radical Feminism

Radical feminism as a theoretical construct maintains that patriarchy is a fundamental and systemic structure of oppression that permeates all aspects of society, on a universal scale extending beyond public sphere into private life, including family, sexuality and religion. According to Young-Bruehl and Wexler²⁹, the theory highlights women's shared interests and a sense of sisterhood that transcends class and race divisions, rooted directly in women's lived experiences rather than being adapted from pre-existing theoretical frameworks.

Some notable theorists include Shulamith Firestone, Kate Millett, Catharine MacKinnon, just to name a few, they stress that meaningful progress toward gender equality requires reimagining and overhauling existing social systems, rather than relying on slow, step-by-step reforms. While radical feminism helps to expose the often-invisible roots of gender-based violence and reproductive control in Nigeria, its universalist assumptions and dismissal of cultural nuances limit its direct applicability in African contexts. As Oyekanmi³⁰ points out, efforts to apply radical feminist frameworks in Nigeria often encounter resistance rooted in cultural traditions and customs. Thus, Simuziya's view becomes a plausible explanation, as he notes that the feminist movement is often viewed with skepticism in African societies, perceived as a colonial legacy with neo-imperial undertones³¹.

Postcolonial Feminism

Postcolonial feminist theory investigates the intersection between feminism and postcolonialism, focusing on the ways colonial histories shape women's experiences and identities. Prominent figures in this field include Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, and Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, among others. This approach examines how colonial narratives and systems of power influence women, especially in the Global South, and how women challenge and navigate these forms of oppression. In Nigeria, postcolonial feminist thought helps unpack how colonial administrative systems entrenched male dominance, disrupting precolonial gender relations that were often more balanced or complementary³².

It also draws attention to the marginalization of African women's voices in global feminist discourse. However, postcolonial feminism often functions primarily as a macro-analytic tool, offering broad critiques of colonial and global power structures, but it may lack the grounded specificity required to design or implement effective community-based interventions that address the immediate, localized needs of women.

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28. Law, S. A. (2019). In defense of liberal feminism. In R. West & G. C. Bowman (Eds.), *Research handbook on feminist jurisprudence* (pp. 24–43). Edward Elgar Publishing. <http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/journals/ELECD/2019/99.html>
 29. Young-Bruehl, E., & Wexler, L. (1992). On “Psychoanalysis and Feminism.” *Social Research*, 59(2), 453 –483. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40970700>
 30. Oyekanmi, F. (2005). Institutionalization of Gender Inequality in Nigeria: Implications for the Advancement of Women. *Population Review*. 44. 56-71. DOI:10.1353/prv.2005.0005
 31. Simuziya, Nsama. (2023). Perceptions of the Feminist Movement and Women’s Rights in the Context of Universal Rights vs Cultural & Religious Norms in African Societies: Feminism in Historical Perspective. *International Journal on Minority and Group Rights*. 30. 1-37. 10.1163/15718115-bja10108.
 32. Muraina, L. Opeyemi, & Ajimatanra eje, A. J. (2023). Gender relations in Indigenous Yorùbá culture: questioning current feminist actions and advocacies. *Third World Quarterly*, 44(9), 2031–2045. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2023.2213171>

African Feminism

African feminism is not a singular or uniform ideology, but a diverse movement encompassing multiple strands of thought. As Gaidzanwa³³ points out, it is more accurate to speak of "African feminisms" to reflect the variety of perspectives shaped by different cultural and historical contexts. Scholars such as Dosekun³⁴ emphasize the need for African women to define their own theoretical positions, resisting external representations by both Western feminists and African men. This study adopts an understanding of African feminism as dynamic and pluralistic, acknowledging its diverse theoretical traditions while contributing to the broader feminist discourse.

One of the central tenets of African feminism is "nego-feminism", coined by Nnaemeka³⁵, which emphasizes negotiation and collaboration over confrontation. This perspective resonates strongly in the Nigerian context, where many women navigate patriarchal structures not by outright rebellion but through tactical negotiation, adaptation, and subtle resistance within cultural frameworks. African feminism also avoids the dichotomy of Western feminism's "individual vs. collective" tension by emphasizing communal well-being, social justice, and interdependence.

Male Feminism

Male feminism is an emerging strand of feminism which seeks to embrace the possibilities of men contributing to the struggle to emancipate the female sex from patriarchal domination, exclusion, marginalization and disempowerment. It is feminism which seeks to show that men can also be allies and that masculinity can be positive. So, it advocates for the conscious enlistment or encouragement of fathers, sons, brothers and uncles to become allies in their families, communities, workplace

and schools so as to achieve the common aim of liberating the woman and girls.
Historical Trajectories of Gender and Power in Nigeria

Precolonial Era

Contrary to Western assumptions that premodern African societies were universally patriarchal, research indicates that women historically occupied prominent positions of authority, serving as queen-mothers, chiefs, and, in some instances, even as supreme monarchs³⁶.

Informed by African feminist thought, particularly the works of Amadiume³⁷, Mama³⁸ and Oyewùmí³⁹, this period is reinterpreted not as egalitarian in a liberal sense, but as one where gender roles were fluid, relational, and embedded in socio-cultural logic rather than fixed hierarchies.

Among the Yoruba, the Iyalode served as the official voice of women in political councils, overseeing market affairs and engaging in civic discourse alongside male chiefs. Similarly, Igbo women practiced a dual-sex political system that allowed women's assemblies (such as the Umuada and Mikiri) to hold men accountable through mechanisms like “sitting on a man,” a form of collective protest. In the Hausa and other northern groups, elite women such as the Magajiya wielded soft power within courtly and religious institutions. Oyewùmí⁴⁰ also affirms that the Owan people (now located in northern Edo) once maintained a social structure resembling matriarchy, where women held elevated social status largely because of

33. Gaidzanwa, R.B (2010), African Feminism: Rethinking approaches and reconsidering strategies. in BUWA: A Journal on African Women's Experiences. Vol. 1. Issue 1.

34. Dosekun S. (2021) African Feminisms. In: Yacob Haliso O., Falola T. (eds) The Palgrave Handbook of African Women's Studies. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-28099-4_58

35. Nnaemeka, O. (2004). Nego - Feminism: Theorizing, Practicing, and Pruning Africa's Way. Signs, 29(2), 357– 385. <https://doi.org/10.1086/378553>

36. Sudarkasa, N. (1986) . “The Status of Women” in Indigenous African Societies. Feminist Studies, 12(1), 91–103. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3177985>.

their dominance in the cotton trade.

These structures illustrate that precolonial Nigerian societies were not devoid of gendered power, but rather, organized power differently. Introduction of external factors such as Islam, Christianity, and Colonialism disrupted these structures, imposing Western patriarchal systems that marginalized women's economic and political participation.

Colonial Era

The emergence of British colonial rule in the late 19th century marked a pivotal disruption in gender relations across Nigeria. They imposed a Western model of patriarchal governance that systematically excluded women from political and economic leadership. African feminist scholars argue that colonialism did not simply marginalize women, but actively restructured gender systems, transforming previously complementary systems into hierarchies.

For example, indirect rule empowered male chiefs and disregarded traditional female authority figures, while Western education prioritized male children, deepening literacy gaps. Taxation policies and the transition to cash-crop economies also disempowered women economically, removing them from decision-making roles in agrarian societies.

African feminism frames this era as the importation of hegemonic patriarchy, one that alienated women from public life and invalidated indigenous structures where women had previously thrived. As Oyewùmí⁴¹ observes, colonialism not only

37. Amadiume, I. (1997). *Reinventing Africa: Matriarchy, religion and culture*. Zed Books.

38. Mama, A. (1995). *Beyond the Masks: Race, Gender and Subjectivity* (1st ed.). Routledge.
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203405499>

39. Oyewùmí, O. (1997). *The invention of women: Making an African sense of Western gender discourses*. University of Minnesota Press. Retrieved from: https://transreads.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/2023-11-25_6562750d9655d_TheInventionofWomenMakinganAfricanSenseofWesternGenderDiscoursesbyOyeronkeOyewumiz-lib.org_.pdf

40. Ibid.

41. Ibid.

imposed new institutions but also introduced gender as a biological and social organizing principle in a way that did not previously exist in some Nigerian contexts. Thus, it could therefore be argued that the Aba women's riot of 1929 was a direct feminist response to the entrenchment of colonial patriarchy in Nigeria, especially through the lens of African feminism.

Post-Colonial Era

Nigeria's independence in 1960 offered political autonomy but did not automatically translate into gender equality⁴², the newly formed state inherited and perpetuated colonial gender hierarchies, leaving women marginalized in governance, legal rights, and economic opportunities. This has led to the rise of organized feminist resistance, both intellectually and activist in the post-independence era.

Movements such as Women in Nigeria (WIN), established in the 1980s as a significant political and feminist organization focused on advocating for women's rights and social justice in Nigeria. The organization became a rallying point for legal reforms, reproductive rights, and equitable education. Intellectual figures like Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie and Amina Mama led the charge in articulating a distinctly African feminism, one that combats both patriarchy and neocolonialism, while centering the everyday realities of African women⁴³.

This period also ushered in legal recognitions, notably in the 1979 and 1999 Constitutions, where equality clauses were included. Yet, enforcement remained sporadic, as particularly at state and local levels. Hudson⁴⁴, though writing in the context of Rwanda and Côte d'Ivoire in *Peacebuilding Through a Gender Lens and the Challenges of Implementation in Rwanda and Côte d'Ivoire*, notes that African feminism critiques the disconnect between legal frameworks and lived experiences,

advocating for grounded, context-specific implementation strategies that acknowledge structural barriers. The same holds true in the Nigerian context

Contemporary Era

The 21st century has witnessed a transformation in feminist activism, as digital platforms have opened new frontiers for mobilization, critique, and solidarity. Movements such as #ArewaMeToo which provided a platform for many women to voice parts of their lives they had never shared before, #EndSARS (Feminist Coalition), and #ChildNotBride demonstrate the ways in which young, urban feminists use social media to challenge state violence, sexual abuse, and cultural taboos.

These movements embody what African feminist scholar Nnaemeka⁴⁵ calls “nego-feminism”, a feminism of negotiation and compromise rather than confrontation. By leveraging the internet, these activists redefine feminist practice, connecting local struggles to global discourses while reclaiming cultural identity. The Feminist Coalition, for instance, organized digital fundraisers and bail networks during the 2020 EndSARS protests, blending humanitarian action with gender advocacy⁴⁶.

42. Jaiyeola, O. E. and Aladegbol A.I. (2020). Patriarchy and Colonization: The "Brooder House" for Gender Inequality in Nigeria, *Journal of Research on Women and Gender* Volume 10, Pages 3 -22

43. Ogundipe-Leslie, M. (1994). *Re-creating ourselves: African women & critical transformations*. Africa World Press.

44. Hudson, H. (2009), *Peacebuilding Through a Gender Lens and the Challenges of Implementation in Rwanda and Côte d'Ivoire*.

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/248945592_Peace_building_Through_a_Gender_Lens_and_the_Challenges_of_Implementation_in_Rwanda_and_Cote_d'Ivoire

45. Nnaemeka, (2004). Nego - Feminism: Theorizing, Practicing, and Pruning Africa ' s Way. *Signs*, 29(2), 357 - 385.

<https://doi.org/10.1086/378553>

46. Oyosoro, F., Okafor, C., & Aigbe, R. (2022). The #EndSARS protest and Black cyberfeminism: A study of the Feminist Coalition and the rise of cyberfeminist ideologies in Nigeria. *Gender, Technology and Development*, 26(1), 1–18.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/09718524.2022.2144099>.

Moreover, this era has seen a surge in women's economic participation, political candidacy, and educational achievement, particularly in southern Nigeria. However, rural, conservative, and northern regions continue to witness gender-based constraints due to religious, legal, and cultural limitations. African feminism insists that such divergences require intersectional analysis, taking into account geography, class, religion, and ethnicity⁴⁷.

Conclusion

This chapter has laid the conceptual, theoretical and empirical groundwork for the book; it has critically placed feminism, gender equality and women's empowerment in clear relief. Of immense essence is the fact that the chapter conceptualized feminism as a consciousness, crusade or movement which seeks to eradicate the negatively socially constructed antagonism or separatism between the male and female sexes; it showed gender equality as the principle or doctrine which seeks to consciously create symmetry between men and women in rights, roles, responsibilities and opportunities whether in business, politics, religious activities or military service, etc. The chapter also conceptualized women's empowerment as the actual steps, policies and programmes designed, put in place or implemented to elevate the status of women in society vis-à-vis their male counterpart.

47. Chiweshe, M. (2018). More than body parts: Theorising gender within African spaces. In Handbook of research on theoretical perspectives on indigenous knowledge systems in developing countries (pp. 916 –926). IGI Global. <https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-5225-6912-1.ch069>

48. Gupta, P., Chintala, L., Rao, & Chakraborty, N. (2024). Legal and policy frameworks for women's empowerment: Global perspectives. *Journal of International Equality Research*, 4(3), 1526–4726. <https://doi.org/10.52783/jier.v4i3.1334>

49. Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999) as Amended. <https://nigeriarights.gov.ng/files/constitution.pdf>

50. Ibid.

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02

Chapter Two

Chapter Two

WHAT IS MALE FEMINISM?

By
Otive Igbuzor, PhD

INTRODUCTION

Historically, women have been marginalized in all areas including social, economic and political spheres¹. The current status of women in the world is precarious. One in every ten women is living in poverty. Women are less likely to have access to social protection. Women are more food insecure than men. Women and girls suffer most from lack of water and sanitation. Women are less likely than men to have access to financial institutions or have a bank account. The digital divide remains a gendered one with 37 percent of women globally not using internet, meaning 259 million fewer women have access to the internet than men². Women are more likely to be unemployed than men. Women farmers have less access to land. Environmental degradation and climate change have disproportionate impacts on women and children.

Women all over the world share a common feature of marginalisation in all spheres of life. In nearly all countries of the world, the dates of male universal suffrage differ from that of women as shown in the table below.

¹ Connel, R (2009), *Gender: In World Perspective* (2nd Edition). Polity Press; Lerner, G (1986), *The Creation of Patriarchy*. Oxford University Press; Moghadam, V. M. (2005), *Globalizing Women: Feminist Networks*. Johns Hopkins University Press and Walby, S. (1990), *Theorizing Patriarchy*. Basil Blackwell.

² UN Women (2024), *Facts and Figures: Economic Empowerment* (www.unwomen.org)

³ Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)(2020), *Women in Parliament 1995 -2020. 25 Years*.
<https://ipu.org/resources/publications/reports/2020-03/women-in-parliament-1995-2020-25-years-in-review>.

Table One: Democratisation of suffrage in Selected countries

Country	Male Universal Suffrage	Female Universal Suffrage	Difference in years
Australia	1903	1908	5
Canada	1915/18	1920	2
France	1869/71	1946	75
Great Britain	1877	1928	51
Italy	1925	1946	21
Sweden	1423	1921	498
Portugal	1911	1974	63
Japan	1918/19	1947	28
United States of America	1856 (for White Men)	1965	109
Nigeria	1922	1979	57

From the table above, it is clear that in all parts of the world, women have been historically discriminated against in electoral issues. Similarly, women are marginalized in political leadership. The number of Women in parliament all over the world is not commensurate with the population of women. Meanwhile, studies show that higher number of women in parliament generally contributes to stronger attention to women issues³. Fortunately, there is increasing participation of women in parliament but as at 2009, only 17 heads of state are women; only 25 % of parliamentarians are women. As at 2025, women in parliament is still at 27.2 percent⁴. There are many factors that hinder women participation in politics. These include patriarchy, violence, money, cultural barriers and religious barriers.

The situation in Nigeria is more precarious than many other parts of the world. The constitutional history of Nigeria shows that this exclusion dates back to the colonial times when women were not allowed to vote. The Clifford constitution of 1922

restricted the electorate to adult males in Calabar and Lagos who have been resident in the city for at least one year and had a gross annual income of 100 pounds sterling. The Richard constitution of 1946 only reduced the property qualification to 50 pounds sterling. The Macpherson constitution removed property qualification but still restricted the electorate to only adult males who pay their taxes. In fact, it was not until 1979 before the right to vote was extended to all Nigerian women. While men were guaranteed voting rights by the Clifford Constitution of 1922, women in all parts of the country started voting in 1979, a difference of fifty-seven years.

Table Two: Democratisation of suffrage in Nigeria

YEAR	CONSTITUTION	SUFFRAGE
1914	Amalgamation	None
1922	Clifford	Adult Males with annual income of 100 pounds sterling
1946	Richards	Adult Males with annual income of 50 pounds sterling
1951	Macpherson	Adult Males who paid their taxes
1954	Lyttleton	Adult Males+ Females in East & West
1960	Independence	Adult Males+ Females in East & West
1963	Republican	Adult Males+ Females in East & West
1979	Presidential	Adult Males & Females

The end result is that the number of women in political leadership is very low in Nigeria.

It has been documented that in Nigeria, women and girls suffer systematic disadvantage and discrimination that is magnified for those in the poorest states and sectors of society⁵. Nigeria's 80.2 million women and girls have significantly worse life chances than men and also their sisters in comparable societies. In Nigeria, 60-79 percent of the rural work force is women but men are five times more likely to own land. Women with dependants pay more tax than men. Women in formal employment are paid less than men. Nearly five times as many judges and permanent secretaries are men rather than women. At a time only 4 percent of local government councillors are women. Up to one third of Nigerian women have been subjected to violence⁶.

All over the world, there are significant gender gaps persisting in areas such as education, employment, political representation and access to health care. According to the World Economic Forum Global Gender Gap Report 2023, at the current rate of progress, it will take 162 years to close the political empowerment gender gap and 169 years for the economic participation and opportunity gender gap⁷. These gaps have profound negative implications for women limiting their opportunities and potential, and for society as a whole hindering economic growth and development. Therefore, accelerating gender equality is a matter of social justice and human rights.

⁴ Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)(2025), Women in Parliament 1995 -2025.

⁵ British Council (2012), Gender in Nigeria Report 2012

⁶ Ibid

In Nigeria, there is social exclusion of women. According to the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2023 Nigeria is ranked 130th out of 146 countries in terms of gender equality highlighting the extent of the problem⁸. According to UNICEF, the net enrolment rate for girls in primary education is 60 percent, compared to 66 percent for boys⁹. In addition, girls are more likely to drop out of school due to early marriage, pregnancy or financial constraints. The female labour force participation rate in Nigeria is 52.2 percent compared to 65.9 percent for men in 2023¹⁰. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), maternal mortality rate in Nigeria are among the highest in the world, with 512 deaths per 100,000 live births¹¹. Women's representation in politics and decision making positions is one of the lowest in the world. Men in Nigeria started voting in 1923 but the first time all Nigerian women voted in a general election was in 1979, 56 years later. The percent of women parliamentarians at the Federal House of Representatives is 4.7 percent and Senate is 2.7 percent¹². This is one of the lowest in the world when compared with other countries: Rwanda- 61.25 percent; South Africa-46.23 percent; Senegal-46.06 percent; Namibia-44.23 percent; Mozambique-43.2 percent; Cape Verde- 41.67 percent; Ethiopia-41.31 percent; Burundi- 38.21 percent; Tanzania- 37.4 percent; Cameroun-33.89 percent; Uganda- 33.81 percent and Angola- 33.64 percent.

Men and women operate in a patriarchal society which is dominated by men. But women leaders bring unique perspectives and approaches that differ from traditional male leadership styles. Understanding these differences can provide insight on their influence on governance and societal transformation. First and foremost, women tend to adopt a more collaborative style of leadership. This approach emphasizes team work and participatory decision making and fosters inclusivity and consensus among stakeholders. In contrast, men are more associated

with competitive leadership style which prioritise authority and top-down decision making approaches. For instance, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the former Prime Minister of New Zealand, Jacinda Ardeen employed a collaborative approach engaging various stakeholders. She was able to ensure compliance and trust and got better result than most other countries. Secondly, research shows that women leaders exhibit higher levels of emotional intelligence and empathy enabling them to connect with their teams and constituents on a personal level. A study by Korn Ferry that found women scoring higher than men in 11 out of 12 emotional intelligence competencies highlights the gender differences in skills crucial for effective leadership. These competencies include emotional self-awareness, empathy, adaptability, and interpersonal relationships. The findings emphasize that women, on average, are more adept at understanding and managing emotions, making them particularly effective in roles requiring collaboration, conflict resolution, and team-building. Thirdly, while men are often seen as more willing to take bold risks, women are perceived to be more cautious and calculated in their decision-making. This difference can result in more sustainable and long-term governance strategies under women leaders. A good example is Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, Africa's first elected female president who successfully guided Liberia through post-conflict rebuilding with cautious policies. Another difference is that women leaders prioritize active listening, detailed communication, and fostering open dialogue, whereas male leaders may focus on assertive and directive communication. This difference can lead to more transparent and inclusive governance processes under women's leadership. Furthermore, women often adopt a transformational leadership style, inspiring their teams through vision and motivation. Men, however, are more likely to adopt a transactional approach, which focuses on tasks and rewards. For example, Indra Nooyi, former CEO of Pepsi Company, is renowned for her transformational leadership that combined profitability with social responsibility. Moreover, it has

been shown that women leaders tend to champion issues like education, healthcare, child welfare, and gender equity, leading to policies that promote social development. When women are in Parliament, there are more budgetary allocation to these issues. It has been argued that the introduction of progressive family policies in Scandinavian countries has been influenced by women's leadership in governance. A crucial difference is in conflict management and peacebuilding. It is well known that women leaders bring unique skills to negotiation and peacebuilding, often focusing on dialogue and reconciliation. The pivotal role played by women in the Liberian Peace process in 2003 is well documented. Finally, studies suggest that women leaders are less likely to engage in corruption, emphasizing ethical and transparent governance. A World Bank report (2016) noted a correlation between higher representation of women in government and lower levels of corruption¹³.

The challenges faced by women across the world led to the emergence of feminism, **a belief system and movement** that advocates for equal rights for women and men across all areas of life¹⁴. While feminism has historically been associated with the struggles and activism of women, the support and involvement of men have become increasingly recognised as critical in dismantling the patriarchal structures that perpetuate inequality. This chapter explores the meaning, relevance, challenges and opportunities of male feminism with a particular focus on Nigeria.

⁷ World Economic Forum (2023), Global Gender Gap Report, 2023

⁸ World Economic Forum (2021), Global Gender Gap Report 2023.

⁹ UNICEF (2020), Girls' Education in Nigeria.

¹⁰ World Bank Gender Data Portal (<https://genderdata.worldbank.org>)

¹¹ World Health Organisation (WHO)(2020), Maternal Mortality in Nigeria.

¹² PLAC (2023), Worrying Numbers for Women in 10th NASS (www.placng.org)

¹³ World Bank (2016), Women, Business and the Law Report.

¹⁴ Hooks, B (2000), Feminism is for everybody: Passionate Politics. South End Press.

2. CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION OF MALE FEMINISM

Feminism is a belief system, movement, and global struggle against patriarchal and intersecting forms of oppression, to ensure political, economic, and social equality and justice for all sexes

Male feminism is therefore a belief system, movement and struggle by men against patriarchy and all forms of oppression of women. Male Feminists are men who believe in feminist thought and activism acknowledging male privilege, listening to women's voices, challenging sexism and taking intentional steps to promote gender equality¹⁵. Male feminism involves the support and advocacy by men for the principles and goals of feminism, namely the political, economic and social equality of sexes in terms of rights and opportunities.

Male feminism refers to the support and advocacy by men for the principles and goals of feminism—namely, the political, economic, and social equality of the sexes. In Nigeria and many parts of the world, male feminism is emerging as a critical movement aimed at dismantling patriarchy and creating a just society where both women and men can thrive. While feminism has historically been associated with women's struggles, the involvement of men as allies and advocates is now widely recognized as indispensable for sustainable gender transformation.

Several scholars have pointed out that Feminism by definition and practice is not just about women but about human beings collectively dealing with the challenges of women. According to Helen LaKelly Hunt,

I think it's so important to understand that feminism is not about women.

Feminism is about human beings. Feminism is about the creation. It's a consciousness of how we are interrelated to each other. Whole feminism is a new kind of consciousness where no person is free, as Martin Luther King Jr. said, until all people are free. It's about a human regard that we have for one another, being expressed in our daily actions.”¹⁶

Taking a cue from Hunt, Chom Bagu has argued that:

If it is not about women then, it does not need an exclusive gang of women to deal with it. If it is about human beings, then it's a problem for all humanity to deal with. In dealing with it from this perspective, everyone ready to contribute to the success of the cause is welcome. This was part of the perspective from which the founding documents of WIN saw it.¹⁷

Ojobo Atuluku has posited that to argue that feminism is only about women's issues is a misconception. According to her,

The most frequent misconception about feminism is that feminism is solely about "women's issues." "Women's issues" are everybody issues. Also, feminism by nature of it being about equality also works to liberate men from their "roles." Examples of what is changing as a result of feminism should not be limited to women's lives, but also include the fact that feminist and feminist discourse/thinking has always been at the forefront of the civil rights movement; children's rights movement; labor rights movements; peace movements. Although many leaders of feminism have been women, not all feminists are women. Some feminists argue that men should not take positions of leadership in the movement, because men, having been socialized to aggressively seek positions of power or direct the agendas within a leadership hierarchy, would apply this tendency to feminist organizations; or that women, having been socialized to defer to men, would be hindered in developing or expressing their own self-leadership in working too closely with men. However, most feminists do accept and seek the support of men.¹⁸

Actually, there are several misconceptions surrounding male feminism. First, there is the misconception that feminism is only for women. While it is true that feminism arose from women's experiences, it is a belief and movement, and its goals are

inclusive and aim to create a better society for all. Therefore, both men and women can be involved in it. Secondly, there is a misconception that male feminists are less masculine. This stereotype discourages men from embracing feminist ideals. On the contrary, quality men do not fear equality with women. Male feminism calls for courageous male leadership to challenge and dismantle patriarchal oppressive systems. Finally, there is the misconception that male feminism is a betrayal of male identity. Nothing can be farther from the truth. This misconception is based on a flawed view of masculinity rooted in dominance rather than co-operation and partnership. However, it must be admitted that the issue is contentious. Many people argue that men can only be allies in the Feminist movement and not as core Feminists. Others contend that the term male feminism is inherently contradictory and a classic oxymoron. They argue that feminism, at its core, is a movement led by women, for women, to challenge patriarchal structures and from this perspective, inclusion of male undermines the autonomy, authority and epistemological foundation of feminism itself.¹⁹ But our contention is that there are men who recognise these limitations and are ready to give up patriarchal privileges and interrogate patriarchal norms and provide alternatives.

¹⁵Flood, M (2019), *Engaging Men and Boys in Violence Prevention*. Palgrave Macmillan.

¹⁶Hunt, H.L. *Faith and Feminism: A Holy Alliance*

¹⁷Bagu, C. (2005), *Reinventing the Feminist Agenda in Nigeria*. A Perspective Paper Presented to the Steering Committee of the Feminist Movement of Nigeria on 13th June, 2005 at ActionAid Nigeria Conference Hall, Abuja.

¹⁸Atuluku, O. (2005), *Feminism: Global Concepts and Context*. A paper presented at a workshop on Re -birth of a Contemporary Feminist Movement on 8th March, 2005.

3. RATIONALE, ROLE AND CHALLENGES OF MALE FEMINISM

The rationale for male feminism is grounded in the understanding that patriarchy not only oppresses women but also limits the emotional, social, and psychological development of men. In Nigeria, where entrenched gender norms contribute to widespread discrimination, violence against women, and unequal opportunities, male feminism is a necessary strategy for societal transformation.

As noted above, there is a huge gender gap in Nigeria. To bridge this gap, men must move from being bystanders to becoming co-advocates of gender equality. Male engagement is crucial in addressing the root causes of violence against women and girls. Male feminists challenge the normalization of violence and promote non-violent conflict resolution.²⁰ In many Nigerian communities, patriarchal norms uphold male superiority. Male feminists can challenge the cultural and religious constructs and model equitable behaviour in homes, workplaces, and religious spaces. Male feminism liberates men from restrictive gender roles that discourage vulnerability, empathy, and emotional intelligence. It has been shown that societies that empower women experience faster economic growth, better governance, and improved social outcomes.²¹ Therefore, men who advocate for gender equality contribute to nation-building.

But there are challenges to male feminism. Male feminists often face ridicule or exclusion. They are seen as weak or “women wrapper”, a derogatory term used to describe a man who is perceived as being too submissive or controlled by a woman especially his wife or girl friend. In addition, they face exclusion from women feminists who believe that men cannot be feminists. Moreover, many men struggle to unlearn deeply ingrained beliefs about male dominance and often exhibit behaviours not congruent with feminist ideals. Moreover, male involvement can become symbolic rather than being transformative.

In spite of the challenges, male feminists play crucial roles in advancing gender equality. First, they can act as advocates. Men can use their voices and platforms to speak out against gender injustice, support feminist campaigns, and demand policy reforms. Secondly, men can promote allyship in feminist movement. Being a good ally involves listening to women, amplifying their voices, and respecting their leadership. Thirdly, male feminists can model the behavioural change needed in a society where there is equality of sexes. Male feminists can model non-violent, respectful, and equitable behaviour in their homes, workplaces, and communities. Fourthly, male feminists can engage in mentorship and education. Educating boys and young men about gender equality helps to build a new generation of gender sensitive leaders. Finally, male feminists can influence law, policies and practices. Male feminists can influence legislative processes to promote laws and policies that protect and empower women, and eventually lead to change in practice.

It is important to point out that male feminism benefits women, men and society as a whole. Male feminism leads to greater support, reduced violence, shared responsibilities, and amplified voices for women. For men, it promotes emotional freedom, healthier relationships, broader life choices, and more authentic expressions of self and for society, it leads to greater social cohesion, economic development, and peace.

¹⁹ Hooks, B. (2000), *Feminism is for Everybody: Passionate Politics*. South End Press.

²⁰ UN Women (2022), *Engaging Men and Boys in Gender Equality* <https://www.unwomen.org>

²¹ World Bank (2012), *World Development Report 2012. Gender Equality and Development*. Washington DC, World Bank.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The chapter underscores the historical and systemic marginalization of women across the world, with a specific focus on Nigeria. It highlights how entrenched patriarchal norms continue to deprive women of equal opportunities in political representation, economic participation, education, and healthcare. The data presented reveal the magnitude of gender disparity and the urgency of collective action to address it.

Male feminism emerges as a crucial strategy in the struggle for gender equality. It represents a transformative approach where men not only acknowledge their societal privileges but actively work to dismantle oppressive structures that affect both women and men. Male feminists challenge harmful norms, serve as allies, and advocate for inclusive policies, thereby contributing meaningfully to nation-building, social justice, and sustainable development. Despite facing resistance, stigmatization, and misconceptions, the role of male feminists remains indispensable in promoting equitable societies.

Recommendations

1. Promote Gender Equality Education and Awareness

Incorporate comprehensive gender education into school curricula and community programs to challenge stereotypes and promote gender-sensitive attitudes among boys and men from an early age.

2. Encourage and Support Male Allies

Develop initiatives that support and encourage men to become active participants in the feminist movement. This can include mentorship programs, allyship training, and public campaigns that highlight positive male role models.

3. Address Cultural and Religious Barriers

Engage cultural and religious leaders in dialogues and training to

reinterpret and promote teachings that support gender equality, leveraging their influence to shift public perceptions.

4. Strengthen Legal and Policy Frameworks

Advocate for gender-responsive laws and policies that promote equal representation, protect women's rights, and address gender-based violence. Male feminists in leadership positions should use their platforms to drive legislative reforms.

5. Promote Shared Leadership and Inclusion in Feminist Spaces

Feminist movements should create inclusive spaces where men can contribute meaningfully without overshadowing women's voices. There should be a balance between allyship and leadership to prevent the co-option of the feminist agenda.

6. Document and Disseminate Stories of Change

Share stories of male feminists who have made positive impacts in their communities to inspire others and demonstrate the tangible benefits of gender equality for all.

7. Address Toxic Masculinity and Redefine Masculine Norms

Launch campaigns and dialogues to deconstruct harmful definitions of masculinity, promoting a version of manhood rooted in empathy, respect, and equality.

8. Institutionalize Male Engagement in Development Programs

Development partners, NGOs, and government agencies should integrate male engagement strategies into gender equality programs and measure their impact over time.

If the recommendations above are implemented in Nigeria, we will be on the way to promoting gender equality in Nigeria.

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03

Chapter Three

Chapter Three

FEMINIST THEORY AND PRACTICE

By
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Introduction

Feminist theory offers a critical framework for understanding how power, inequality, and exclusion are structured and maintained across societies. It interrogates the systems, patriarchy, capitalism, racism, religion, and colonialism that shape gender relations and social hierarchies. Over time, feminist thought has evolved from early liberal demands for formal equality to more complex critiques of the intersections between gender, race, class, and culture. This evolution reflects the growing recognition that gender-based oppression is neither uniform nor ahistorical, and that feminist struggles must be grounded in context and experience.

In Africa, and Nigeria in particular, feminist theory has developed in response to both local realities and global discourses. African feminists have pushed back against the universalism of Western feminist paradigms, advancing culturally grounded frameworks such as *STIWA*, *nego-feminism*, *motherism*, and *womanism* that reflect the lived experiences, histories, and values of African women. These frameworks are not only theoretical; they are practical tools of resistance and negotiation in settings where patriarchy is reinforced by tradition, religion, law, and economic marginalisation.

The Nigerian feminist movement has evolved through multiple phases, from anti-colonial mobilisation and post-independence organising to the emergence of ideologically explicit feminist collectives such as Women in Nigeria (WIN), and more recently, digitally mobilised movements like the Feminist Coalition. Throughout, feminist activism has consistently challenged structural injustice while adapting to shifting political, cultural, and technological landscapes.

This chapter explores the theoretical foundations and practical expressions of feminism, with a particular focus on Nigeria. It examines the key strands of feminist thought, their areas of convergence and divergence, and how they have shaped feminist activism in Nigeria. Central to this analysis is the concept of praxis, which refers to the interplay between theory and action, and the importance of intersectional, grounded, and inclusive feminist practices. In doing so, the chapter reaffirms the ongoing relevance of feminist theory in addressing Nigeria's socio-political challenges and envisions a transformative feminist future grounded in justice, dignity, and collective liberation.

Historical and Theoretical Foundations of Feminism

Feminist theory is often narrated in waves, each representing distinct historical moments and ideological priorities. The first wave, emerging in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, was primarily concerned with legal inequalities, especially women's suffrage, property rights, and access to education. Pioneers such as Mary Wollstonecraft¹, laid the philosophical foundation for liberal feminism by asserting women's rationality and their right to equal treatment.

The second wave of feminism, spanning the 1960s to the 1980s, expanded the struggle to issues of sexuality, reproductive rights, workplace discrimination, and domestic roles. It was marked by deeper critiques of patriarchy, the family structure, and systemic inequality. Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*² introduced the idea that “one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman,” positioning gender as a socially constructed category³. This period also witnessed the emergence of radical, socialist, and cultural feminist strands.

The third wave, emerging in the 1990s, responded to the critiques of essentialism and exclusion in earlier waves. It emphasised intersectionality, diversity, and the agency of women from marginalised identities. Bell hooks, in works such as *Ain't I a Woman*⁴ and *Feminism is for Everybody*⁵, critiqued racism within feminist movements and centred Black women's experiences, arguing for an inclusive, transformative feminist politics.

The fourth wave, often associated with digital activism, emerged in the 2010s and continues to this day. It focuses on sexual harassment, body autonomy, queer and trans rights, and gender-based violence, often mobilised through online platforms and movements such as *#MeToo*. Thinkers like Judith Butler further expanded feminist theory by challenging the binary conception of gender. In *Gender Trouble*⁶, Butler argued that gender is performative rather than innate, opening new avenues for queer theory and non-binary activism.

Although the discourse and feminist action came in waves, feminism is not a monolithic ideology but a constellation of diverse theoretical traditions and activist orientations. Over time, distinct strands of feminism have emerged, each offering

unique explanations of gender inequality and prescribing different pathways for achieving social justice. These strands reflect the multiplicity of women's experiences across class, race, culture, and geography, and are shaped by both global intellectual traditions and local struggles. Understanding these strands is crucial for comprehending the complexity of feminist theory and its application in Nigeria and the broader African context.

There is no single, universally accepted classification of feminist theory, as scholars interpret and categorise its strands in varying ways. However, for the purpose of this chapter, we identify six broad strands of feminism to guide our analysis.

¹ Wollstonecraft, M. (1792). *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. Penguin Classics.

² Simone de Beauvoir. (1949). *The second sex* (H. M. Parshley, Trans.). Vintage Books. (Original work published 1949)

³ Simone de Beauvoir, (1949). *Ibid*

⁴ bell hooks, (1981). *Ain't I a woman: Black women and feminism*, South End Press. NOTE: *bell hooks* (born Gloria Jean Watkins) intentionally styled her name in lowercase letters as a political statement. She explained that: "The focus should be on the substance of my writing, not who I am." By decentering the self and rejecting traditional rules of naming, hooks emphasised that her ideas and the issues she wrote about, particularly concerning race, gender, and class, were more important than her personal identity or status.

⁵ Bell hook, (2000). *Feminism is for everybody: Passionate politics*. South End Press.

⁶ Butler, J. (1990). *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. Routledge.

1. Liberal Feminism

Liberal feminism is one of the earliest and most dominant traditions within feminist thought, particularly in Western contexts. It is rooted in Enlightenment ideals of individual rights, equality before the law, and rationality. Liberal feminists argue that gender inequality arises from the denial of equal rights and opportunities to women, and that reforming existing institutions, such as education, the legal system, and the labour market, can achieve gender justice.

Key liberal feminist thinkers include Mary Wollstonecraft⁷, whose work provides a foundational liberal feminist text advocating for women's education and equality. Betty Friedan's⁸, *The Feminine Mystique*, a classic liberal feminist work that sparked the second wave of feminism in the United States and *The Subjection of Women* by John Stuart Mill⁹, also one of the classic liberal arguments for gender equality and women's rights. All of these discourses advocated for equal access to public life and the removal of discriminatory laws. In practice, liberal feminism tends to focus on issues such as women's suffrage, equal pay, legal rights, and political representation.

However, critics, particularly from Marxist and Black feminist traditions, argue that liberal feminism often reflects the interests of middle-class, educated women and ignores the deeper structural and cultural dimensions of patriarchy (hooks, 2000).

2. Radical Feminism

Radical feminism sees patriarchy as a fundamental system of oppression that is deeply embedded in social institutions, cultural norms, and interpersonal relationships. It posits that gender inequality cannot be reformed within existing

structures but must be dismantled through a radical transformation of society. Radical feminists focus heavily on the control of women's bodies, sexuality, and reproductive rights. They have played key roles in bringing issues such as domestic violence, rape, pornography, and sexual harassment into public discourse.

Pioneers such as Andrea Dworkin, who authored the book *Pornography: Men Possessing Women*, provided a fundamental radical feminist critique of pornography. Dworkin argues that pornography is a form of violence against women and serves as a central tool of patriarchal domination. Her work significantly influenced radical feminist discussions on sexuality, male power, and bodily autonomy¹⁰. Catharine MacKinnon is one of the pioneering liberal theorists; she developed a comprehensive theory explaining how the state and law institutionalise male dominance. MacKinnon critiques liberal, Marxist, and radical approaches while advancing a legal theory grounded in women's lived experiences of power and subordination¹¹. Additionally, her groundbreaking work on sexual harassment as a form of sex discrimination under United States law, laid the foundation for legal and institutional responses to workplace harassment and has had a significant global influence¹².

⁷ Wollstonecraft, M. (1792). *A vindication of the Rights of Woman : With Structures on Political and Moral Subjects* . J. Johnson.

⁸ Friedan, B. (1963). *The feminine mystique* . W. W. Norton & Company.

⁹ Mill, J. S. (1869). *The subjection of women* . Longmans, Green, Reader, and Dyer.

¹⁰ Dworkin, A. (1981). *Pornography: Men possessing women*. Perigee Books ; see her other works , Dworkin, A. (1987). *Intercourse*. Free Press and Dworkin, A., & MacKinnon, C. A. (1988). *Pornography and civil rights: A new day for women's equality*. Organizing Against Pornography.

¹¹ MacKinnon, C. A. (1989). *Toward a feminist theory of the state* . Harvard University Press.

¹² MacKinnon, C. A. (1979). *Sexual harassment of working women* : A case of sex discrimination. Yale University Press.

In *The Dialectic of Sex*, Shulamith Firestone offers one of the earliest and most influential articulations of radical feminist theory. Drawing on Marxist and Freudian thought, Firestone argues that gender oppression predates class oppression and that the biological division of labour, especially women's role in reproduction, is the foundation of patriarchy. She argues that patriarchy is universal and predates capitalism¹³. Her central thesis is that the subjugation of women is rooted in biology, particularly in the control of women's reproductive capacities (pregnancy, childbirth, and child-rearing). She contends that the traditional family structure is the primary institution through which male dominance is reproduced.

3. Marxist and Socialist Feminism

Marxist feminism locates the roots of women's oppression in the capitalist system, where women's unpaid domestic labour and reproductive roles sustain the economy. It argues that patriarchy and capitalism are mutually reinforcing systems that must be overthrown together. This strand of feminism builds on the foundational analysis of Friedrich Engels, who argued that women's subjugation arose historically with the advent of private property and class society. In *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*¹⁴ Engels contends that the patriarchal family was not a natural institution but a product of economic relations designed to control women's sexuality and reproductive capacity, thereby ensuring the transmission of property through male lineage. This economic structuring of gender relations, Marxist feminists argue, is integral to the functioning of capitalist societies, where the unpaid and invisible labour of women underpins both the family unit and the wider economic system.

Building on this foundation, Alexandra Kollontai¹⁵ and later thinkers like Silvia Federici¹⁶ and Lise Vogel¹⁷ expanded the analysis of how capitalism organises and

exploits women's reproductive labour. Kollontai emphasised that bourgeois feminism could not adequately address the needs of working-class women, advocating instead for collective solutions, such as communal childcare and socialised domestic labour. Federici¹⁸, linked the rise of capitalism to the violent disciplining of women's bodies, especially through the witch hunts, which she viewed as mechanisms for enforcing control over reproduction. Vogel, meanwhile, offered a unitary theory that integrates the spheres of production and social reproduction, arguing that both are central to understanding women's oppression under capitalism.

Other Marxist feminists such as Angela Davis¹⁹, Mariarosa Dalla Costa²⁰ and Selma James, and Christine Delphy²¹, introduced intersectional and materialist critiques that exposed the gendered and racial dimensions of labour. Davis challenged both feminist and Marxist movements to confront the specific ways capitalism exploits Black and working-class women, including through domestic work and incarceration. Dalla Costa and James emphasised that housework is not a natural duty but a form of labour crucial to the capitalist system, demanding recognition and remuneration. Delphy went further to argue that patriarchy itself functions as an

¹³Shulamith Firestone (1970). *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution*. William Morrow.

¹⁴Engels, F. (1884). *The origin of the family, private property and the State*. (Reprint, Penguin Classics, 2010).

¹⁵Kollontai, A. (1909). *The Social Basis of the Woman Question*. Retrieved from

<http://www.marxists.org/archive/kollonta/1909/social-basis.htm>

¹⁶Federici, S. (2004). *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation*. Autonomedia.

¹⁷Vogel, L. (1983). *Marxism and the oppression of women: Toward a unitary theory*. Rutgers University Press.

¹⁸Federici, S. (2004). *Op.cit.*

¹⁹Davis, A. Y. (1981). *Women, Race, & Class*. Random House.

²⁰Dalla Costa, M., & James, S. (1972). *The power of women and the subversion of the community*. Falling Wall Press.

²¹Delphy, C. (1984). *Close to home: A Materialist Analysis of Women's Oppression*. Hutchinson.

economic system in which men, not just capitalists, extract value from women's domestic labour. Together, these theorists advance a powerful critique of capitalism's reliance on gendered exploitation and the need for structural transformation that transcends both class and gender oppression.

Marxist feminism combines insights from both Marxism and radical feminism, emphasising that women's oppression is both economic and ideological. It emphasises the importance of intersectionality, highlighting how capitalism, patriarchy, and race intersect in complex ways. This strand is particularly resonant in postcolonial contexts, including Nigeria, where economic exploitation and gendered labour are central issues.

4. Black and Intersectional Feminism

Black feminism emerged in response to the marginalisation of Black women within both the mainstream (white, middle-class) feminist movements and the male-dominated civil rights and nationalist movements. Black feminists argued that the dominant feminist discourse often failed to account for the interlocking oppressions of race, class, and gender. They insisted that Black women's experiences could not be adequately understood through a single-axis lens focused only on gender, and called for a more inclusive framework that addressed multiple dimensions of marginalisation.

One of the most influential early voices was bell hooks, whose groundbreaking work *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism*²² exposed the compounded effects of racism and sexism on Black women. hooks argued that slavery had uniquely dehumanised Black women, stripping them of the ideals of womanhood even as white feminists claimed those ideals as their basis for liberation. In *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, she further contended that feminism must be radically redefined to include voices from the margins, especially those of poor and racialised women, whose lives are shaped by structural inequality across multiple dimensions.²³

Angela Davis examined the intersection of race, class, and gender in her analysis. In *Women, Race, and Class*²⁴, Davis illustrated how the suffrage movement in the U.S. frequently sidelined the interests of Black women, even as they actively participated in anti-slavery and labour movements. She examined how Black women's reproductive rights, domestic labour, and incarceration were sites of intersecting oppression under capitalism and white supremacy²⁵.

²²hooks, bell, 1984 op.cit.

²³hooks, b. (1984). *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Centre*. South End Press.

²⁴Davis, A. Y. (1981). *Women, Race, and Class*. Random House.

²⁵Davis, A. Y. (1981). Ibid.

Kimberlé Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality further deepened this analysis by illustrating how systems of oppression overlap and produce unique experiences of disadvantage²⁶. She argued that traditional frameworks of discrimination often treat identity categories as separate and independent, thereby overlooking the unique vulnerabilities faced by individuals at the intersection of multiple marginalised identities. Her concept of intersectionality showed how individuals can face multiple, simultaneous systems of oppression, a framework that has since become foundational to contemporary feminist and anti-racist thought globally. Intersectionality, as she framed it, offers a more nuanced lens for understanding how laws, policies, and social institutions can invisibilise or exclude those whose experiences do not fit neatly into single-issue categories. This framework has since become a foundational tool in feminist theory, anti-racist advocacy, and human rights discourse around the

Collectives like the *Combahee River Collective* also played a foundational role in articulating Black feminist politics. In their 1977 statement, they described how their oppression as Black women was shaped by “interlocking systems” of race, gender, class, and sexuality. They rejected both the racism of white feminism and the sexism of Black nationalist movements, calling instead for an anti-capitalist, inclusive, and transformative politics²⁸.

Together, Black and intersectional feminists have reshaped the feminist landscape, insisting on contextual, inclusive, and grounded analyses that reflect the lived experiences of women at the intersections of multiple systems of domination. Their work has influenced not only academic theory but also activism, especially in postcolonial contexts like Nigeria, where gender is often intertwined with ethnicity, religion, class, and regional identity.

5. African Feminism

African feminism has developed as both a political practice and an intellectual tradition, rooted in the lived experiences of African women and responding to the specific intersections of colonialism, patriarchy, capitalism, religion, and heteronormativity. It challenges the Eurocentric foundations of mainstream feminist theory while confronting local systems of gendered oppression. African feminism is therefore a diverse and evolving body of thought and practice that responds to the specific historical, cultural, social, and political realities of women across the African continent. Unlike Western feminist paradigms that often emphasise individualism, confrontation, or abstract universality, African feminism is grounded in community, negotiation, cultural specificity, and postcolonial critique. It emerges from a consciousness that African women experience patriarchy not in isolation, but in conjunction with the legacies of colonialism, economic marginalisation, class inequalities, and religious orthodoxy²⁹.

A defining characteristic of African feminism is its rejection of one-size-fits-all models of feminism imported from the West. It emphasises that African women are not passive victims but agents who have historically negotiated power within their families, communities, and political spaces. This has given rise to multiple

²⁶Crenshaw, K. (1991). *Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Colour*. Stanford Law Review, 43(6), 1241 –1299.

²⁷Crenshaw, K. (1991). *Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Colour*. Stanford Law Review, 43(6), 1241 –1299. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1229039>

²⁸Combahee River Collective. (1982). A Black feminist statement. In G. T. Hull, P. B. Scott, & B. Smith (Eds.), *All the Women are White, All the Blacks are Men, but Some of us are Brave*: Black women's studies (pp. 13 –22). Feminist Press.

²⁹Aina, I. O. (2012). “Two Halves Make a Whole: Gender at the Crossroads of the Nigerian Development Agenda” . Obafemi Awolowo University, Inaugural Lecture Series 250 .pdf. <https://ir.oauife.edu.ng/bitstreams/8103bb6b-3714-4cb0-90c5-20365ac9cff0/download>

expressions of African feminist thought. One of the earliest and most influential voices, Molara Ogundipe-Leslie, developed the STIWA framework, "Social Transformation Including Women in Africa", which calls for an inclusive approach that situates women's empowerment within the broader goal of transforming African societies³⁰. She insisted that feminism in Africa must recognise the interplay of gender with tradition, class, education, and colonial legacies.

Obioma Nnaemeka introduced the concept of nego-feminism, a form of feminism based on negotiation and collaboration rather than confrontation. She described African women's resistance as often non-adversarial, rooted in pragmatism, communal values, and relational ethics³¹. In this view, women assert agency not only by challenging patriarchy head-on, but also by working within familial and cultural systems to redefine power and responsibility.

Amina Mama is one of the most prominent voices in African feminist scholarship. Her work emphasises that African feminism must be profoundly political, historically grounded, and critical of both internal and external systems of domination. She critiques the Western framing of feminism that often portrays African women as passive victims needing rescue and challenges the neoliberal co-optation of feminist agendas through donor-driven, NGO-centered development models³². In her essay "Challenging Subjects: Gender and Power in African

³⁰Ogundipe -Leslie, M. (1994). *Re-creating Ourselves: African Women and Critical Transformations*. Africa World Press.

³¹Nnaemeka, O. (2004). 'Nego-feminism: Theorising, Practising, and Pruning Africa's way'. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 29(2), 357–385. <https://doi.org/10.1086/378553>

³²Mama, A. (2001). *Beyond the Masks: Race, Gender and Subjectivity*. Routledge.

Contexts," Mama argues that the feminist struggle in Africa must confront the intersecting forces of patriarchy, militarism, authoritarianism, and imperialism, all of which shape women's lives in the postcolonial state³³.

Mama is also critical of the "NGO-isation" of feminism, warning that over-reliance on external funding and institutionalisation risks depoliticising the movement and distancing it from its grassroots and activist roots. For her, African feminism is not merely an academic discourse but a transformative political practice rooted in lived experiences and social justice struggles. She advocates for feminist scholarship that is self-reflexive, contextually informed, and activist-oriented, bridging theory and practice in service of liberation³⁴.

Ayesha Imam, another Nigerian feminist scholar and activist, has been instrumental in theorising gender justice from within religious and legal contexts. Her work foregrounds the tensions between religious identity and feminist consciousness, particularly in Muslim-majority societies in Africa. Imam's scholarship and activism have focused on reinterpreting Islamic texts and laws to promote women's rights, challenging patriarchal readings that reinforce subordination. Her approach is both pragmatic and political, advocating for feminist legal pluralism that enables women to claim rights within their religious and cultural frameworks, without abandoning universal commitments to gender equality³⁵. She thus expands African feminism's reach into legal reform, religious critique, and human rights advocacy.

³³Mama, A. (1995). 'Challenging Subjects: Gender and Power in African Contexts'. *African Sociological Review*, 1(2), 56–63.

³⁴Mama, A. (2001) Op.cit.

³⁵Imam, A. (1997). Engendering African social sciences: An introductory essay. In A. Imam, A. Mama, & F.

Sow (Eds.), *Engendering African Social Sciences* (pp. 1–30). Dakar: CODESRIA.

Oyeronke Oyewumi offers a more radical epistemological intervention that challenges the foundational assumption of much feminist theory: that gender is a universal and transhistorical category³⁶. Drawing from Yoruba society, she argues that precolonial Yoruba social organisation was structured more by age and seniority than by gender, and that the binary notion of 'woman' as a subordinated category is an imposition of Western colonial logic. This work represents a powerful decolonial critique of feminism, urging scholars to reconsider how they theorise power, identity, and hierarchy in African contexts. Oyewumi's intervention compels African feminist scholarship to move beyond uncritical reliance on Western categories and to seek indigenous logics of personhood, kinship, and social organisation.

Building on, and complicating, Oyewumi's framework is Bibi Bakare-Yusuf, whose contributions bring sexuality, embodiment, and queer critique into African feminist theory. While recognising the value of Oyewumi's cultural deconstruction of gender, Bakare-Yusuf cautions against romanticising African traditions or denying the realities of gendered oppression. In her essay “*Yorubas Don't Do Gender*”, she challenges essentialist readings of African cultures as inherently gender-neutral, instead call for a critical engagement with both tradition and modernity, emphasising the need to theorise desire, sexuality, and fluid subjectivities within African contexts³⁷. Her work opens space for queer African feminist thought, interrogating heteronormativity and advocating for more inclusive and expansive feminist futures.

³⁶Oyewumi, O. (1997). *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

³⁷Bakare-Yusuf, B. (2003). “Yorubas Don't Do Gender ”: A Critical Review of Oyeronke Oyewumi's *The Invention of Women* : An African Sense of Western Gender Discourse. In CODESRIA, *African Gender Scholarship: Concept, Methodologies and Paradigms*. 2004.

Bisi Adeleye Fayemi's “**wrapper**” **metaphor** lies at the heart of her **feminist vision**. Deeply rooted in West African culture, the wrapper is a multifunctional piece of cloth traditionally used by women to cover, protect, carry, or comfort others. Adeleye-Fayemi reimagines it as a potent symbol of **solidarity, sisterhood, and social responsibility**. In her interpretation, the act of wrapping another woman is both literal and metaphorical, a call for women to **enfold one another in care, dignity, and mutual support**. Rather than promoting individualistic resilience, she champions a model of **collective empowerment** in which women stand together and support one another in the face of patriarchal structures and systemic inequality³⁸.

This vision is most fully articulated in her essay collection, *Where Is Your Wrapper?*, and her weekly column, *Loud Whispers*, where she urges African women to draw strength from their cultural heritage, not as a static tradition, but as a transformative resource. In this framing, “throwing your wrapper around another woman” becomes not just an act of compassion but a feminist intervention, a deliberate affirmation of interdependence, cultural pride, and political solidarity³⁹. To this extent, for Adeleye Fayemi, the wrapper is both a garment and a gesture, an emblem of African feminist ethics grounded in care, connection, and community.

³⁸Adeleye-Fayemi, B. (2019). *Where Is Your Wrapper? Letters to My Sisters*. Lagos: Farafina Books.

³⁹Tribune Online. (2022). *Dr Bisi Adeleye-Fayemi and the institutionalisation of feminist power*. Retrieved from <https://tribuneonline.ng/opinion/dr-bisi-adeleye-fayemi-and-institutionalisation-of-feminist-power/>

Other significant strands of African feminist thought reflect efforts to articulate frameworks that are culturally grounded and responsive to African realities, while also engaging with global Black feminist traditions. One such strand is *Motherism*, developed by Catherine Obianuju Acholonu. In her work *Motherism: The Afrocentric Alternative to Feminism*, Acholonu presents motherhood, nature, and nurture as central pillars of African womanhood⁴⁰. She argues that African feminism must depart from Western feminist confrontational approaches and instead embrace a philosophy rooted in peacebuilding, procreation, and communal harmony.

While Motherism seeks to offer an Afrocentric alternative to Western feminism by emphasising motherhood, nature, and peacebuilding, it has been critiqued for reinforcing patriarchal and essentialist gender roles. Oyeronke Oyewumi⁴¹, argue that grounding African feminism in biological motherhood risks marginalising women who do not or cannot have children and confines the identity and value of women to their reproductive roles. Furthermore, Aina suggests that Motherism lacks the political radicalism required to challenge systemic gender inequalities in African societies, as it promotes a reconciliatory and conservative framework that may gloss over real power imbalances between men and women.

Another important framework is *Womanism*, initially coined by African American writer Alice Walker in *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*⁴². While rooted in the African American experience, Womanism has been embraced by some African scholars for its inclusive, community-oriented, and spiritually grounded approach. Unlike mainstream Western feminism, which has often centred the struggles of white,

⁴⁰Acholonu, C. O. (1995). *Motherism: The Afrocentric Alternative to Feminism*. Afa Publications.

⁴¹Oyewùmí, O. (1997). *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses*. University of Minnesota Press.

⁴²Aina, I. O. (2012). Op.cit.

⁴³Walker, A. (1983). *In Search of our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose*. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

⁴⁴ Ibid

middle-class women, Womanism emphasises the interconnectedness of race, gender, class, and spirituality, and advocates for the well-being of entire communities, not just women. It is particularly concerned with avoiding the alienation of men in gender struggles and emphasises family cohesion and mutual respect⁴⁴.

Like Motherism, Womanism has been questioned for its emphasis on communal harmony and unity with men, potentially at the expense of confronting patriarchy directly. Amina Mama⁴⁵ critiques such approaches for failing to adequately challenge male dominance, noting that the insistence on inclusion and relational balance may dilute the transformative political intent of feminist struggle. Obioma Nnaemeka⁴⁶ Further argues that while Womanism and similar strands seek to localise feminism in African culture, they may underplay the structural and institutionalised nature of gender oppression, thereby limiting their effectiveness as tools for social transformation. These critiques highlight the need for African feminist frameworks that are culturally grounded yet critically engaged with issues of power, autonomy, and justice.

The various strands of African feminist thought showcase its richness and diversity. They collectively contribute to a dynamic and multifaceted African feminism. These works reflect a shared commitment to contextual specificity, epistemic justice, and political transformation, despite differing on methods and conceptual tools. Importantly, they challenge both Western feminist universalism and African patriarchal essentialism, advocating for a form of feminism that is rooted in Africa while also having a global perspective.

⁴⁴ Ibid

⁴⁵Mama, A. (1995). *Op.cit.*

⁴⁶Nnaemeka, O. (2004). *Op.cit.*

These works are interconnected, contributing to a wider movement for feminist solidarity and coherence, as highlighted in the Charter of Feminist Principles for African Feminists⁴⁷. Published under the auspices of the African Women's Development Fund (AWDF) and the Feminist Africa network, the African Feminist Charter provides a shared political and ideological foundation for feminist organising across the continent. It affirms that African feminism is radical, intersectional, anti-imperialist, and unapologetically political, grounded in the lived struggles of African women and girls. The Charter recognises diversity among African feminists, across class, religion, sexuality, and geography, while insisting on a common commitment to dismantling all forms of oppression, including patriarchy, capitalism, colonialism, and heteronormativity⁴⁸.

The Charter explicitly defines feminism as a “political, cultural and economic movement that aims to establish equal rights and legal protection for women,” and insists that feminism must include a transformative analysis of power, both within the home and in international systems. It rejects both the "victim narrative" imposed on African women and the romanticisation of culture that shields harmful practices from critique⁴⁹.

The Charter bridges the theoretical insights of African Feminist scholars with movement-based praxis, offering a pan-African feminist manifesto that is both grounded in local realities and committed to global solidarity. It also insists on accountability within feminist spaces, intersectionality in analysis, and care in activism.

⁴⁷African Women's Development Fund (AWDF). (2006). *Charter of Feminist Principles for African Feminists*. Retrieved from <https://awdf.org/publications/charter-of-feminist-principles-for-african-feminists/>

⁴⁸See the charter for details; African Women's Development Fund (AWDF). (2006). *Charter of Feminist Principles for African Feminists*. Retrieved from <https://awdf.org/publications/charter-of-feminist-principles-for-african-feminists/>

⁴⁹Ibid

In Nigeria, it continues to inspire generations of scholars, activists, and everyday women who navigate and challenge patriarchy not only through protest, but also through persistence, negotiation, and creative adaptation.

6. Muslim Feminism

Muslim feminism occupies a contested and often polarising space within both feminist and Islamic discourses. Much like the long-standing debate over the compatibility of Islam and democracy, some critics argue that Islam and feminism are inherently irreconcilable, claiming that feminism is a Western, secular ideology that conflicts with divine religious injunctions. Within this framing, attempts to merge the two are viewed as either religiously subversive or politically naïve. However, Muslim feminist scholars and activists strongly challenge this binary. They argue that the core ethical principles of Islam, justice, equality, and compassion, are entirely consistent with the feminist pursuit of gender justice. Rather than abandoning faith, they reinterpret sacred texts and traditions to reclaim Islam as a source of empowerment for women, rooted in both spiritual integrity and social reform.

It emerges from a critical engagement with both patriarchal interpretations of Islamic texts and Western feminist discourses that often depict Islam as inherently oppressive to women. Rather than abandoning religion in pursuit of liberation, Muslim feminists assert that Islam, properly interpreted, offers a framework for equality, dignity, and rights for women and men alike.

At its core, Muslim feminism is concerned with hermeneutics, that is, the interpretation of foundational texts such as the Qur'an and Hadith. It argues that many of the practices that subordinate women in Muslim societies are not intrinsic to Islam but are products of historical, political, and cultural contexts, often shaped by patriarchal interests. This approach distinguishes Muslim feminism from secular feminism by affirming faith as a site of empowerment rather than a source of restriction⁵⁰.

Pioneering scholars such as Fatima Mernissi⁵¹, Amina Wadud⁵², and Asma Barlas⁵³ have led the call for gender-sensitive readings of Islamic texts. Wadud, in particular, has argued that the Qur'an's ethical framework promotes justice and mutuality, and that many patriarchal laws attributed to Islam are jurisprudential constructions rather than divine mandates (Wadud, 1999). Barlas (2002) similarly contends that oppressive interpretations arise not from the Qur'an itself but from androcentric exegesis, legal traditions, and political institutions.

⁵⁰Badran, M. (2009). *Feminism in Islam: Secular and Religious Convergences*. Oxford: Oneworld Publications.

⁵¹Mernissi, F. (1975/1987). *Beyond the Veil: Male -Female Dynamics in Modern Muslim Society* (rev. ed.). Indiana University Press. See also, Mernissi, F. (1991). *The Veil and the Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Women's Rights in Islam*. Perseus Books.

⁵²Wadud, A. (1999). *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective* (2nd ed.). New York: Oxford University Press.

⁵³Barlas, A. (2002). *"Believing Women" in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an*. Austin: University of Texas Press. See also, Badran, M. (2009). *Feminism in Islam : Secular and Religious Convergences*. Oxford: Oneworld Publications

This hermeneutical project is central to Muslim feminist praxis: it involves recovering egalitarian verses, challenging hadiths of questionable authenticity, and distinguishing between divinely revealed principles and human-made interpretations. In doing so, Muslim feminists articulate a theology of equality that is both rooted in scripture and responsive to contemporary gender realities.

Muslim feminism does not present a monolithic or homogenous agenda. It is **highly contextual**, shaped by the particular historical, political, and cultural environments in which Muslim women live. In Africa, Muslim feminism has evolved in response to **local cultural and legal contexts**, particularly in countries with Sharia-based legal systems such as Nigeria, Sudan, and parts of East Africa⁵⁴. **Ayesha Imam** stands out as a leading figure in articulating a **rights-based Islamic feminism** in Africa. Her work demonstrates how **Muslim women can negotiate rights within religious frameworks** without capitulating to secularism or cultural relativism⁵⁵. In secular states like Turkey or Tunisia, Muslim feminist activism may focus on protecting religious expression in public life. In more theocratic or legally pluralistic states, it may seek to **challenge discriminatory laws or reinterpret Sharia** from a feminist perspective.

⁵⁴Edwin, Shirin. "We Belong Here, Too: Accommodating African Muslim Feminism in African Feminist Theory via Zaynab Alkali's The Virtuous Woman and the Cobwebs and Other Stories." *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 27, no. 3 (2006): 140–56. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4137389>.

⁵⁵Imam, Ayesha (2003). Women, Muslim Law, and Human Rights in Nigeria. In Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, African Programme, Occasional Papers, No. 2.

Despite its internal diversity, **Muslim feminism** is unified by several defining principles. At its core is a **commitment to justice and gender equality** grounded in Islamic faith and ethics. Muslim feminists reject both **Islamist patriarchy**, which uses religion to justify women's subordination, and **Western feminist Islamophobia**, which often dismisses Islam as inherently oppressive. Instead, they chart a third path, one that affirms religious identity while **challenging patriarchal interpretations of sacred texts**, engaging in **legal reform**, and advancing **grassroots mobilisation** within Muslim communities.

Nonetheless, Muslim feminism remains contested. It faces criticism from **secular feminists**, who question its compatibility with feminist ideals, and from **conservative Islamic scholars**, who view it as a dangerous innovation (*bid'ah*) or a product of Western influence. However, the persistence, adaptability, and growing resonance of Muslim feminist thought and activism across Africa, the Middle East, Asia, and the diaspora attest to its **significance as a transformative space for agency, reinterpretation, and resistance**. Rather than representing contradiction, Muslim feminism embodies a **creative negotiation between faith and feminism**, offering a powerful model of justice rooted in both spiritual conviction and sociopolitical critique.

7. Postmodern and Queer Feminism

Postmodern feminism emerged as a critical response to earlier feminist strands, especially liberal and radical feminism, that often relied on essentialist or universal definitions of womanhood. Drawing heavily on the work of Michel Foucault on discourse and power, as well as Jacques Derrida on deconstruction, postmodern feminists question the stability and coherence of categories such as woman, man, or even gender. Rather than seeing gender⁵⁶ as a fixed identity rooted in biology or universal social roles, postmodern feminism argues that gender is socially constructed, fluid, and historically contingent⁵⁷.

At the forefront of this movement is Judith Butler, whose seminal book *Gender Trouble*⁵⁸ profoundly reshaped feminist and queer theory. Butler critiques the binary logic of male/female and introduces the concept of gender performativity, the idea that gender is not something we are, but something we do, through repeated behaviors and cultural expectations. According to Butler, these performances are regulated by heteronormative structures, and disrupting them (through parody, drag, or nonconformity) can reveal the constructed nature of all gender identities⁵⁹.

Building on this, queer feminism extends postmodern critiques by focusing explicitly on heteronormativity and compulsory sexuality, challenging the marginalization of LGBTQ+ experiences within both mainstream society and some feminist movements. It calls for a feminism that is inclusive of all sexual and gender identities and that recognises the intersections between homophobia, transphobia,

and patriarchy. Scholars like Gayle Rubin⁶⁰ and Jack Halberstam⁶¹, alongside activists, have argued for a feminism that is attuned to the multiplicity of gender expressions and resistant to normative sexual and relational models.

Though postmodern and queer feminism have been critiqued, particularly in African and working-class contexts, for being overly abstract, elitist, and disconnected from material struggles, they have nevertheless contributed to important new ways of thinking about gender, identity, and power. In recent years, African feminist movements, particularly among younger, urban, and digitally active generations, have increasingly engaged with postmodern and queer ideas. Activists and collectives in Nigeria, South Africa, and Kenya have drawn on queer feminist theory to challenge rigid gender roles, homophobia, and gender-based violence, often using art, social media, and cultural performance as tools of resistance⁶².

⁵⁶Derrida, J. (1976). *Of Grammatology* (G. C. Spivak, Trans.). Johns Hopkins University Press. (Original work published 1967)

⁵⁷Butler, J. (1990). *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Routledge.

⁵⁸Ibid

⁵⁹See Ibid and her other book, Butler, J. (2004). *Undoing Gender*. Routledge.

⁶⁰Rubin, G. (1984). Thinking sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality. In C. Vance (Ed.), *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring female sexuality* (pp. 267–319). Routledge.

⁶¹Halberstam, J. (2011). *The Queer Art of Failure*. Duke University Press.

⁶²See Tamale, S. (2011). *African Sexualities: A Reader*. Pambazuka Press. And Ekine, S. (2013). Contesting Narratives of Queer Africa. In S. Ekine & H. Abbas (Eds.), *Queer African Reader* (pp. 78–91). Fahamu Books.

8. Ecofeminism

Ecofeminism emerged in the 1970s as a theoretical and activist movement that links the exploitation of the environment with the oppression of women. The concept was first developed by Françoise d'Eaubonne in *Le Féminisme ou la Mort*, where she argued that patriarchal structures that dominate women also underlie the environmental crisis⁶³. Early ecofeminist theorists observed that the domination of nature and the subordination of women were ideologically and historically connected through dualistic and hierarchical thinking, exemplified by the dichotomies of man/woman, culture/nature, and reason/emotion⁶⁴.

Scholars such as Vandana Shiva and Maria Mies extended ecofeminist thought by highlighting how capitalism and colonial systems rely on the appropriation of both women's labour and natural resources⁶⁵. They argue for a vision of sustainability rooted in local knowledge systems, communal stewardship, and ethical care. Their work particularly foregrounds women in the Global South, whose roles in food production, water collection, and biodiversity preservation make them central to ecological sustainability, while also rendering them disproportionately vulnerable to environmental degradation⁶⁶.

Greta Gaard introduced the concept of intersectional ecofeminism, which integrates animal rights, queer theory, and anti-racist critiques. She and other scholars criticized earlier forms of ecofeminism for essentializing the connection between women and nature, as well as for their limited engagement with issues of race, class, and sexuality. As a result, contemporary ecofeminism has moved towards social constructionist approaches. This perspective views women's relationships with nature as shaped by socio-economic conditions rather than inherent characteristics.

In the African context, ecofeminism is expressed through the lived experiences and activism of women engaged in land struggles, climate justice, and ecological

restoration. Wangari Maathai's work with the *Green Belt Movement* in Kenya is widely regarded as an exemplary case of ecofeminism in practice, as it links women's empowerment with reforestation, anti-corruption efforts, and democratic governance⁶⁷. African ecofeminist perspectives emphasise the intersection of gender, land rights, neocolonial extraction, and environmental violence, often critiquing both Western environmentalism and patriarchal traditionalism for excluding grassroots women's voices.

Ecofeminism continues to evolve, offering a robust interdisciplinary framework that connects environmental ethics, gender justice, and decolonial critique. It highlights the urgency of reimagining development, sustainability, and care in ways that centre those most affected by environmental harm, particularly women in marginalised communities.

Areas of Convergence Across Feminist Strands

While feminism encompasses a wide spectrum of ideologies and methodologies, ranging from liberal to radical, Marxist to postmodern, African to womanist, there are fundamental areas of convergence that bind these diverse strands into a shared intellectual and political movement. These convergences form the core of the feminist commitment to justice, equality, and societal transformation.

I. Commitment to Ending Gender-Based Oppression: At the heart of all feminist ideologies is a common goal: the dismantling of patriarchy and the systems

⁶³ d'Eaubonne, F. (1974). *Le Féminisme ou la mort*. Paris: P. Horay.

⁶⁴ Merchant, C. (1980). *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution*. San Francisco: Harper & Row.

⁶⁵ Shiva, V., & Mies, M. (1993). *Ecofeminism*. Halifax: Fernwood Publications.

⁶⁶ Ibid

⁶⁷ Maathai, W. (2004). *The Green Belt Movement: Sharing the Approach and the Experience*. New York: Lantern Books.

that sustain gender-based discrimination and oppression. Whether through reformist means or radical overhaul, all strands advocate for a world in which women are free from violence, exclusion, and subordination. They oppose structural and cultural norms that normalise male dominance in public and private life.

- II. *Assertion of Women's Agency and Autonomy:* Across all feminist traditions is a shared belief in the full humanity, agency, and autonomy of women. Feminists insist that women must have the freedom to make decisions about their lives, bodies, labour, and relationships without coercion or subjugation. This affirmation of agency cuts across liberal calls for legal rights, radical demands for bodily autonomy, Marxist critiques of reproductive labour, and African feminism's emphasis on negotiating power within familial and communal settings.
- III. *Advocacy for Structural and Social Change:* Feminist strands agree on the need for structural transformation, though they may differ in the scope and method. All identify that gender inequality is not merely a matter of individual prejudice but is embedded in laws, institutions, cultures, and economies. As such, feminism calls for the reform or transformation of institutions such as the family, state, market, religion, and media to ensure inclusivity and justice.
- IV. *Emphasis on Consciousness-Raising and Education:* From early suffragist movements to digital-age feminism, all strands recognise the importance of awareness and education in challenging gender norms and mobilising change. Feminists across the board value storytelling, public discourse, academic critique, and grassroots organising as tools for consciousness-raising and empowerment.
- V. *Solidarity and Collective Struggle:* Despite their ideological differences, feminist movements have long emphasised the power of collective action. Whether through women's movements, advocacy networks, protests, or online

campaigns, feminism is deeply rooted in solidarity. Even womanist and motherist traditions, often framed as distinct from mainstream feminism, stress collective well-being and community cohesion as central to gender justice.

VI. Rejection of Gender Essentialism and Natural Inequality: Most feminist traditions challenge the idea that women's roles and limitations are biologically determined. Even in frameworks that emphasise maternal roles (such as motherism), there is a rejection of the notion that women are naturally inferior or that their identities should be confined to domestic spaces. The overall thrust is to unmask and resist the ideological uses of biology to justify exclusion.

VII. Intersection with Broader Human Rights and Social Justice Agendas: Feminist movements globally and locally are increasingly aligned with broader struggles for justice, including racial equity, labour rights, anti-colonial liberation, and environmental justice. This convergence underscores the recognition that gender oppression does not operate in isolation and that a just society must be inclusive, equitable, and democratic in every sense.

*VIII. Insistence on **identity**:* **Whether based on ethnicity, religion, or nationality, such identities should not be used to justify the subordination of women. This issue is particularly urgent in Africa, where feminists have long faced the accusation that challenging patriarchal culture is "un-African." Despite their theoretical differences, feminists broadly reject the idea that tradition should be static or above critique. Instead, they argue that African identity is dynamic and that women have always played a vital role in shaping, challenging, and redefining it. Feminist thinkers assert that being African does not require silence, compliance, or adherence to rigid gender roles. In this perspective, feminism is a legitimate expression of self-determination and justice within the African context.**

The **Charter of Feminist Principles for African Feminists** is a key document that articulates these shared commitments. It recognises that African feminists come from different political, religious, class, and sexual identities, yet affirms that they are united in their struggle against **patriarchy, capitalism, imperialism, and all forms of oppression.**

Praxis: Feminist Activism in Nigeria

Feminist theories, especially African and intersectional frameworks, have had a profound influence on the development of feminist structures, movements, and advocacy strategies in Nigeria. Drawing from both indigenous knowledge systems and global feminist thought, Nigerian feminist actors have adapted diverse theoretical models to confront deeply entrenched patriarchy, religious conservatism, economic marginalisation, and postcolonial legacies. African feminism, in particular, has provided a culturally rooted foundation that emphasises community, negotiation, and social transformation, principles that resonate with Nigeria's multi-ethnic, religiously plural, and patriarchal society. For instance, concept of nego-feminism, which highlights negotiation and collaboration over confrontation, is arguably visible in the strategies of organisations like Women's Rights Advancement and Protection Alternative (WRAPA), WARDC, LEADS and BAOBAB for Women's Human Rights, which work with both secular and religious actors to advance gender justice in ways that are context-sensitive and non-antagonistic.

Feminist activism in Nigeria has evolved over decades, shaped by historical struggles, political transitions, cultural negotiations, and, more recently, digital mobilisations. From anti-colonial resistance to contemporary feminist movements, Nigerian women have persistently engaged in both formal and informal modes of activism,

often drawing from indigenous organising strategies while engaging global feminist ideas.

Evolution of Feminist Organising

Nigerian feminist praxis can be traced back to the early 20th century with women-led resistance against colonial rule and exploitation. One of the most iconic events was the Aba Women's Riot of 1929, a mass protest by women in Eastern Nigeria against colonial taxation and administrative injustice. The uprising, often considered the first major anti-colonial revolt in British West Africa, demonstrated the power of collective female action rooted in indigenous political systems and market networks⁶⁸. These early movements, though not framed in feminist language, laid the foundation for later gender-conscious organising.

In the post-colonial period, women's activism took more structured forms, particularly in the form of professional associations, market women's associations, and later non-governmental organisations. During the 1980s, the formation of Women in Nigeria (WIN) marked a significant ideological shift, introducing a feminist lens that explicitly linked women's subordination to broader socio-economic and political structures⁶⁹. WIN's activism was anchored in both academic feminist theory and grassroots mobilisation, and it served as a critical space for African feminist scholarship and political education⁷⁰.

Women in Nigeria (WIN): Pioneering Feminist Organising

Founded in 1982 during a national conference at Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Women in Nigeria (WIN) is widely regarded as the first explicitly feminist collective in Nigeria. WIN emerged as a response to both the marginalisation of women in academic and political spaces and the inadequacies of state-led women's programs

like the National Council of Women Societies (NCWS) and pet projects of spouses of senior state officials (First Ladies) that often reinforced traditional gender roles rather than challenging them⁷¹. Rooted in the intellectual and activist traditions of radical and Marxist feminism, WIN was composed largely of female and male academics, students, and activists, who sought to develop a critical, research-based understanding of the social, political, and economic position of women in Nigerian society.

WIN's approach was grounded in intersectional analysis, long before the term gained global traction, linking gender inequality to class exploitation, ethnicity, religion, and state power. The movement challenged state patriarchy, the tokenism of elite women's organisations, and the co-optation of women's issues by the state. WIN argues that feminism in Nigeria must be both critical and culturally engaged, attentive to religious and customary laws, while advocating for the democratic rights of all women⁷². WIN was also an early institutional site for African feminist praxis, combining grassroots mobilisation with scholarly production and political education. Although WIN declined in visibility by the mid-1990s due to political repression and internal fragmentation, its legacy continues to influence feminist scholarship and activism in Nigeria today.⁷³

⁶⁸ Van Allen, J. (1972). "Sitting on a Man": Colonialism and the Lost Political Institutions of Igbo Women. *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 6 (2), 165–181. <https://doi.org/10.2307/484389>

⁶⁹ Imam, A. (2005). Women, Muslim Law, and Human Rights in Nigeria. In M. Mamdani, A. Imam, & F. Sow (Eds.), *Gender and the politics of Rights and Democracy in Africa* (pp. 44–63). CODESRIA/Zed Books.

⁷⁰ Jibrin Ibrahim and Amina Salihu, (2007). *Feminism or Male Feminism: The Lives and Times of Women in Nigeria (WIN)*. Centre for Research and Documentation (CRD) and Politics of Development Group, Stockholm University and Network of Women's Studies in Nigeria.

⁷¹ Imam, A. (1997). Politics, Islam, and women in Kano, Northern Nigeria. In H. L. Boddy & S. J. Smith (Eds.), *African feminism: The politics of survival in sub-Saharan Africa* (pp. 65–89). University of Pennsylvania Press.

⁷² Imam A. (1997) Ibid.

⁷³ Ibrahim, J. and Salihu, A. 2007. *Feminism or Male Feminism? The Lives and Times of Women in Nigeria (WIN)*. CDD.

Contemporary Feminist Movements

Today, Nigerian feminist activism has diversified and expanded, with numerous actors and organisations working across legal, educational, digital, and grassroots platforms. Organisations such as the Women's Rights Advancement and Protection Alternative (WRAPA), WARDC, LEAD, PWAN and Baobab for Women's Human Rights have been central in promoting legal literacy, advocating for reforms to religious and customary laws, and defending women's rights within both secular and Islamic legal systems⁷⁴.

A new wave of young, urban, and tech-savvy feminists has emerged in recent years, effectively using social media as a tool for consciousness-raising, solidarity, and mobilisation. Campaigns like *#ArewaMeToo*, which broke the silence on sexual abuse in Northern Nigeria, and *#SexForGrades*, which exposed systemic sexual harassment in Nigerian universities, reflect the growing power of digital feminism. Perhaps the most visible example of this new feminist praxis was the role played by the Feminist Coalition during the *#EndSARS* protests in 2020, where young Nigerian women led efforts in fundraising, legal aid, medical support, and strategic communication. The Coalition's transparent, intersectional, and decentralised approach mirrored a new feminist ethic, one that blends grassroots activism with digital innovation, and cultural fluency with political audacity⁷⁵.

These efforts underscore the multi-dimensional nature of feminist praxis in Nigeria, combining theory and action, tradition and innovation, and individual and collective agency. They also highlight the ways in which Nigerian feminism continues to adapt to shifting political, technological, and cultural contexts.

⁷⁴Ayesha Imam, (2005) op.cit.

⁷⁵Feminist Coalition. (2020). *Who We Are* . <https://feministcoalition2020.com/>

Conclusion

Feminist theory remains a powerful and relevant lens for interrogating Nigeria's complex socio-political structures. From colonial-era systems that institutionalised gender inequality to contemporary forms of exclusion rooted in religion, ethnicity, class, and neoliberal economic policies, feminist frameworks help reveal how power operates and whom it marginalises. Whether through African, Marxist, intersectional, or postmodern strands, feminist thought enables a deeper understanding of how patriarchy is embedded in the state, the family, the market, and even in cultural and religious norms.

However, theory alone is insufficient. This chapter has demonstrated that the true power of feminism lies in its praxis, in how women and their allies translate theory into action. The Nigerian experience highlights the importance of a grounded, intersectional, and inclusive feminist practice, one that is context-aware, responsive to local realities, and sensitive to the multiple and overlapping identities that shape women's lives. From early resistance movements to contemporary digital activism, Nigerian feminists have combined indigenous knowledge with global insights to challenge injustice, build solidarity, and demand change.

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List of Abbreviations

AWFD	African Women's Development Fund
CDD	Centre for Democracy and Development
CODESRIA	Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa
LEADS	League of Democratic Women
LGBTQ	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer/Questioning.
NCWS	National Council of Women Societies
PWAN	Partners West Africa
STIWA	Social Transformation Including Women in Africa
WARDC	Women Advocate Research and Documentation Centre
WIN	Women in Nigeria
WRAPA	Women's Rights Advancement and Protection Alternative
WRAPA	Women's Rights Advancement and Protection Alternative

04

Chapter Four

Chapter Four

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE: ISSUES AND PROGRAMMING

By

Rahinatu Adamu Hussaini and Hussaini Abdu, Ph.D.

Introduction

Gender-Based Violence (GBV) refers to harmful acts directed at individuals based on their gender, and it manifests in physical, sexual, psychological, and economic forms. Rooted in unequal power relations and systemic gender inequalities¹. GBV disproportionately affects women and girls, though men, boys, and gender-diverse individuals are also victims. In Nigeria, GBV takes many forms, including domestic violence, sexual assault, child marriage, female genital mutilation, trafficking, and conflict-related sexual violence, occurring across social classes, ethnic groups, and geographic regions.

The prevalence of GBV in Nigeria remains alarmingly high, exacerbated by deeply entrenched patriarchal norms, religious and cultural justifications, widespread poverty, weak legal enforcement, and growing insecurity. It is not merely a private or cultural matter but a serious violation of human rights with far-reaching implications. GBV undermines the dignity and autonomy of survivors/victims, weakens public health systems, impedes educational and economic opportunities, and poses a significant barrier to inclusive development. Its impacts are generational and systemic, often reinforcing cycles of trauma and exclusion.

This chapter explores the scope and drivers of GBV in Nigeria, examines the legal and policy frameworks designed to address it, and analyses the range of programming strategies implemented by government, civil society, and

development partners. It critically reviews successes, limitations, and emerging trends in GBV prevention and response. Finally, the chapter calls for more transformative, intersectional, and survivor-centred approaches that can contribute to the eradication of GBV and the advancement of gender justice in Nigeria.

Prevalence and Patterns of GBV in Nigeria

Gender-Based Violence in Nigeria remains a widespread and persistent human rights crisis. Between 2020 and 2023, official records documented over 27,000 cases of GBV, including 1,145 incidents that resulted in death. However, accountability remains limited, and only 393 convictions were secured during the same period². These figures likely play down the true extent of the crisis, as cultural silence, stigma, and systemic gaps in reporting continue to mask the full scale of GBV in the country.

The 2013 Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS) revealed that approximately one in three Nigerian women has experienced physical violence since the age of 15.³ This statistic remains a critical indicator of the depth of gender inequality and violence entrenched in Nigerian society. Particularly alarming is the prevalence of intimate partner violence (IPV). Surveys consistently show that between 30% and 31% of women have experienced physical, emotional, or sexual abuse from their spouses or partners⁴. Such violence is often normalised within family and community settings, further undermining efforts at prevention and justice.

¹ Inter-Agency Standing Committee. (2015). *IASC Guidelines for Integrating Gender -Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action* [PDF].

² Oladimeji, T., & Agbede, S. (2025). *The effects of gender -based violence on women's rights in Nigeria. International Journal of Social Science and Multidisciplinary Research*, 11(1), 110–118.

³ UNFPA Nigeria. (2023). Gender -based violence. Retrieved from <https://nigeria.unfpa.org>

⁴ Ndubuisi, A., and Adeyemo, K. (2022). Prevalence and patterns of intimate partner violence in Nigeria.

Nigerian Journal of Clinical Practice, 26(3), 301 –309.

Forms of Gender-Based Violence

In Nigeria, Gender-Based Violence takes many forms that often overlap and reinforce each other, including physical, sexual, psychological, and economic abuse. These are rooted in patriarchal structures and perpetuated by harmful social norms, economic hardship, and weak institutions. Below is an overview of the main forms of GBV in the Nigerian context

a. Domestic Violence and Intimate Partner Violence (IPV)

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) and Domestic Violence are the most prevalent and socially tolerated forms of GBV in Nigeria. They encompass physical, emotional, economic and sexual abuse occurring within the home or intimate relationships, often committed by a current or former spouse or partner or family members. National surveys indicate that up to 31% of Nigerian women between the ages of 15 - 49 have experienced at least one form of IPV, including beatings, coercive sex, and controlling behaviour⁵. Cultural and community-level acceptance often normalises such violence. In some communities, IPV is sometimes interpreted as a sign of affection or "marital joy," thereby discouraging victims from speaking out or seeking help. Acceptance is higher in households with lower educational attainment and income levels, where traditional gender roles remain deeply entrenched⁶.

Femicide, defined as the gender-motivated killing of women, has also been on the rise. In 2022 alone, at least 401 Nigerian women were reported to have died from sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). By 2024, 135 femicide incidents had been documented, resulting in 149 deaths, while early 2025 recorded 17 cases and

⁵ Ndubuisi, A., and Adeyemo, K. (2022). Prevalence and patterns of intimate partner violence in Nigeria. *Nigerian Journal of Clinical Practice*, 26(3), 301 –309. Also see the National Demographic and Health Survey Report, 2018.

⁶ Ndubuisi, A. and Adeyemo, K. Ibid.

19 deaths within just the first quarter⁷. These numbers highlight a disturbing trend of fatal violence against women, often driven by intimate partners, and compounded by the failure of institutions to protect victims or hold perpetrators accountable.

b. Sexual Violence and Rape

Sexual violence remains a pervasive issue in Nigeria, affecting children, adolescents, and adults alike. According to global estimates adapted to Nigeria's context, one in four girls and one in ten boys have experienced sexual violence before the age of 18⁸. Such abuse often occurs in familiar settings, homes, schools, religious institutions, perpetrated by individuals known to the survivor/victims. In tertiary institutions, particularly in states like Enugu, sexual harassment and assault remain widespread, frequently involving power dynamics between lecturers and female students⁹. These violations often go unreported due to stigma, victim-blaming, and institutional inaction, leaving survivors without justice or support.

c. Child Marriage and Harmful Traditional Practices

Child marriage remains one of the most entrenched and widespread forms of gender-based violence in Nigeria, particularly in the North-East and North-West geopolitical zones. In these regions, close to half of all girls are married before the age of 15, and as many as 78% are married before 18¹⁰. Nigeria, in fact, has the highest number of child brides in West and Central Africa, accounting for a significant portion of the nearly 60 million girls in the sub-region who are married before adulthood¹¹. These early and often forced unions expose girls to premature

⁷ Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD). (2025). The rising tide of femicide in Nigeria: A silent war against women. Retrieved from <https://www.cddwestafrica.org>

⁸ TIME. (2021). *One in four girls sexually abused: Nigeria's hidden epidemic*. Retrieved from <https://time.com>
See also UNICEF. (2021). Female genital mutilation: Nigeria. Retrieved from <https://data.unicef.org>

⁹ Ndukuba, J., Chimezie, O., & Eze, A. (2022). *Sexual harassment and assault among university students in southeastern Nigeria*. *Nigerian Medical Journal*, 63(4), 290–296.

¹⁰ (European Union Agency for Asylum [EUAA], 2021).

¹¹ UNICEF 2021. Op.cit.

childbirth, sexual violence, limited autonomy, and lifelong economic dependency. Child marriage disrupts education and perpetuates intergenerational poverty and social exclusion driven by systemic discrimination and weak protections.

Alongside child marriage, Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) is another pervasive form of GBV in Nigeria. Nationally, approximately 27% of women aged 15 - 49 have undergone some form of FGM¹². While there has been a modest decline in prevalence across older age groups, the practice persists among younger girls in several regions, making Nigeria one of the countries with the highest absolute number of women and girls affected by FGM globally.¹³ The persistence of this practice, despite legal prohibitions and public awareness campaigns, points to the strong influence of cultural norms and resistance to change.

d. Economic, Emotional and Psychological Abuse

Often underreported and misunderstood, economic, emotional and psychological abuse constitutes a significant yet invisible form of GBV. It includes deliberate financial deprivation, verbal insults, gaslighting, threats, isolation, and coercive control. In many Nigerian homes and relationships, emotional abuse is normalised as discipline or marital authority. Unlike physical violence, this form of abuse rarely leaves visible scars, making it difficult to detect and legally address. Victims/survivors often endure prolonged trauma, including anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation, without accessing psychosocial support or legal remedies.¹⁴

¹²UNICEF 2021, op.cit.

¹³World Health Organization (WHO). (2021). Female genital mutilation: Key facts. Retrieved from <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/female-genital-mutilation>

¹⁴Oladimeji, T., & Agbede, S. (2025). *The effects of gender-based violence on women's rights in Nigeria. International Journal of Social Science and Multidisciplinary Research*, 11(1), 110–118.

Economic deprivation, or economic abuse, is a deeply entrenched in Nigeria, where patriarchal norms and widespread poverty converge to trap women in cycles of dependency and vulnerability. It manifests when male partners or family members control access to funds, refuse to contribute to household needs, prevent women from pursuing education or employment, or seize property and inheritance rights, creating systemic barriers to financial independence. A recent qualitative study among young Nigerian women with histories of intimate partner violence revealed how partners' deliberate control over money and food amplifies food insecurity and limits women's ability to escape abusive situations.¹⁵ Such deprivation not only deepens poverty, but also escalates other forms of violence, undermines health and development, and reinforces gendered power imbalances. In Nigeria, economic abuse is not just a background condition; it is a tool used by perpetrators to consolidate control, ensuring victims remain financially bound and socially marginalised.¹⁶

e. Emerging Forms of GBV

In recent years, new forms of GBV have emerged, shaped by technology, insecurity, and migration. In Nigeria, technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV) is rapidly evolving as digital platforms become sites of control, intimidation, and abuse, disproportionately targeting girls and women. TFGBV manifests through online harassment, non-consensual image sharing, stalking, and digital surveillance, reinforcing offline power imbalances and limiting women's freedom of expression and mobility.¹⁷ The rise of online misogynistic subcultures, collectively called the “manosphere”, and harmful masculinities amplify this violence by normalising

¹⁵Ogbonnaya, Ijeoma N., Olanike S. Kuku, Oluwatomi O. Owopetu, and Oladipupo K. Dada. 2023. “Money, Economic Abuse, and Food Insecurity: A Qualitative Study among Young Nigerian Women with a History of Intimate Partner Violence.” *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/08862605231174463>.

¹⁶Fawole, Olufunmilayo I. 2008. “Economic Violence to Women and Girls: Is It Receiving the Necessary Attention?” *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse* 9 (3): 167–177. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1524838008319255>.

¹⁷Airaoje et al. 2025. “From Silence to Solidarity: Confronting Misogyny and TFGBV in Nigeria’s Digital Age – Experts Weigh In.” *LightRay Media*, March 21.

trolling, doxxing, and threats against women, which both reflect and fuel patriarchal sentiment.¹⁸ As Nigerian women increasingly speak out via movements like #BodyRight, they continue to face backlash that underscores how entrenched gendered digital aggression has become in both virtual and real-world spheres.¹⁹

Another emerging form of GBV is Human trafficking, particularly for sexual exploitation. Nigeria is a major source country for trafficked women and girls to Europe and the Middle East. Traffickers exploit poverty, lack of education, and broken family structures to lure victims, who often face physical and sexual abuse, forced labour, and social exclusion.

Conflict-related GBV is another growing concern, particularly in the North-East and North West where Boko Haram insurgency, banditry and other forms of armed violence have subjected women and girls to abductions, forced marriages, rape, and sexual slavery. Displaced persons, especially in Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps, are at heightened risk of exploitation and abuse by both non-state actors and security personnel.²⁰ These violations often occur in the context of weak institutional oversight, militarised environments, and impunity.

Drivers and Root Causes of Gender-Based Violence

Gender-Based Violence (GBV) in Nigeria is sustained by a complex interplay of structural, cultural, economic, legal, and political factors. While GBV manifests in

¹⁸SVRI. undated. “Technology Facilitated Gender Based Violence.” *SVRI Global Library*.

¹⁹UNFPA Nigeria. 2023. “UNFPA Nigeria Launches the BodyRight Campaign.” June 20.

https://nigeria.unfpa.org/en/events/unfpa-nigeria-launches-bodyright-campaign?utm_source=chatgpt.com

²⁰Adebayo, S., Musa, M., & Okonkwo, C. (2023). *Conflict and sexual violence in Nigeria's displacement camps: Gaps in protection and accountability*. *Pan African Medical Journal*, 45(2), 88–96.

many forms, its persistence is largely due to deeply embedded social norms, systemic inequalities, and institutional failures that create enabling environments for abuse. Understanding the root causes of GBV is essential for designing effective prevention and response strategies.

- a. **Unequal Gender Power Relations:** At the heart of GBV in Nigeria is a patriarchal social order that systematically privileges men and subordinates women. This hierarchy governs relationships at household, community, and institutional levels, reinforcing the belief that men have authority over women's bodies, mobility, sexuality, and decision-making. Patriarchal norms normalise male dominance and control, which often manifest in physical, sexual, and emotional abuse. As Eze-Anaba²¹ notes, many Nigerian men are socialised to view control over women as a marker of masculinity, and women are socialised to accept subordination as a virtue.
- b. **Social and Gender Norms:** Cultural and religious beliefs and practices play a significant role in reinforcing GBV. In many communities, traditional practices such as child marriage, wife inheritance, and female genital mutilation (FGM) are culturally sanctioned. Religious interpretations, especially when taken out of context or manipulated, have also been used to justify gender inequality and violence.
- c. **Economic Inequalities and Dependence:** Poverty and economic dependence are major drivers of GBV. Women who lack access to education, employment, and resources are more vulnerable to abuse, as they are often unable to leave violent relationships or challenge power imbalances. Economic stress within families can also trigger domestic conflict, where women become scapegoats for broader economic frustrations.²²

²¹Eze-Anaba, I. (2022). *Patriarchy and the silencing of survivors: Legal and cultural challenges in addressing GBV in Nigeria*. *Journal of African Law and Society*, 12(1), 55–72.

²²UNFPA Nigeria. (2023). Gender -based violence. Retrieved from <https://nigeria.unfpa.org>

Moreover, transactional sex and survival-based relationships expose women and girls to coercion, exploitation, and increased risk of violence.

d. Weak Legal and Institutional Frameworks: Despite the existence of laws such as the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act (VAPP) and the Child Rights Act, in 35 of the 36 states,²³ enforcement remains weak. Many cases of GBV are not reported due to lack of trust in law enforcement, fear of retaliation, or the belief that justice will not be served. Where reports are made, survivors often face institutional barriers, ranging from police indifference to judicial delays and stigma from service providers.²⁴ In some states, laws are either not domesticated or not operational, and traditional or religious courts often take precedence in family matters, reinforcing gender-biased rulings.

e. Conflict, Displacement, and Insecurity: The rise in armed conflict, banditry, and terrorism has significantly exacerbated GBV in Nigeria. In conflict zones such as Borno, Yobe, and Zamfara, women and girls face heightened risks of sexual violence, abduction, and forced marriage. Boko Haram, for instance, has systematically used rape and forced “marriages” as tools of war and domination. Displacement further increases vulnerability: women in Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps report high levels of sexual exploitation, often by those tasked with their protection.

f. Silence and Stigma: One of the most persistent barriers to addressing GBV is silence, driven by fear, shame, and social stigma. Survivors are often blamed, ostracised, or pressured to reconcile with perpetrators in the name of family honour or social cohesion. This culture of silence ensures that violence

²³ As of 2024, 35 of Nigeria’s 36 states , including the Federal Capital Territory , have domesticated the Violence Against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) Act. Kano is the only state yet to adopt it. Additionally, 32 states have also domesticated the Child Rights Act (CRA) . See <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/673358-gender-matters-across-nigeria-february-2024-edition.html?tztc=1>

²⁴ Oladimeji & Agbade, 2025 op.cit.

remains hidden and unchallenged. In many cases, community leaders or family members discourage reporting to “protect” the family name or avoid legal complications.²⁵ The lack of survivor-centred and victim support services, including legal aid, shelters, and trauma counselling, reinforces this invisibility and allows violence to thrive.

Legal and Policy Frameworks on Gender-Based Violence in Nigeria

A combination of international commitments, national legislation, and sub-national legal systems, including customary and religious laws, guides efforts to address gender-based violence (GBV) in Nigeria. While there has been notable legal progress in recent decades, the implementation and enforcement of laws related to GBV continue to face significant challenges. This section explores the key legal instruments, their scope, and the barriers that hinder justice for survivors.

²⁵Eze-Anaba, 2022 op.cit.

International Instruments

Nigeria is a signatory to several international and regional instruments that provide a legal foundation for combating GBV. One of the most significant is the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), ratified in 1985. CEDAW obliges states to take concrete measures to eliminate discrimination and violence against women in both public and private life. Nigeria has also ratified the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, commonly known as the Maputo Protocol, which explicitly addresses violence against women, harmful traditional practices, reproductive rights, and the rights of women in conflict situations.²⁶

While these instruments establish broad commitments, their impact in Nigeria has been undermined by weak domestication and enforcement at the national and sub-national levels. Notably, CEDAW has not been fully incorporated into Nigeria's national legal framework, limiting its enforceability in domestic courts.

National Legal Frameworks

Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act (VAPP), 2015: The VAPP Act represents the most comprehensive federal legislation addressing GBV in Nigeria. It criminalises various forms of violence including rape, domestic violence, harmful traditional practices, psychological abuse, and economic abuse. It also provides for victim compensation, protection orders, and establishes a framework for survivor-centred services.²⁷ However, as a federal law, its applicability is limited to the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), and individual states must domesticate it for it to apply

²⁶ African Union. (2003). *Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol)*. Retrieved from <https://au.int/en/treaties/protocol-african-charter-human-and-peoples-rights-rights-women-africa>

²⁷ Federal Government of Nigeria. (2003). *Child Rights Act*. Abuja: Government Press.

²⁸ WARD. (2024). *Tracking the domestication and implementation of the VAPP Act across Nigeria*. Women Advocates Research and Documentation Centre. Retrieved from <https://wardc.org>

elsewhere. As of early 2024, more than 30 of Nigeria's 36 states have domesticated the VAPP Act, though implementation varies significantly across states.²⁸

Child Rights Act (CRA), 2003: The CRA seeks to protect children from abuse, neglect, and harmful practices, including child marriage and exploitation. It sets the minimum age of marriage at 18 and guarantees children's rights to education, protection, and survival. However, like the VAPP Act, the CRA requires domestication by individual states. Resistance to its adoption, especially in the North, has limited its reach and weakened protection for girls in regions where child marriage remains widespread.

Penal and Criminal Codes: Nigeria's Penal Code (applicable in the North) and Criminal Code (applicable in the South) include some provisions addressing sexual and physical violence. However, they are outdated and lack specificity regarding many forms of GBV. For example, marital rape is not recognised as a crime under either code, and penalties for sexual assault are inconsistent and often inadequate.²⁹ These limitations reflect the codes' colonial origins and the patriarchal assumptions embedded within them.

Sharia and Customary Laws: In states operating Sharia legal systems (predominantly in the North), personal status laws often reinforce gender inequality and permit practices that conflict with human rights standards. While some Sharia courts have addressed GBV cases, interpretations vary and are often influenced by the judge's personal beliefs and idiosyncrasies. Similarly, customary laws in many communities uphold practices like wife inheritance and forced marriage, with little consideration for the autonomy or consent of women.³⁰

²⁸ WARD. (2024). Tracking the domestication and implementation of the VAPP Act across Nigeria. Women Advocates Research and Documentation Centre. Retrieved from <https://wardc.org>

²⁹ Okeke-Ihejirika, P., & Ogunjuyigbe, O. (2022). Criminal justice and gender-based violence in Nigeria: A review of statutory gaps. *African Human Rights Law Journal*, 22(1), 85 – 101.

³⁰ Eze-Anaba, I. (2022). Legal pluralism and the limits of GBV protection in Nigeria. *Journal of African Law and Society*, 12(1), 42–58.

GBV Programming in Nigeria: Strategies and Approaches

Efforts to prevent and respond to gender-based violence (GBV) in Nigeria have grown in scope and sophistication over the past two decades. These efforts span government initiatives, civil society advocacy, donor-supported interventions, and community-led responses. Programming typically falls under two broad categories: prevention, which aims to address the root causes and social norms that enable GBV, and response, which focuses on supporting survivors and victims through legal, health, and psychosocial services. Despite progress, coverage remains inconsistent, under-resourced, and often fragmented.

5.1 Prevention Interventions

a) Awareness, Education, and Social Norms Change

A major component of GBV prevention in Nigeria involves shifting harmful gender norms through public education and community engagement. Campaigns focus on debunking myths about domestic violence, promoting gender equality, and raising awareness of survivors' rights and services. Initiatives such as the *UN Spotlight Initiative* and the *HeForShe* campaign have helped spotlight GBV issues, particularly during global observances like the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence.³¹

Education programs targeting schools, faith-based institutions, and traditional leadership structures are also key. These programs often include life skills training, rights-based education, and curriculum reform to foster gender sensitivity from an early age.³² However, their effectiveness varies across regions and is often constrained by conservative backlash or lack of sustained funding.

³¹UN Women Nigeria. (2022). Nigeria Spotlight Initiative: End -line Report. Retrieved from <https://nigeria.unwomen.org>

³²UNFPA Nigeria. (2023). Gender -based violence. Retrieved from <https://nigeria.unfpa.org>

b) Engaging Men and Boys

Recognising the role of men as both potential perpetrators and allies, many GBV prevention efforts now include targeted programs for men and boys. Initiatives on positive masculinity encourage critical reflection on male identity, power, and violence. Community dialogues, mentorship programs, and male-led advocacy networks, such as the *MenEngage Alliance* and *Husband Schools* in Northern Nigeria, have shown promise in promoting behaviour change and accountability.³³

These efforts are especially vital in challenging entrenched patriarchal beliefs and ensuring that prevention is not seen as a “women's issue” alone. Nonetheless, the scale of such programs remains limited, and broader cultural transformation requires long-term investment and political will.

Response Mechanisms

a) Health, Psychosocial, Legal, and Shelter Services

Survivors/victims of GBV require a range of services, including immediate medical care, trauma counseling, legal aid, and safe shelter. While some tertiary hospitals and primary health centres offer post-rape care and emergency contraception, many facilities lack trained personnel or survivor-sensitive protocols.³⁴ NGOs often provide psychosocial support, but access is limited in rural and conflict-affected areas.

Legal aid and police services are also essential but remain poorly coordinated and underfunded. Survivors often face stigma and institutional indifference, which discourages reporting and perpetuates impunity.³⁵ Shelters and safe houses are extremely limited, most are run by NGOs with minimal support from the state.

³³ ActionAid Nigeria. (2021). Positive masculinity and male engagement: Lessons from husband schools in Northern Nigeria. Abuja: ActionAid.

³⁴ WARD. (2023). Strengthening justice pathways for GBV survivors in Nigeria: Policy brief. Women Advocates Research and Documentation Centre. Retrieved from <https://wardc.org>

³⁵ Oladimeji, T., & Agbede, S. (2025). The effects of gender -based violence on women's rights in Nigeria. *International Journal of Social Science and Multidisciplinary Research*, 11(1), 110 –118.

b) Sexual Assault Referral Centres (SARCs) and One-Stop Centres

SARCs (Sexual Assault Referral Centres) are among Nigeria's most innovative response models to sexual violence. These centres offer a range of integrated services, including medical care, counselling, and legal support, all in a survivor-friendly environment. As of 2024, more than 30 SARCs have been established in states such as Lagos, Kaduna, Enugu, and Kano, with support from organizations like the Mirabel Centre and the Justice for All program.³⁶

Despite their success, SARCs are unevenly distributed and often reliant on donor funding. Many states still lack functional centres, and referral systems between police, health providers, and shelters remain weak.

c) Coordination and Referral Systems

Effective GBV response requires coordinated efforts across multiple sectors, including health, justice, social services, and civil society. Referral pathways and case management systems have been developed in some states, often supported by donor-funded projects. However, a lack of standardisation, data sharing, and accountability mechanisms hinders nationwide impact.³⁷

Efforts to integrate GBV services into humanitarian response frameworks, especially in the North-East, have shown some success, but coordination remains ad hoc, with gaps in training, funding, and policy harmonisation.³⁸

³⁶British Council. (2021). Justice for All Programme: Evaluation of Sexual Assault Referral Centres (SARCs) in Nigeria. Retrieved from <https://www.britishcouncil.org.ng>

³⁷UNFPANigeria, 2023 op.cit.

³⁸GBV AoR Nigeria. (2022). GBV SubSector Strategy for Nigeria Humanitarian Response Plan. Retrieved from <https://gbvaor.net>

Declaration of a State of Emergency on GBV in Nigeria

In June 2020, amid a surge in sexual violence cases and mounting public outrage, the Nigerian Governors' Forum declared a state of emergency on rape and other forms of gender-based violence. This political move followed a series of high-profile assaults, including the brutal rape and murder of Uwa Omozuwa, which catalysed nationwide protests and online activism under hashtags like *#JusticeForUwa* and *#WeAreTired*. For the first time, GBV was acknowledged as a national crisis requiring a coordinated government response.

The declaration promised key actions, including the domestication of the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act (VAPP) in all states, increased funding for sexual assault referral centres, and improved law enforcement engagement. Some progress followed - by 2023, over 30 states had adopted the VAPP Act, up from just 14 in 2020.³⁹ However, implementation remained weak. Most states failed to fund or operationalise GBV services adequately, and enforcement by police and courts was marred by stigma, corruption, and lack of capacity.

Critics argue that the emergency declaration has been more symbolic than transformative, lacking the institutional urgency typically associated with emergency response, such as dedicated courts, special prosecutors, or substantial budget reallocations. While it generated momentum for civil society advocacy and donor investment, it did not translate into structural reforms or long-term behavioural change. Survivors still face barriers to justice, and social norms that normalise violence remain deeply entrenched.⁴⁰

³⁹UN Women. *Tracking the Domestication of the VAPP Act in Nigeria*. New York: UN Women, 2023.

⁴⁰Ajayi, A. I., and F. Olanrewaju. "Gender -Based Violence in Nigeria: A Review of Policy and Implementation Challenges." *African Journal of Reproductive Health* 23, no. 4 (2019): 93–102.

Nonetheless, the declaration marked a shift in public discourse. It positioned GBV within national security and development agendas and provided leverage for actors demanding accountability. In humanitarian settings, it facilitated the stronger integration of GBV prevention into protection frameworks.⁴¹ Yet, the real emergency persists, not just in the prevalence of violence, but in the state's incomplete response to it.

Role of Civil Society, Government, and International Partners

Civil society organisations (CSOs) have played a pioneering role in GBV programming in Nigeria. From advocacy and legal reform to service delivery and support for survivors and victims, organisations such as the Women Advocates Research and Documentation Centre (WARDC), Project Alert, and Mirabel Centre, among many others, have filled critical gaps left by the state.

The Nigerian government has taken steps to institutionalise GBV response through policies such as the National Gender Policy, VAPP Act, and the National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security. However, funding and political prioritisation remain low. Ministries often lack dedicated GBV units or skilled personnel to effectively manage programs.⁴²

International partners, including UN agencies, the EU, the UK's FCDO, the Ford Foundation, and several international NGOs, have provided support for capacity-building, awareness campaigns, and legal advocacy. However, much of this programming relies on donor funding, which raises sustainability concerns.

⁴¹OCHA. *Nigeria Humanitarian Needs Overview 2022*. Geneva: United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2022.

⁴²N Women Nigeria. (2022). Nigeria Spotlight Initiative: End -line Report. Retrieved from <https://nigeria.unwomen.org>

Impacts of GBV Interventions in Nigeria

The decade of enhanced targeted interventions, ranging from legislative reforms to grassroots activism and humanitarian coordination, has produced measurable successes in shifting public attitudes, enhancing service provision, and institutionalising safeguards. Some of the gains and successes of the years of intervention include:

a. Legal and Policy Advancements: The Emergence of a Normative Framework

One of the most significant milestones in Nigeria's GBV landscape is the passage of the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act (VAPP) in 2015. The Act broadened the legal definition of GBV to include emotional, psychological, and economic abuse, alongside physical and sexual violence. It also introduced provisions for survivor compensation and penalties for harmful practices like female genital mutilation and spousal battery.⁴³

The passage of the VAPP Act signalled a critical shift in Nigeria's normative framework. Before 2015, GBV-related legislation was either fragmented or inadequate. Although criminal codes criminalised rape and assault, they lacked comprehensive protection for survivors, particularly within the domestic sphere. Since the enactment of the VAPP Act, advocacy campaigns have led to its domestication in over 30 of Nigeria's 36 states, a significant leap from fewer than 10 states in 2019.⁴⁴ This trend demonstrates increasing subnational commitment to legal accountability, often catalysed by the efforts of feminist organisations.

⁴³Federal Republic of Nigeria. *Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act*. Abuja: Government Printer, 2015

⁴⁴UN Women. *Tracking the Domestication of the VAPP Act in Nigeria*. New York: UN Women, 2023.

Nonetheless, enforcement remains uneven. The absence of implementation structures, delays in judicial processes, and persistent police complicity in protecting perpetrators continue to challenge the Act's effectiveness. However, the VAPP Act remains a cornerstone of legal progress in Nigeria's GBV response and a template for regional and local advocacy.

b. Increased Visibility and Shifts in Social Norms

GBV, traditionally silenced and stigmatised, has become a subject of national discourse in Nigeria, mainly due to the visibility created by media campaigns, digital activism, and survivor-led movements. Campaigns such as *#JusticeForOchanya*, *#ArewaMeToo*, and *#SayNoToRape* mobilised young Nigerians, especially women, to publicly challenge the culture of silence around sexual violence and institutional complicity.⁴⁵

In addition, the UN-EU Spotlight Initiative launched in 2019 invested significantly in public sensitisation through television, radio, and digital platforms, reaching over 40 million Nigerians with messaging on GBV prevention and survivors' rights.⁴⁶ The integration of male engagement strategies has also contributed to redefining masculinity and encouraging bystander interventions. Evaluations reveal increased awareness of GBV laws, particularly among youth, and growing support for survivors.⁴⁷

Although the impact on long-term behaviour remains under-examined, these campaigns represent a paradigmatic shift: GBV is no longer confined to private

⁴⁵Datiri Blessing. *Online Activism Against Gender -Based Violence: How African Feminism is Using Twitter for Progress*. DEBATS · Annual Review, 5 · 2020—271 / 286. [file:///C:/Users/Hussa iniAbdu.NGA-000124/Downloads/Dialnet -OnlineActivismAgainstGenderBasedViolence -7720014.pdf](file:///C:/Users/Hussa%20iniAbdu.NGA-000124/Downloads/Dialnet%20OnlineActivismAgainstGenderBasedViolence%20-7720014.pdf)

⁴⁶UN Nigeria. *Spotlight Initiative Progress Report 2022*. Abuja: United Nations Nigeria, 2022.

⁴⁷UNFPA Nigeria. *Evaluation of GBV Prevention and Response Services in Nigeria: 2020–2023*. Abuja: UNFPA, 2023.

discourse but increasingly recognised as a structural injustice requiring public accountability.

c. Expansion of Survivor-Centred Services

The expansion of GBV response services represents another critical gain. Before 2010, Nigeria had limited infrastructure for supporting survivors of sexual and gender-based violence. However, in recent years, centres like the Mirabel Centre in Lagos and the Women at Risk International Foundation (WARIF) have established multi-sectoral, one-stop centres offering medical, legal, and psychosocial services to survivors. Between 2013 and 2022, the Mirabel Centre alone provided services to over 25,000 survivors.⁴⁸

In humanitarian settings, particularly in conflict-affected Northeast Nigeria, GBV sub-clusters and Area of Responsibility (AoR) platforms have coordinated the establishment of safe spaces, the distribution of dignity kits, and community protection structures. Evaluations indicate improved access to care for women and girls, particularly in IDP camps in Borno and Yobe states.⁴⁹ The use of digital platforms such as the TALKAM mobile app, which enables survivors to report GBV incidents anonymously and access referrals, also reflects innovative progress in expanding reach, especially in urban and peri-urban contexts.⁵⁰

Despite some progress, challenges persist, including stigma surrounding reporting, low prosecution rates, and inconsistent availability of services in rural areas. Nevertheless, the expansion of services represents a significant shift from the previous near-total lack of survivor-centered infrastructure.

⁴⁸Mirabel Centre. *Impact Report 2013 –2023*. Lagos: Mirabel Centre, 2023.

⁴⁹OCHA. *Nigeria Humanitarian Needs Overview 2022*. Geneva: United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2022.

⁵⁰Devatop Centre for African Development. *Annual Report*. Abuja: Devatop, 2022.

d. Institutionalisation of Safeguarding and Accountability Mechanisms

An important institutional gain has been the mainstreaming of safeguarding policies within international development and humanitarian organisations operating in Nigeria. Following high-profile abuse scandals and donor pressure, NGOs and UN agencies now routinely integrate GBV risk mitigation, complaint mechanisms, and codes of conduct into their operations. A 2024 external performance evaluation of USAID's *CARE-GBV* project in Nigeria highlighted improvements in organisational awareness, staff wellbeing, and survivor safety protocols.⁵¹ (NORC, 2024).

Safeguarding has shifted from a compliance-based approach to a survivor-centred framework that prioritises confidentiality, community ownership, and restorative justice. Although there are still gaps in enforcement, the integration of GBV (Gender-Based Violence) risk assessments, staff training, and organisational codes of ethics indicates a growing commitment to accountability.

e. Youth Engagement and Normative Change

Nigeria's demographic reality, characterised by a youthful population, has led to the development of targeted interventions for young people. Peer-led education initiatives, such as those implemented in National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) orientation camps, have shown positive results in changing knowledge and attitudes regarding gender norms and sexual consent. A randomised control trial conducted in three NYSC camps revealed statistically significant improvements in male participants' understanding of gender-based violence (GBV) and support for gender equality.⁵²

⁵¹NORC. *Performance Evaluation of USAID's CARE -GBV Global Project: Nigeria Case Study*. Chicago: NORC at the University of Chicago, 2024.

⁵²Okonkwo, C. et al. "Effectiveness of Peer Education on GBV Attitudes Among Nigerian Youth: A Randomized Control Trial." *Journal of African Social Science Research* 18, no. 2 (2023): 88–109.

Similarly, civil society organisations, both national and international, have leveraged youth networks to disseminate GBV messaging in schools, faith-based spaces, youth spaces, and online platforms. These approaches reflect the recognition that long-term normative change requires sustained engagement with the values and practices that underpin violence.

The landscape of GBV response in Nigeria has undergone substantial transformation in the past decade. From the enactment of legal frameworks, such as the VAPP Act, to the establishment of survivor-centred services, youth mobilisation, digital activism, and the institutionalisation of safeguarding, these interventions represent significant gains in addressing a deeply rooted social problem. While implementation gaps, structural inequalities, and sociocultural resistance persist, the gains made thus far provide a robust foundation for deepening Nigeria's GBV response.

Challenges of Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Nigeria

Despite the growing proliferation of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) interventions in Nigeria, and the successes attained as enumerated above, the country continues to experience high levels of violence against women and girls. The World Bank estimates that nearly one in three Nigerian women have experienced physical violence, and about 7% report having experienced sexual violence.⁵³ While legal reforms, institutional investments, and civil society mobilisations have led to measurable progress, a complex array of political, cultural, institutional, and operational challenges continues to constrain the effectiveness, reach, and sustainability of GBV interventions. This section critically examines these challenges through a political economy and rights-based lens. Some of the challenges include:

a) Weak Legal Enforcement and Fragmented Implementation

The Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act (VAPP) of 2015 represents a significant legal advancement. However, the law's implementation has been severely

undermined by weak enforcement mechanisms, judicial delays, and the slow domestication of the Act across Nigeria's federated states. As of 2023, fewer than 30 out of 36 states had domesticated the VAPP Act, and enforcement remained largely ineffective due to insufficient legal awareness among law enforcement officers, judicial actors, and the public.⁵⁴

In practice, many victims of GBV are unable to access justice due to corrupt policing, procedural bottlenecks, and lack of protection from retaliation. Legal pluralism further complicates matters. In northern Nigeria, where Sharia law operates alongside customary law and statutory law, conflicting legal codes, which sometimes prioritise conciliation or punishment of survivors rather than perpetrators, particularly in cases involving sexual violence or child marriage. The legal system's inability to provide timely and survivor-centred justice undermines trust in formal institutions and reinforces the culture of silence surrounding GBV.

b) Cultural Norms and Social Stigma

Cultural norms rooted in patriarchy, religious conservatism, and gendered power relations continue to impede GBV prevention and response efforts. In many communities, violence against women is normalised, and victims/survivors are often blamed, ostracised, or pressured into silence to “protect the family's honour”⁵⁵. This culture of stigma severely limits reporting rates, which remain as low as 2–10% depending on the form of violence and location.⁵⁶

⁵³ World Bank. Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) in Nigeria: Country Profile. Washington, DC: World Bank, 2021.

⁵⁴ UN Women. *Tracking the Domestication of the VAPP Act in Nigeria*. New York: UN Women, 2023.

⁵⁵ Ajayi, A. I., and F. Olanrewaju. “Gender -Based Violence in Nigeria: A Review of Policy and Implementation Challenges.” *African Journal of Reproductive Health* 23, no. 4 (2019): 93–102.

⁵⁶ National Population Commission (NPC) and ICF. Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey 2018. Abuja and Rockville: NPC and ICF, 2019. No recent updates have been provided on reporting; it is therefore unclear whether there has been any improvement.

Interventions that challenge these norms, especially those targeting early marriage, female genital mutilation (FGM), or marital rape, often encounter resistance from traditional and religious institutions. Community leaders who are pivotal in shaping norms are not consistently engaged or capacitated, leading to token participation or backlash.⁵⁷ Without deeper cultural engagement, GBV interventions risk being viewed as foreign impositions rather than legitimate vehicles for social justice.

c) Underfunding and Donor Dependency

A persistent challenge is the chronic underfunding of GBV prevention and response, particularly at the state and local levels of government. While international donors, such as the EU-UN Spotlight Initiative, USAID, and FCDO, have supported large-scale programming, most interventions remain donor-driven and unsustainable. Although relative progress has been made on government intervention since the declaration of a state of emergency in 2020, national and subnational allocations for GBV-related services (e.g., shelters, legal aid, psychosocial support) are either absent or insufficient, and few states have functional Sexual Assault Referral Centres (SARCs).⁵⁸

Moreover, community-based organisations (CBOs) and women-led NGOs, which are often at the frontlines of GBV response, operate on limited budgets, short-term grants, and projectized funding cycles. This constrains long-term programming, staff retention, and the development of robust monitoring systems. The COVID-19 pandemic further exposed these fragilities, with many GBV service providers unable to operate during lockdowns due to a lack of contingency support.

⁵⁷Ajayi, A. I., and F. Olanrewaju. “Gender -Based Violence in Nigeria: A Review of Policy and Implementation Challenges.” *African Journal of Reproductive Health* 23, no. 4 (2019): 93 –102.

⁵⁸UNFPA Nigeria. Evaluation of GBV Prevention and Response Services in Nigeria: 2020 – 2023. Abuja: UNFPA, 2023.

d) Data Gaps and Poor Monitoring and Evaluation

Another fundamental challenge is the lack of reliable, disaggregated, and timely data on the prevalence, drivers, and impact of GBV. Despite recent improvements, including the establishment of the National GBV Data Situation Room and Dashboard, reporting remains inconsistent, fragmented across sectors (health, police, justice), and often not publicly accessible.⁵⁹

Many implementing organisations lack standardised indicators or evaluation frameworks, and few interventions undergo independent impact assessments. This results in an evidence gap, making it challenging to identify what works, replicate successful models, or adapt programming in real time. Moreover, government agencies often underreport cases due to political sensitivity or fear of reputational damage, particularly in conflict-affected regions.

a) Inadequate Integration into Humanitarian and Development Systems

In humanitarian settings, GBV prevention and response are often siloed as standalone components, rather than fully integrated into health, education, protection, and livelihoods programs. Coordination between humanitarian actors and national systems remains weak, with parallel reporting structures, duplication of services, and uneven capacity among local actors.⁶⁰

In the development sector, GBV is sometimes treated as a “soft issue,” receiving less priority than economic growth, infrastructure, or security. As a result, cross-sectoral linkages, such as those between GBV and poverty, education, urban planning, or

⁵⁹UN Women. Tracking the Domestication of the VAPP Act in Nigeria. New York: UN Women, 2023.

⁶⁰OCHA. *Nigeria Humanitarian Needs Overview 2022*. Geneva: United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2022.

climate change, are underexplored, and opportunities for holistic prevention are often missed.

b) Limited Capacity and Burnout Among Service Providers

Frontline GBV responders, including social workers, health professionals, legal advocates, and community mobilizers, face heavy caseloads, poor remuneration, and emotional exhaustion. Training on survivor-centred approaches is often limited or one-off, with few opportunities for professional development or psychological support. In states where conflict or insecurity is prevalent, such as Borno, Yobe, Adamawa, Zamfara, Katsina and Kaduna, staff face additional threats to their safety and freedom of movement, further constraining their ability to provide timely and dignified care.

GBV interventions in Nigeria have made considerable strides in legislative reform, public awareness, and service expansion. However, these gains are still undermined by a constellation of structural, cultural, and institutional challenges. Weak enforcement, deep-rooted patriarchy, funding fragilities, data limitations, and inadequate systemic integration undermine the scale and sustainability of these interventions.

Toward Transformative and Sustainable GBV Prevention

While considerable progress has been made in addressing gender-based violence (GBV) in Nigeria, lasting change requires a more transformative and sustainable approach. Efforts must move beyond reactive programming and address the structural, cultural, and institutional drivers of violence. Such transformation demands an intersectional and survivor-centred lens, stronger institutions and community ownership, and sustained investment in prevention, education, and evidence generation.

a) Strengthen Leadership Political Will

Political will is a critical determinant of the effectiveness of gender-based violence (GBV) interventions in Nigeria. While the passage of key legislation, such as the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act (2015), and the 2020 declaration of a state of emergency on rape reflect formal commitments, the **translation of these commitments into action has been inconsistent and largely superficial**. Many state governments have domesticated the VAPP Act; however, enforcement remains weak due to inadequate funding, a lack of institutional capacity, and limited accountability mechanisms.

The absence of sustained political leadership undermines multi-sectoral coordination and deprioritises GBV within broader development and security agendas. Political elites often treat GBV as a peripheral or donor-driven issue, rather than a structural crisis that requires an urgent policy and budgetary response. Moreover, **gender justice is rarely a central focus of electoral platforms or legislative debates, further underscoring** the low salience of GBV in political priorities.

To strengthen GBV response, political will must go beyond rhetoric. It requires sustained investment, institutional reform, and accountability systems that ensure survivors' rights are protected and perpetrators held to account. Without such commitment, Nigeria's GBV response will continue to falter under the weight of symbolic gestures and unimplemented policies.

b) Intersectional, Survivor-Centred, and Culturally Grounded Approaches

To be effective, GBV prevention must recognise the diverse identities and vulnerabilities of those affected. Intersectional approaches consider how gender intersects with other factors, such as age, disability, sexual orientation, class, ethnicity, and religion, to shape individual experiences of violence.

Moreover, interventions must centre the voices, rights, and choices of survivors/victims. Survivor-centred approaches prioritise safety, confidentiality, dignity, and empowerment, ensuring that support systems do not inadvertently re-traumatise or disempower victims. Programmes also need to be culturally grounded, engaging traditional, religious, and community leaders not only as gatekeepers but as potential allies in challenging harmful norms and promoting change.

c) Strengthening Institutions, Accountability, and Community Ownership

The sustainability of GBV prevention depends on the capacity and responsiveness of institutions. This includes strengthening the judiciary, police, healthcare systems, and social services to ensure survivors receive justice and care without bias or delay. Legal protections, such as the VAPP Act, must be enforced through adequate funding, training, and monitoring mechanisms.

Institutional accountability must go hand-in-hand with community ownership. Local actors, traditional councils, faith institutions, women's groups, and youth networks, must be empowered to lead prevention efforts. Community-led models that integrate indigenous knowledge and reflect local values have greater legitimacy and sustainability.⁶¹ Building community ownership also enhances early warning systems and fosters safe spaces for dialogue and redress.

d) Scaling Up Positive Masculinity and Transformative Education

Engaging men and boys remains one of the most critical yet underfunded pillars of GBV prevention. Positive masculinity programmes, such as *Husband Schools* and *MenEngage Alliances*, have demonstrated that with the right tools and spaces, men can challenge dominant narratives of control and violence and adopt more egalitarian behaviours.

⁶¹ActionAid Nigeria, 2021 op.cit.

Beyond stand-alone programs, education must be transformative and lifelong, from early childhood through adulthood. Gender equality education should be integrated into school curricula, vocational training, religious institutions, and civic education. It must teach not only awareness of rights but also skills in empathy, conflict resolution, and respectful relationships.⁶² Teacher training, parental engagement, and media literacy are all essential components of such a strategy.

e) Investment in Data, Research, and Long-Term Programming

Reliable, disaggregated data is foundational to effective policy and programming. Unfortunately, GBV data in Nigeria remains sparse, fragmented, and inconsistent. There is an urgent need for national-level data collection systems that track prevalence, case management, and service uptake across states and sectors. Strengthening data systems also enables evidence-based advocacy and more targeted interventions.

Long-term, multi-sector programming is essential for achieving transformative change, as opposed to relying on short-term, project-based responses. This approach requires stable domestic financing, supplemented by international partners when necessary. Donor support must align with national strategies and focus on building local capacity rather than fostering dependency. Lessons learned from global initiatives, such as the Spotlight Initiative, demonstrate that long-term investment leads to more significant outcomes in institutional change, public engagement, and the transformation of social norms.

Conclusion

Gender-Based Violence (GBV) remains one of the most pervasive and enduring human rights violations in Nigeria, cutting across class, region, religion, and age. As this chapter has shown, GBV is deeply rooted in patriarchal structures, reinforced by harmful cultural and religious norms, economic inequalities, institutional weaknesses, and a culture of silence and impunity.

⁶²UNESCO, (2021) op.cit.

Despite the rising awareness and growing body of laws and policies, the scale and complexity of GBV continue to overwhelm national response systems.

While Nigeria has made notable strides, such as the passage and partial domestication of the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act (VAPP), the establishment of Sexual Assault Referral Centres (SARCs), and increased engagement by civil society, significant gaps remain. These include underfunding, limited rural outreach, fragmented services, and the exclusion of the marginalised population. Institutional responses are often reactive rather than preventive, and survivor-centred services remain insufficient and unevenly distributed.

Moving forward, sustainable GBV prevention and response require a more transformative approach, one that is intersectional, survivor-led, and culturally grounded. Strengthening institutions, ensuring accountability, and fostering community ownership are essential for breaking the cycle of violence. Scaling up education, parenting, programming positive masculinity, investing in local capacity, and committing to long-term funding are equally critical.

Ultimately, ending GBV in Nigeria is not only a legal or humanitarian imperative, it is central to achieving gender equality, social justice, and inclusive development. It requires bold leadership, grassroots mobilisation, and a societal shift in values. Only through collective action, sustained political will, and structural transformation can Nigeria create a society where everyone, regardless of gender or identity, can live free from violence, fear, and discrimination.

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List of Abbreviations

GBV	Gender Based Violence
NDHS	Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey
IIPV	Intimate partner violence
SGBV	Sexual and Gender-Based Violence
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
FCDO	Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
EU	European Union
UN	United Nations
TFGBV	Technology-Facilitated Gender-based violence
IDP	Internally Displaced Persons
VAPP	Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
FCT	Federal Capital Territory
SARCs	Sexual Assault Referral Centres
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisations
CRA	Child Rights Act
CSOs	Civil society organisations
WARDC	Women Advocates Research and Documentation Centre
WARIF	Women at Risk International Foundation (WARIF)
NYSC	National Youth Service Corps

05

Chapter Five

Chapter Five
**MALE ENGAGEMENT IN SUPPORT OF ENDING GENDER
BASED VIOLENCE IN NIGERIA**

By
Otive Igbuzor, PhD

1. INTRODUCTION

Violence against women and girls is a huge challenge and an obstacle to development across the world. It has been recognized as an obstacle to the achievement of the objectives of equality, development and peace.¹ Violence against women (VAW) remains one of the most pervasive human rights violations globally, cutting across culture, class, education, income, ethnicity, and religion. In recent years, there is an increased reportage or incidence of violence against women and girls across the world. There is no doubt that accelerated development which is greatly needed across the world cannot take place without addressing the challenges of violence against women and girls.

Over the years, several attempts have been made to tackle the problem of violence against women and girls but the challenge remains daunting. In recent years, governments, scholars and the international community have taken greater interest on matters relating to violence against women and girls. These issues gained international prominence during the United Nations decade for women (1975-85). In 1985, violence against women was identified as an obstacle to peace in the Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women.² In June, 1993, the Vienna Declaration on Human Rights affirmed that Women rights are human rights. Similarly in 1993, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women. In 1995, at the 4th World Conference on Women in Beijing, China, violence against women was identified as

one of the 12 critical areas of concern for immediate action by the international community, international financial institutions, the private sector, governments, NGOs and the media.

The acts of violence against women and girls are numerous and include domestic violence, rape, incest, child sexual abuse, forced prostitution, sexual harassment, physical assault, acid bath, harmful traditional practices (widowhood rites, female genital mutilation, male child preference etc) economic deprivation, neglect and abandonment etc³

The problem of violence against women is a global phenomenon. The World Health Organisation (WHO) report indicates that at least one in five of the world's female population, has been physically or sexually abused by a man or men at some point in their life.⁴ It has been documented that wife abuse is the leading cause of injury among women of reproductive age in the United States and that 4,835 “dowry related deaths” were recorded in India in 1990.⁵ It has been estimated that 85 to 114 million women and girls have been subjected to female genital mutilation, the majority of them in Africa.⁶ One in three Nigerian women and girls aged 15-24 have been victims of violence.⁷

Violence against women is not only a human rights issue but also a development issue because of the link between poverty, human insecurity and violence.

In this chapter, we argue that men and boys constitute the missing link in the plausible solutions to gender based violence. But first, we explicate the concept of violence against women, outline the theories of violence against women and the plausible solutions.

¹ United Nations (2001), Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action with the Beijing + 5 Political Declaration and Outcome Document. New York, United Nations.

² Report of the 3rd World Conference on Women, Equality, Development and Peace. Nairobi. 1985. New York, United Nations.

³ Effah-Chukwuma, Josephine (2007), Male Involvement in Eliminating Violence Against Women. Lagos, Project Alert on Violence Against Women.

⁴ ibid

⁵ Effah-Chukwuma, Josephine (2007), Male Involvement in Eliminating Violence Against Women. Lagos, Project Alert on Violence Against Women.

In this chapter, we argue that men and boys constitute the missing link in the plausible solutions to gender based violence. But first, we explicate the concept of violence against women, outline the theories of violence against women and the plausible solutions.

2. GENDER BASED VIOLENCE

Violence against women and girls is simply any violence directed at them simply because of their sex. It is any act that violates the rights and fundamental freedom of women and girls. It is a manifestation of long years of historically unjust, unequal power relations between men and women which have led to domination over and discrimination by men. Violence is usually not tolerated by society or law enforcement agencies but in most cases, it is tolerated when directed against women and girls.

The UN General Assembly in 1993 defined **Violence Against Women as any act of gender-based violence** that results in, or is likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, physical, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty whether occurring in public or private life. Violence against women and girls can occur in the family or in the workplace or in the community.

Violence against women and girls can be classified into four man categories namely physical violence, psychological violence, sexual violence and socio-economic violence⁸:

- I. **Physical violence:** this involves inflicting bodily harm causing pain and sometimes disability including kicking, slapping, hitting with a weapon, pushing, flogging, pouring of acid, harmful traditional practices (Female

⁶ Nahid, T (1993), Female Genital Mutilation: A call for Global Action.

⁷ Osam, Susanna (2007), Violence Against Women in Ghana: An Analysis of Cases Presented in the Print Media. Accra, Abantu for Development.

⁸ Effah-Chukwuma, Joseph and Osarenren, Ngozi (2001), Beyond Boundaries: Violence Against Women in Nigeria. Lagos, Project Alert on Violence Against Women.

Genital Mutilation (FGM), widowhood rites) and murder.

II. Psychological violence: is mental violence including verbal abuse, harassment, threats, confinement, deprivation of physical, financial and personal resources etc

III. Sexual Violence: various forms of sexual violence including rape, incest and child sexual abuse.

IV. Socio-Economic violence: restricted access to social, economic and political resources including refusal to pay school fees for the children, financial neglect, denial of inheritance rights, widowhood rites etc.

It has been recognized that violence free environment is desirable for humanity. But scholars have documented that several factors hamper the efforts towards eradication of violence against women and girls including lack of political will; deeply embedded attitudes about male-female relations; social taboos against discussing private matters in public; strong resistance from some organized religion, health system and law enforcement mechanism; a system of gender relations which posits that men are superior to women; reluctance of victims to report violation and society's tolerance of violence against women and girls.⁹

3. THEORIES OF GENDER BASED VIOLENCE

Several theories have been propounded to explain the reasons, extent and causes of violence against women. Some scholars have identified six theories namely psychodynamic theory; observational learning; frustration-aggression theory; socio-psychological theories; sociological theories and family organization theory.¹⁰

I. Psycho-dynamic Theory: defect in the character structure of some individuals predisposes them to the display of violence which is exacerbated when there is added stress.

⁹ CIRDDOC (2002), Violence Against Women: An Overview. Enugu, Fourth Dimension Publishers and Appiah, D. C. and Cusack, K (1999), Breaking the Silence and Challenging the Myths of Violence against Women and Children in Ghana: Report of a National Study on Violence. Ghana, Gender Studies & Human Rights Documentation Centre.

¹⁰ Effah-Chukwuma, Josephine and Osarenren, Ngozi (2001), Beyond Boundaries: Violence Against Women in Nigeria. Lagos, Project Alert on Violence Against Women.

- II. Observational Learning:** aggression and violence are learnt by people through direct experience and observation or through stories. When some individuals are brought up in violent environment, they tend to conclude that violence is a way of life.
- III. Frustration-Aggression Theory:** When some people are frustrated, it causes discomfort and they respond with violence.
- IV. Socio-Psychological Theories:** Certain characteristics of some people attract violence to them through appearance, physical defects or certain mannerisms. This theory has been criticized for blaming the victim. It is this kind of reasoning that promotes the term “battered wives” rather than “violent husbands.”¹¹
- V. Sociological Theories:** Social factors such as poverty, unemployment, stress and social isolation contribute to aggressive behavior.
- VI. Family Organisation Theory:** The composition of family contributes to aggressive behavior. Some scholars observe that men who beat their wives are poor, uneducated, either unemployed or stuck in a low paid, low status job and the son of a violent father.¹²

From the above theories, three issues are clear. First, socialization can have great effect on violence against women. Secondly, environment in which people grow up can influence their attitude towards violence against women. Thirdly, certain factors can exacerbate tendency towards violence against women.

¹¹ Pahl, Jan (1985), Private Violence and Public Policy: The needs of battered women and the response of the public services.

¹² Effah-Chukwuma, Josephine and Osarenren, Ngozi (2001), op cit

4. PLAUSIBLE SOLUTIONS TO END GBV

Over the years, scholars and development Practitioners have outlined the programmatic actions that can be taken to end gender based violence. They include the following:

1. Speak Out: The beginning point is to speak against violence against women and girls. As President Nelson Mandela stated:

For every woman and girl violently attacked, we reduce our humanity. For every woman forced into unprotected sex because men demand this, we destroy dignity and pride. Every woman who has to sell her life for sex, we condemn to a life time in prison. For every moment we remain silent, we conspire against our women. For every woman infected by HIV, we destroy a generation. We must be honest and open about the power relationships between men and women in our society.¹³

The voice of men speaking against violence against women can be particularly powerful and Network of Men Leaders need to be organized around the world.

2. Create Awareness: There is the need to create awareness on the dangers of violence against women. This can be done using the print and electronic media, social media, posters, stickers, rallies, drama, films, seminars, workshops.

3. Research on the forms and extent of violence against women and girls and ways to eliminate them.

4. Advocacy and Campaigns on eliminating violence against women and girls.

5. Provide services to victims of violence against women and girls including free legal aid and counseling services and shelters for victims of violence.

6. Abolition of harmful traditional practices such as FGM, widowhood practices, and other harmful practices.

7. Legal reform including review of existing laws, enactment of law on violence against women and enforcement of existing laws.

8. Reform of law enforcement on issues of violence against women including awareness creation and sensitization, training, re-training and re-orientation of law enforcement officers, research and advocacy and sanctions.¹⁴

9. Organise Network of Men leaders to support women organizations and advocate for elimination of violence against women.

5. MALE ENGAGEMENT IN SUPPORT OF ENDING GBV

Philosophies for engaging men in ending GBV should be grounded in equality, accountability, empathy, and transformative change. This involves approaching men as partners in dismantling patriarchal norms, encouraging self-reflection, and promoting positive masculinities that reject violence, coercion, and dominance. Engagement must challenge harmful gender stereotypes while affirming men's ability to practice compassion, fairness, and justice.

Class, ethnicity, and disability significantly influence male engagement. Men from economically disadvantaged backgrounds may struggle with disempowerment that fuels frustration, while men from privileged classes may be unaware of their structural advantages. Ethnic identity and historical experiences of marginalisation can shape openness to gender justice work, while men with disabilities often face compounded stigma and exclusion that require inclusive strategies. Effective engagement must therefore be inclusive.

Resistance from men—whether rooted in fear of losing privilege, cultural beliefs, or misunderstanding gender equality as male disempowerment—must be addressed constructively. This requires patient dialogue, education, and modelling of respectful behaviour. Demonstrating how gender equality benefits society as a

¹³Nelson Mandela, Quoted in Ibeanusi, Kate and Effah -Chukwuma, Josephine (2009), Male Involvement Project: Report of Consultative Forums on Male Involvement in Eliminating Violence Against Women in Nigeria. Lagos, Project Alert on Violence Against Women.

¹⁴Police Service Commission (2012), Domestic Violence Policy for the Nigeria Police Force.

whole, including men, can help overcome opposition.

men must show genuine solidarity with women and survivors of GBV through consistent action. This includes amplifying women's voices, rejecting victim-blaming, confronting misogyny among peers, and supporting survivor-centred laws and services. Solidarity also requires sharing the risks and responsibilities of advocacy, leveraging social influence to challenge unjust systems, and committing to long-term allyship that goes beyond symbolic gestures.

Over the years, all the above actions have been undertaken but in most cases with little involvement of men and boys. But in recent years, there is a compelling argument on why men and boys should be involved in eliminating violence against women and girls. Male engagement refers to the active involvement of men and boys in promoting gender equality and ending gender-based violence. It encompasses changing individual attitudes, collective behaviours, and institutional norms that support or condone violence against women.

A tool kit on ending abuse developed by the Family Violence Prevention Fund listed ten top reasons for working with men and boys:¹⁵

- I. Many women want men to step up and take a stand against violence.
- II. Most men do not agree with men's violence, yet they do nothing to challenge or stop it-these men need to be mobilized to prevent violence.
- III. Some men are already working to prevent violence but lack support, many more would like to get involved, but don't know how.
- IV. Men commit most of the violence against women. So it is up to them to stop it-take responsibility.
- V. Men are not born violent. They learn violence and become violent because of beliefs and norms about what it is to be a man. Work with men and boys can change those beliefs and norms and support men in rejecting violence.

¹⁵<http://toolkit.endabuse.org/why-MenAndBoys/top10/> (cited in Effah -Chukwuma, Josephine (2007), Male involvement in Eliminating Violence Against Women

- VI. Men have the potential to stop violence. Not only can they choose to not perpetuate acts of violence, they can choose to challenge the attitudes and assumptions that support gender-based violence.
- VII. Gender based violence has continued despite years of anti-violence work. The missing link is effective violence prevention work with men.
- VIII. Men experience violence too-many are survivors from childhood but very few get the support they need to heal them of their experiences.
- IX. Men and boys listen to their peers-we need to mobilize men and boys to spread the violence prevention message in their families, work places and communities.
- X. Decision makers and opinion leaders are mostly men. We need to work with them to get the political, financial and moral support necessary to prevent gender-based violence.

Men and boys can engage in practical work to eliminate violence against women by speaking out publicly against violence against women; working on themselves to change their attitude and behaviour; serve as mentor or good role model for others to emulate; take action as a neighbour, friend, classmate, co-worker, teammate or even someone unknown to you whenever you encounter violence against women or work as allies with women to eliminate violence against women.

There is no doubt that men and boys can make a huge difference if they can understand the nature of gender based violence, its root causes and negative impact and they get involved in efforts to end it. It is crucial that men and boys understand how their views of gender based violence has been socially constructed so that it can be deconstructed. If men and boys can be empowered with the skills and confidence to deconstruct their views on GBV, then they can commit themselves to become agents of change. Men and boys as agents of change armed with information and commitment can take individual and collective action against GBV. Men and boys taking action against GBV can lead to reduction and eventual elimination of GBV.

1. THE UN RESPONSE TO END GBV

The United Nations' Secretary General Network of Men Leaders was launched by the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Ban Ki Moon in December, 2012 as part of the growing effort to include men and boys as part of the solution to ending violence against women. The network supports the work of women around the world to defy destructive stereotypes, embracing equality and inspire men and boys everywhere to speak out against violence. The network is set up in recognition of the fact that many men are uncomfortable with stereotypical and violent behavior towards women and would intervene to end violence against women and girls.

The network is made up of current and former politicians, civil society and youth activists, religious and community leaders, cultural figures and other prominent individuals. The global network currently has 39 members including Mr. Franco Frattini (Minister of Foreign Affairs of Italy) and Mr. Jerzy Buzek (President of the European Parliament) and Mohammed Yunus (Founder of Grameen Bank). From Africa, there are four members, Kumi Naidoo and Archbishop Desmond Tutu from South Africa; Emmanuel Ochora from Uganda and Dr. Otiye Igbuzor from Nigeria. The network believes that men have a crucial role to play as fathers, friends, decision makers, and community and opinion leaders in speaking out against violence against women and ensuring that attention is given to the issue. Men can provide positive role models for young men and boys based on healthy models of masculinity.

Similarly, in 2014, the UN Women launched the *HeforShe* initiative inviting men and boys to commit to gender equality and take action to end violence against women. Since then, the UN Women has mobilised millions of men and boys globally including Nigeria.

NETWORK OF MEN LEADERS TO END VAW, NIGERIA

The Network of Men Leaders to end VAW, Nigeria is to provide a platform for leaders in Nigeria to advocate for, and provide guidance and direction to end

violence against women and girls within their communities. Men Leaders who are members of the network will be involved in advocacy, providing guidance and direction and highlighting good practices and deploring bad examples. The objectives of the Network will include:

- a. To contribute to mobilization and change in the culture, attitudes and behavior that perpetuate all forms of violence against women in Africa
- b. To motivate and encourage mobilization and action by men as well as women to contribute to preventing violence against women.

The Network was launched in Nigeria on 29th November, 2013.

The responsibilities of members of the Network include:

- Actively advocate for zero tolerance of violence against women and girls of all ages
- Promote publicly, through the media, and other avenues as appropriate, a positive role model of men preventing violence against women and girls;
- Support women's and men's organizations and networks and, through leadership and by example, support their efforts to end violence against women and girls.

CRITERIA FOR MEMBERSHIP

All members of the network must fulfil the criteria below:

1. Commitment to use all appropriate avenues to work to bring an end to all forms of violence against women and girls
2. Commitment not to engage in any actions or activities that will jeopardize the work to prevent and eradicate violence against women and girls.
3. Affirmation that the member has never used nor condoned violence against women and girls.
4. Commitment to use time, energy and resources to work to end violence against women and girls.

7. THE WAY FORWARD

Gender-based violence is a huge challenge and an obstacle to development across the world. There are plausible solutions to end GBV. These solutions of necessity include the involvement of men and boys but this is a great missing link in the struggle to end GBV. In the future, all efforts and programmes must include the involvement of men and boys. The United Nations has provided us with a platform to mobilise men and boys. All men and women of goodwill and good conscience should support any platform that will contribute to end GBV not only in Nigeria but across the world.

Ending violence against women requires a whole-of-society approach, and male engagement is a critical to achieving this objective. When men and boys are engaged, they can become effective advocates for change, challenging patriarchal norms, and fostering healthy, respectful relationships. By fostering positive masculinities and building inclusive movements, a world free from violence against women becomes not just possible but inevitable.

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06

Chapter Six

Chapter Six

TWELVE YEARS OF ENGAGING MEN AND BOYS: LESSONS FROM THE FIELD ON ENDING GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

By

Dr. Vincent Dania, DMS, PMP®

Introduction

The African Centre for Leadership, Strategy & Development (Centre LSD) began its work on engaging men and boys in the prevention of gender-based violence in 2013. This step was inspired by a global initiative led by former United Nations Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon, who, in 2009, launched the Network of Men Leaders to End Violence Against Women at the UN Headquarters in New York.¹ The launch coincided with the 10th anniversary of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women and marked a significant turning point in mobilizing male leadership to challenge violence against women and girls.

In October 2012, Dr. Otiye Igbuzor, the Founding Executive Director of Centre LSD, was appointed by Ban Ki-moon as a member of this distinguished network. His appointment placed Nigeria on the map of global advocacy efforts that recognized the role of men as partners, not just perpetrators in the fight against gender-based violence.²

Upon his return to Nigeria, Dr. Otiye recognized the need to translate the global initiative into a national movement that reflected local contexts and realities. In response, he established the Network of Men Leaders to End Violence Against Women in Nigeria, a platform conceived to bring together influential men from diverse sectors to champion the fight against gender-based violence.³

¹ UN News. (2009, November 24). *Ban launches new network of men leaders to combat violence against women*. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2009/11/322382>

³ Akor, O. (2013, December 3). *UN Women launches 'men network against violence*. Daily Trust. <https://dailytrust.com/un-women-launches-men-network-against-violence/>

Chapter 5 of this book, *Male Engagement in Support of Ending Gender-Based Violence* by Dr. Otiye Igbuzor, already provided an in-depth overview of the Network's work and offered a practical guide for engaging men in advocacy and behaviour change.

I had the privilege of serving as the pioneer coordinator of this national network. Under this platform, and with the support of funding partners such as UN Women, Christian Aid, and the Ford Foundation, we designed and implemented several initiatives aimed at shifting harmful gender norms and engaging men as allies in promoting gender justice.

This chapter draws from twelve years of practical experience in the field. It presents our reflections, the diverse strategies we adopted, what worked and what didn't, and the invaluable lessons that emerged. It also offers insights and promising practices for practitioners, policymakers, and advocates seeking to engage men and boys in transformative gender work, particularly within culturally sensitive and patriarchal contexts like Nigeria.

What Our Hotline Revealed About GBV in Nigeria

The Culture of Silence and Low Reporting

The first thing we noticed when we began male engagement through the Network of Men Leaders to End Violence Against Women in Nigeria (NML) was the disturbingly low rate of reported Gender-Based Violence (GBV) cases by survivors. This could be attributed to the deeply ingrained culture of silence surrounding issues related to intimate relationships and family life in Nigeria. A popular adage reinforces this norm: “Don't wash your dirty linens in public.”

Even women who wanted to report had very limited options. This was before the enactment of the Violence Against Persons Prohibition Act, 2015 (VAPP Act).

One option was to report to the police. However, this route came with serious challenges. Unless the violence was life-threatening, the police often failed to take such cases seriously. Additionally, survivors faced backlash from family members, especially in situations where a wife's complaint might lead to a husband being arrested or dragged to court.

Because of these consequences, many women avoided reporting to the authorities. Another available option was to approach religious leaders. But even this had limitations, as most religious leaders could only offer counselling to the couple rather than enforce any form of justice or protection.

Launching the GBV Hotline and ADR Team

Recognizing this gap, we set up a hotline for survivors to report GBV cases and established an Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) team. The team comprised lawyers, police officers, activists, and Centre LSD staff who are members of the Network of Men Leaders.

Within the first few weeks of launching the hotline to the public, we received over 30 calls!

A Case from Giri District: Community Response in Action

One particular case that stands out involved a young couple living in the Giri district of Abuja, near Gwagwalada. The wife was beaten unconscious by her husband, and neighbours rushed her to the hospital. After receiving treatment and being discharged, she was beaten again two days later. The same thing happened a third time within a week. It was after the third incident that the attending doctor called our hotline, having heard the number from a radio jingle we aired during the 2013 16 Days of Activism to End Violence Against Women.

Our ADR team intervened. The conflict stemmed from the wife's suspicion that her husband was cheating. Ongoing tensions in the relationship, driven by unresolved suspicions and poor communication, ultimately escalated into repeated acts of violence against the woman.

As part of our intervention model, we didn't stop at resolution. We required both parties to sign an undertaking. In particular, the man had to sign a declaration never to hit his wife again, with a clear warning: if the hotline received another report, we would personally ensure legal action and that he spent time in prison.

For over 12 months of active ADR intervention, we had no repeat offenders.

Consequence as a Deterrent

This experience reinforces a critical lesson: violence against women and girls (VAWG) can be significantly reduced when perpetrators are aware that real and enforced consequences will follow, and that these consequences are imposed by a neutral party outside the survivor's family. The state is best positioned to play this role.

Unfortunately, competing responsibilities made it difficult to sustain the ADR team over time.

Key Triggers of GBV and the Role of Trust

Still, despite the eventual discontinuation of the ADR team, a clear pattern emerged from the many cases we handled: two common triggers for violence consistently stood out—suspicion of infidelity and financial hardship. Interestingly, many women were willing to endure economic challenges, provided there was no betrayal of trust or reckless spending on alcohol and drugs.

Given how frequently suspicion of infidelity surfaced as a trigger for violence, it is essential that men do not create room for doubt or secrecy in their relationships. Trust is a foundational element of any healthy partnership, and where there is a communication gap, suspicion quickly fills the void. Men must prioritize clear, consistent, and honest communication with their partners, not only about their whereabouts, but also about finances, friendships, and emotional needs. In many of the cases we encountered, violent outbursts could have been avoided if misunderstandings were addressed early and openly.

Equally important is the need for couples to develop mutual accountability frameworks, such as shared financial transparency, and respectful dialogue. Community-based education programs and premarital counseling can also help couples set expectations and resolve conflicts constructively. For broader impact, we recommend that male engagement programs include sessions on healthy relationship skills, conflict resolution, and emotional regulation, as these directly address the root causes of domestic tensions. Men must understand that their role in building a peaceful home is not passive, it requires intention, humility, and emotional maturity.

Engaging Existing Power Structures: A Lesson from Trade Unions and Traditional Councils

Why New Networks Failed

During the first year of Centre LSD's UN Women-funded male engagement project to end violence against women and girls in Cross River and Lagos States in 2020, we set out with the noble goal of establishing community-based networks of male

leaders. The idea was to create self-sustaining groups dedicated to addressing gender-based violence (GBV) at the grassroots level. We developed governance structures for these networks and assigned leadership roles, such as chairperson, deputy chairperson, and secretary. The initial energy and enthusiasm were truly inspiring.

However, despite our best efforts, the networks gradually became inactive within a few months. None of the groups remained functional beyond the three-year lifespan of the project.

By the end of the first year, it became evident that gender-based violence, while critically important, was not a strong enough motivator to sustain long-term interest and engagement among men. The issue simply did not resonate with their immediate, day-to-day realities in a way that could anchor consistent group activity.

Working with Male-Dominated Groups

We discovered that men tend to mobilize more effectively around issues related to livelihood, access to power, and recreational interests. Based on this insight, we adjusted our strategy to focus on male-dominated groups and trade unions, such as the Motorcycle Riders Association, Tricycle Riders Association, Artisan Groups, and the National Union of Road Transport Workers (NURTW). These platforms already had established leadership, strong member engagement, and consistent meeting structures.

To build their capacity, we conducted Training-of-Trainers (ToT) sessions for union leaders, including chairmen, vice-chairmen, and secretaries. Each session was guided by a comprehensive training manual tailored to their specific roles and organizational realities.

Practical Innovations: Tools That Worked

One particularly effective innovation was the integration of practical administrative skills into the training. We included modules on how to prepare meeting agendas and write minutes. To reinforce this, we provided participants with customized

hardback 80-leaf notebooks, pre-formatted for minute-taking and aligned with the training content.

A key advocacy ask was that every meeting agenda include discussions on the following:

- Resolutions on gender-based violence
- Attitudes toward female passengers
- Mechanisms for investigating and addressing reported or observed cases of GBV

This approach ensured that GBV became a routine part of internal discussions, rather than a one-off advocacy topic. It normalized the integration of gender issues into the daily operations of these groups.

Traditional Councils as Gatekeepers of Norms

In many Nigerian communities, traditional leaders, such as chiefs, elders, and council members, serve as the primary custodians of cultural norms.⁴ Their influence extends beyond conflict resolution to shaping what is considered acceptable behaviour within households and the wider society. Recognizing their authority, we deliberately included traditional councils of chiefs in our male engagement strategy.

We adopted a similar approach to the one used with trade unions. We delivered training tailored to the cultural and administrative roles of traditional leaders and introduced tools to help embed gender justice into their governance structures. One of the most effective tools was the customized minute-taking notebook, which helped formalize GBV discussions during routine council

As with the trade unions, we encouraged traditional councils to include the following as standing agenda items:

- Resolutions on gender-based violence within the community

⁴ Centre for Health and Gender Equity (CHANGE). (2018). *The role of traditional leaders in ending gender-based violence: Lessons from Sub-Saharan Africa*. <https://www.genderhealth.org>

- Attitudes and behaviours toward women in both family and public life
- Mechanisms for investigating and responding to GBV cases

This integration ensured that gender-based violence was treated as an ongoing leadership priority. Chiefs were encouraged to speak out publicly against harmful practices, such as wife-beating and child marriage, and to model progressive standards of masculinity and respect.

Even two years after the project ended, several councils of chiefs continued using the notebooks and had embedded GBV issues into their formal meeting procedures. In some communities, traditional leaders had gone further to intervene in family disputes, referring survivors to support services, and applying community-level sanctions against perpetrators. In the words of Chief Amos Item, Paramount Ruler of Obanliku LGA, Cross River State:

In the words of Chief Amos Item, Paramount Ruler of Obanliku LGA, Cross River State:

“We were in darkness before but now light has come. The entire council of chiefs has taken a firm stand against all the barbaric and harmful practices in our communities.”

This experience underscored a critical lesson: when traditional leaders embrace gender justice, they lend it legitimacy and cultural weight. Their leadership reframes gender equality from being a “foreign NGO agenda” to an accepted and evolving part of community life. Engaging these cultural gatekeepers is essential for achieving sustainable, long-term normative change.

Key Lessons from this Experience

Leverage Existing Structures

As much as possible, work through already established groups, especially those organized around livelihood (e.g., trade unions), religion (e.g., churches and mosques), or traditional authority (e.g., councils of chiefs). These platforms already possess legitimacy, leadership, and regular meeting structures that can be harnessed for sustained behaviour change.

New Groups Are Hard to Sustain

Newly formed clubs, networks, surveillance groups, or “safe spaces” often lack long-term viability. Without ongoing funding or a strong connection to participants' everyday lives, these groups tend to lose momentum and fade out quickly.

Manage Expectations Around Donor Visibility

In retrospect, one of the reasons for the initial enthusiasm was the knowledge that the project was funded by UN Women. Many participants joined with the expectation of financial or material benefits. When such benefits did not materialize, interest quickly declined. To avoid this, it's advisable that the implementing organization, not the donor, be the visible face of the project. This reduces unrealistic expectations and encourages local ownership and intrinsic motivation.

Pair Advocacy with Practical Tools

It's not enough to train or preach behavioural change. Target groups must be equipped with the tools to institutionalize the change. In our case, we wanted GBV discussions to become part of routine trade union meetings. So we trained them on agenda-setting and minute-writing and provided customized notebooks to facilitate the process. This simple tool helped formalize the conversation and track commitment over time.

Engaging Men and Boys: How Inclusive Training Transformed Participation

A core component of Centre LSD's male engagement work has been training and capacity building. From inception, the Network of Men Leaders to End Violence

Against Women in Nigeria placed a strong emphasis on equipping men with the knowledge, attitudes, and skills needed to become allies in the prevention of gender-based violence (GBV).

To date, the network has trained over 1,000 men across Nigeria on various aspects of male engagement and gender equality. The training content was carefully designed to meet the following objectives:

- Enhance men's knowledge of the various forms of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) and harmful traditional practices (HTPs), including their prevalence at the household, community, and national levels.
- Build awareness of how socially constructed gender norms, both masculinities and femininities, contribute to the perpetuation of SGBV and harmful practices.
- Strengthen participants' confidence and capacity to challenge discriminatory norms and serve as positive role models or “positive deviants” in their families, workplaces, and communities.
- Facilitate a movement of men and boys actively advocating against SGBV and harmful practices through organized campaigns and everyday action.
- Increase awareness of relevant laws and policies, while promoting survivors' access to justice and support services in the communities where we worked.

Training Design and Evolution

Each training session followed a modular structure, using participatory methods and real-life scenarios. The modules typically included:

- Climate Setting – Creating a safe, respectful space for honest discussion.
- Understanding Key Concepts and Terminologies – Introducing gender, power, GBV, and related terms.
- Social Construction of Gender – Exploring how societies shape expectations of masculinity and femininity, and how these constructs fuel inequality.
- Securing Our Communities Against SGBV and Harmful Practices – Practical steps men can take to prevent violence and protect the vulnerable.
- Forming Collectives and Taking Action – Mobilizing as a group to advocate and intervene.
-

Initially, the trainings were designed exclusively for adult men. The logic was that men needed space for honest, man-to-man conversations where difficult truths could be discussed without fear of judgment, and where they could challenge one another to become better husbands, fathers, leaders, and friends.

However, as the work progressed, we expanded our focus to include boys, especially in secondary schools. We conducted targeted sessions with school prefects, club leaders, and young male influencers to introduce them to age-appropriate versions of the same modules. Our aim was to start early, shaping mindsets before harmful norms became entrenched.

Unexpected Feedback: “We Want Women Included”

At the end of every training, whether with men or boys, we collected feedback. Sometimes we used oral debriefs; other times, we administered anonymous surveys.

A surprising and consistent request kept surfacing:

“We want women and girls included in our trainings.”

This feedback initially caught us off guard. Our assumption had been that men would be more open and reflective in male-only spaces, free from the pressures of gender dynamics. We believed that honest conversations about masculinity, privilege, and change required male-only environments. But the men themselves disagreed.

They told us that the knowledge they were receiving about gender equality, violence prevention, and respectful relationships would be difficult to apply if their wives, sisters, daughters, or partners were not equally exposed.

“What’s the point,” one participant asked, “if I go home changed and my wife doesn’t understand the shift?”

The Power of Inclusive Learning

In response, we began including women in selected training sessions. The difference was remarkable.

In mixed-gender trainings:

- Engagement increased. Men spoke more frankly and with greater conviction.

- Dialogue deepened. Men and women debated real-life scenarios, clarified misunderstandings, and developed joint resolutions.
- Commitment improved. Participants often left with agreed household actions and follow-up plans.
-

Men were more likely to confront their own biases when women were present to offer their perspectives and vice versa. The presence of women turned theoretical lessons into grounded, relational discussions.

Key Lesson: Inclusion Deepens Impact

One of the most important lessons we've learned is that men want women involved, even in spaces originally designed for men. The traditional lines drawn between male-only and female-only engagement are, in practice, artificial and limiting.

Every case of GBV involves a relationship between a male and a female, whether as perpetrator and survivor, bystander and victim, or partners navigating power dynamics. Lasting change requires that both parties be part of the conversation.

Even when trainings or campaigns are targeted at one gender, meaningful involvement of the other can deepen impact and improve mutual understanding. Going forward, we've embraced the idea that gender equality is not a solo journey, it must be walked together.

Key Lessons from Twelve Years of Field Engagement

S/N	Lesson	Insight	Implication for Practitioners
1	Leverage Existing Structures	Established groups around livelihood, religion, and traditional authority are more sustainable than newly formed networks.	Work with trade unions, faith-based institutions, and traditional councils.
2	Make GBV Part of Everyday Systems	Embedding GBV topics into meeting agendas normalized the conversation.	Integrate GBV into regular union and council discussions using tools like customized notebooks.
3	Manage Expectations Around Donor Visibility	Public association with donors raised unrealistic expectations.	Let the implementing organization be the face of the intervention to enhance local ownership.
4	Inclusion Enhances Engagement	Men requested that women be part of trainings for mutual understanding.	Facilitate inclusive training sessions to reflect the relational nature of GBV.
5	Consequences Create Change	Perpetrators changed behaviour when real consequences were enforced.	Support local ADR mechanisms and advocate for consistent legal enforcement

Conclusion

Over the course of twelve years, our work at Centre LSD has revealed that meaningful male engagement in the fight against GBV is both possible and powerful, but only when rooted in cultural relevance, community ownership, and sustained accountability. We have seen firsthand that punitive responses alone cannot dismantle patriarchal norms; it takes committed dialogue, inclusive learning, and consistent reinforcement of values that promote empathy, fairness, and responsibility.

While some strategies, such as forming new male-only networks proved difficult to sustain, others like integrating GBV education into existing structures such as trade unions and traditional councils delivered lasting impact. We also learned that men welcome shared learning spaces with women, and that true transformation often begins when both parties are part of the journey.

The road ahead requires that we continue to adapt, listen, and evolve. For donors, policymakers, and practitioners, the lesson is clear: effective male engagement is not about event-based activism but about embedding change into the fabric of everyday life. When men are treated not as problems to fix but as partners to equip, the possibilities for safer, more equitable communities become limitless.

Appendices

¹Other members of the global network of men leaders selected by Ban Ki-moon:

- Juan Carlos Areán, Programme Director of the Family Violence Prevention Fund
- Gary Barker, International Centre for Research on Women
- Ted Bunch, Co-founder of the National Association of Men and Women Committed to Ending Violence against Women
- Brazilian novelist and UN Messenger of Peace, Paulo Coelho
- Italian Foreign Minister Franco Frattini
- Former Colombian President and Secretary-General of the Organization of American States, César Gaviria Trujillo
- Former Chilean President, Ricardo Lagos
- Andrew Levack, Co-chair of MenEngage Alliance
- Todd Minerson, Executive Director of the White Ribbon Campaign
- Emmanuel Ochora of Gulu Youth for Action in Uganda
- Dean Peacock, Founder of Building Partnerships to End Men's Violence
- Spanish Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero
- Norwegian Justice and Police Minister Knut Storberget
- Nobel Peace Prize laureate Archbishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa

Glossary

1. Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR)

A community-based approach to resolving conflicts without going through the formal legal system. In the context of this chapter, ADR involved trained individuals—lawyers, police officers, activists—intervening in cases of gender-based violence (GBV) to mediate and prevent repeat offenses.

2. Barbaric and Harmful Practices

Cultural or traditional practices that infringe on the rights, dignity, and safety of women and girls. Examples include child marriage, wife beating, and denial of education to girls. These are often upheld under the guise of tradition but contribute to systemic gender inequality.

3. Behaviour Change Communication (BCC)

A strategic process that uses communication to promote positive behaviours. In male engagement work, BCC involves reshaping attitudes around masculinity, power, and

violence through dialogue, storytelling, media, and peer learning.

4. Custodians of Culture

Leaders, often traditional rulers, elders, or religious authorities, who uphold and transmit societal norms and values. Their role in gender programming is critical as they have the influence to either reinforce or challenge harmful gender norms.

5. Engaging Men and Boys

An intentional strategy in gender equality and GBV prevention that involves men and boys as allies, advocates, and change agents. It shifts focus from seeing men as threats to viewing them as partners in promoting safer, more equitable communities.

6. Gender-Based Violence (GBV)

Any harmful act directed at an individual based on their gender. GBV includes physical, sexual, emotional, and economic abuse, and disproportionately affects women and girls in both public and private spaces.

7. Gender Norms

Socially constructed roles and expectations assigned to individuals based on their gender. These norms shape how men and women are expected to behave and often reinforce power imbalances and inequality.

8. Male-Dominated Groups

Organizations or social groups, such as trade unions, artisan associations, or traditional councils where leadership and membership are predominantly male. These structures are often overlooked in gender programming but offer strategic entry points for shifting harmful norms.

9. Positive Deviance

A behaviour change strategy that focuses on individuals or groups who, despite facing similar challenges as others, adopt uncommon but successful behaviours or practices. In this context, it refers to men who model gender-equitable behaviour in patriarchal societies.

10. Sustainable Community Structures

Long-standing local institutions or groups that serve economic, cultural, or governance functions within a community. These include religious organizations, traditional councils, and trade unions. Working through these platforms improves the sustainability of social interventions.

11. Suspicion of Infidelity

A recurring trigger of intimate partner violence, often rooted in poor communication, lack of trust, or unequal power dynamics. In the context of this chapter, it is identified as one of the most common causes of GBV reported through Centre LSD's interventions.

12. Training-of-Trainers (ToT)

A capacity-building model in which selected individuals are trained not only to improve their own knowledge but also to train others within their community or organization. It is a multiplier strategy used effectively in trade unions and traditional councils in this chapter.

13. Traditional Council of Chiefs

A formal assembly of traditional leaders responsible for decision-making and dispute resolution in their communities. In this chapter, they serve as influential partners in embedding GBV discussions into local governance.

14. Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG)

A broader term that encompasses all forms of gender-based violence specifically targeting women and girls. VAWG includes domestic violence, rape, harmful practices, trafficking, and emotional abuse.

Reference:

Akor, O. (2013, December 3). *UN Women launches 'men network against violence*. Daily Trust. <https://dailytrust.com/un-women-launches-men-network-against-violence/>

Centre for Health and Gender Equity (CHANGE). (2018). *The role of traditional leaders in ending gender-based violence: Lessons from Sub-Saharan Africa*. <https://www.genderhealth.org>

UN News. (2009, November 24). *Ban launches new network of men leaders to combat violence against women*. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2009/11/322382>

07

Chapter Seven

Chapter Seven
**MOVEMENT ORGANISING FOR GENDER EQUALITY
AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN NIGERIA**

By
Otive Igbuzor, PhD

1. INTRODUCTION

Gender equality and women's empowerment are essential for sustainable development, peace, and democracy. Movement organizing has been a catalyst for social change across the world especially in the last one decade. In Nigeria, despite policies and international commitments, gender-based disparities persist in education, political representation, access to resources, and protection from violence.¹ Movement organizing—collective efforts by individuals, civil society organizations (CSOs), and feminist groups—has emerged as a transformative force challenging patriarchal norms, systemic oppression and advocating for structural reform. In this chapter, we look at how Social Movement Organising can help in pushing for gender equality and women empowerment. But first, we look at the concepts of gender equality, empowerment and women empowerment.

2. CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

a. GENDER EQUALITY

Gender Equality refers to a state in which men and women have equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities in all spheres of life.² Gender equality does not mean that men and women are the same. But men and women are human beings and should be accorded all rights and opportunities available to human beings. Gender equality implies that the rights, responsibilities, and opportunities of individuals will not depend on whether they are born male or female. For this to happen, it means

¹ UN Women (2020), Women's Rights in Review: 25 Years after Beijing.

² UN Women (2022), Engaging Men and Boys in Gender Equality. <https://www.unwomen.org>

that the barriers that hold women down such as harmful traditional practices, discrimination and violence against women have to be eliminated.

b. EMPOWERMENT

The concept of empowerment is very popular in the field of development. There is hardly any development project in the four decades that does not talk about empowerment. The concept has been over used such that many people are confused about its concrete implication in social, economic and political terms. Many scholars have attempted to define the term in different ways. The world Bank defines empowerment as the expansion of freedom of choice and action...increasing one's authority and control over the resources and decision that affect one's life.³ This is a very broad and vague definition with a narrow and limited focus. A broader and more nuanced definition was given by Batliwala who defined empowerment as:

Control over material assets, intellectual resources, and ideology. The material assets over which control can be exercised may be physical, human, or financial, such as land, water, forests, people's bodies and labour, money and access to money. Intellectual resources include knowledge, information and ideas. Control over ideology signifies the ability to generate, propagate, sustain, and institutionalize specific sets of beliefs, values, attitudes and behaviour-virtually determining how people perceive and function within given socio-economic and political environments.⁴

³ <http://www.worldbank.org/poverty/empowerment/whatis/index.htm>

⁴ Batliwala, S (1994), "The Meaning of Women's Empowerment: New Concepts from Action" in Sen, G; Germain, A and Chen, L. C. (Eds) , Population Policies Reconsidered: Health, Empowerment and Rights. Massachusettes, Harvard school of Public Health p129

This definition looks at empowerment as the holding of power by individuals, groups or communities that enables them to take decisions that would lead to control over resources and ideas. But it must be noted that no individual, group or community is totally powerless in terms of taking decisions over resources and ideas. This is why empowerment has sometimes been looked at as a process of gaining greater control over the sources of power. This view informed the definition of empowerment by Sharma as:

... a range of activities from individual self esteem to collective resistance, protest and mobilization that challenge basic power relations. For individuals and groups where class, caste, ethnicity and gender determine their access to resources and power, their empowerment begins when they not only recognize the systemic forces that oppress them, but act to change existing power relationships. Empowerment therefore is a process aimed at changing the nature and direction of systemic forces, which marginalize women and other disadvantaged sections in a given context.⁵

The definition by Sharma sees empowerment both as a process and the result of the process. Empowerment will therefore lead to redistribution of power and transformation of structures and institutions. In a similar vein, Price-Chalita defined empowerment as a process through which oppressed people recognize and begin to use their agency, creating new spaces, occupying existing spaces or revolutionalising negatively labeled spaces.⁶

c. WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

Women empowerment involves increasing the power and autonomy of women to make strategic life choices.⁷ It is the process of increasing the capacity of women to

⁵ Sharma, k (1991 -92), **Grassroots Organisations and women's Empowerment: Some Issues in the Contemporary Debate.** Samya Shakti Vol. 6 p p28-43

⁶ Price -Chalita, P.(1994), "Spatial Metaphor and the Politics of Empowerment: Mapping a place for Feminism and Post Modernism in Geograpghy" in **Antipode** . Vol. 26 No 3 pp236 -254

⁷ Kabeer, N (1999), Resources, Agency, Achievements: Reflections on the Measurement of Women's Empowerment. Development and Change. Vol 30, No. 3, Pp 435 -464

make choices and transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes. Empowerment leads to access to resources, agency, and achievements in both private and public domains. There are four dimensions of women empowerment. The first is economic empowerment to ensure that women have equal access to economic resources, employment opportunities, land, capital, property and not discriminated against in taxation. The second is political empowerment to ensure that women have equal representation in government. The third is social empowerment to ensure that women have access to education, healthcare and social protection and protected from violence and traditional practices that are dehumanising. The fourth is legal empowerment to ensure that men and women are equal before the law and that there are no laws that discriminate against women.

3. SOCIAL MOVEMENT ORGANISING

Social movements are purposeful, organized groups that strive toward a common goal, such as creating change, resisting change, or giving voice to disenfranchised groups. Social movements typically emerge when there is dysfunction in the relationship between systems, systematic inequality, deprivation, or widespread discontent. Examples of social movement organizing include the anti-tobacco movement, the Arab Spring, the anti-apartheid movement, the workers' movement, the women's movement, and the student movement.

In the current era, social media plays a pivotal role in social movement mobilization, and artificial intelligence has great potential for enhancing this mobilization. Several scholars have explored the reasons behind the birth, growth, and maturation of various types of social movements. The 1950s saw the emergence of significant social movements in the US and Europe, including the civil rights movement, the anti-Vietnam War movement, the feminist and gender equality movements, and the environmental movement. The theories explaining these phenomena include:

1. **Deprivation Theory:** Social movements arise when certain people or groups in a society feel deprived of specific goods, services, or resources.
2. **Resource Mobilization Theory:** When individuals in a society have certain grievances, they may mobilize necessary resources, such as money, labour, social status, knowledge, and the support of the media and political elite, to address these grievances.
3. **Political Process Theory:** This theory posits that the success of movements depends on the availability of political opportunities and the power of the government. If the government is strongly entrenched and repressive, a social movement is likely to fail. Conversely, if the government is weak or tolerant of dissent, the movement has a better chance of flourishing.
4. **Structural Strain Theory:** This theory suggests that six factors are necessary for a social movement to grow:
 1. People in society experience some type of problem (deprivation).
 2. Recognition by people that this problem exists.
 3. An ideology proposing a solution develops and spreads.
 4. An event or events convert this nascent movement into a bona fide social movement.
 5. The society (and its government) is open to change for the movement to be effective.
 6. Mobilization of resources as the movement develops further.
5. **New Social Movement Theories:** These theories move away from the traditional Marxist framework, which analyzes collective action from an economic perspective, to focus on politics, ideology, and culture. They emphasize new definers of collective identity, such as ethnicity, gender, and sexuality.

Social movements produce learning in two ways: direct learning, when people participate in movements, and indirect learning when people observe the operation of movements. Both types of learning are crucial as they can transform the behaviour

of people in society. Social movements influence how people, both participants and non-participants, interpret the world, potentially impelling them to take actions that result in social change.

The history of Social Movements in Africa dates back to pre-colonial era which represented resistances to protect autonomy and cultural integrity. Examples in pre-colonial era include the resistance of Asante in present day Ghana, the Zulu Kingdom under Shaka Zulu in South Africa and the resistance of Samori Toure in West Africa.⁸ In the colonial era, social movements led the struggle for independence.⁹ They include the Mau Mau movement in Kenya, the National Liberation Front of Algeria, and the Mozambique Liberation Front (FRELIMO) of Mozambique. Social Movements in Africa have served as vehicles for challenging oppression, demanding rights and asserting collective agency.¹⁰

In the recent past, there has been type movement-type organising such as:

- a. The #EndSARS Movement began in 2017 against police brutality and extra-judicial killing by the Police in Nigeria.
- b. #FeesMustFall in South launched in 2015 and led by students against the proposed increase in university fees.
- c. #Afriforum in South Africa was established in 2006 focusing on protecting the rights of Afrikaners in post-apartheid South Africa.
- d. Y'en a Marre (Fed Up) in Senegal was formed in 2011 by a group of rappers and Journalists with a focus on political accountability and youth empowerment.
- e. #ArewaMeToo in Nigeria which emerged in 2009 with a focus on sexual violence and harassment in Northern Nigeria.

⁸ Boahem, A. A. (1987), *African Perspectives on Colonialism*. Johns Hopkins University Press.

⁹ Mamdani, M (1996), *Citizens and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism*. Princeton University Press.

¹⁰ Mamdani, M (1996), *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of late Colonialism*. Princeton University Press.

All these movements achieved varying degrees of success. For instance, the #EndSARS and #FeesMustFall compelled the governments of Nigeria and South Africa to rethink policies and implement reforms. The #ArewaMeToo broke societal taboos forcing open discussion of sexual violence.

4. STRATEGIES FOR MOVEMENT ORGANISING

There has been organising for gender equality and women empowerment across the world for several decades. This has taken several forms of co-ordinated efforts by individuals, organisations and institutions to promote gender equality and women empowerment. The efforts include using legal frameworks to grassroots mobilisation, policy advocacy and community mobilisation.

As we argued in chapter five, one of the missing links in organising for gender equality and women empowerment is lack of involvement of men and boys. Therefore, engagement of men and boys is critical in future efforts in organising for gender equality and women empowerment.

Secondly, there is the need to change the way of organising. Organising workshops and seminars in five-star hotels and issuing communiques are unlikely to shift the needle. There is the need for new ways of organising. Civil Society must conduct evidence-based policy research and use the evidence for advocacy. But more importantly, such reports must be used to mobilise citizens in a large scale to demand change. This is why CSOs must promote, capacitate and work with Social Movements to bring about transformative change.

Thirdly, there is the need to involve the grassroots in the organising. There should be grassroots mobilisation with community initiatives that empower local actors. Fourthly, communication is a powerful tool for organising for change. Both conventional and social media must be vigorously used to push for feminist values.

The path to gender equality and women empowerment has been blocked by patriarchy, male dominance and elite capture of the state. This is not what can be corrected by a few people. What we need is a movement. We have always argued that change will happen in any society when the conditions are ripe.¹¹ In our view, for change to occur in any society requires the presence of objective and subjective conditions. **Objective conditions** exist when situations are evidently abnormal with huge contradictions which can only be resolved by change. The subjective conditions are the organizational preparations required to bring about change. There is no doubt that the objective conditions for promoting gender equality and women empowerment have been existing in Nigeria for a very long time. There is arrested development and the creative potentials of women can help to accelerate development. There is high level of poverty especially of women. There is harmful traditional practices and widowhood practices that are repugnant to natural justice. Women are discriminated against in all spheres of life. The state of affairs is not sustainable. The challenge has been the absence of the subjective conditions with the requisite organization and platform to mobilize for social change.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Gender equality and women's empowerment remain fundamental to achieving inclusive development, justice, peace, and democracy in Nigeria. Despite the existence of supportive policies, international commitments, and ongoing efforts by civil society, gender-based disparities persist in access to education, political representation, economic opportunities, and protection from violence. This chapter has shown that **movement organising**—through collective action, grassroots mobilisation, and strategic advocacy—offers a potent tool for dismantling patriarchy, transforming institutions, and shifting societal norms.

¹¹ Igbozor, O (2017), *Leadership, Development and Change*. Ibadan, Kraft Books Limited

Social movements, particularly those that centre feminist values and mobilise around shared grievances and aspirations, have historically led to transformative change. The Nigerian context—with its entrenched patriarchal structures, widespread poverty, and elite capture—presents both **objective conditions** that demand urgent transformation and an opportunity to build **subjective conditions** by organising and empowering individuals and communities. The challenge lies not in the absence of cause but in the lack of coherent, sustained, and large-scale organising for change.

Recommendations

1. Strengthen Movement Building and Grassroots Organising

- o Invest in long-term grassroots engagement that empowers local actors, especially rural women, to lead the movement for gender equality.
- o Build alliances across different groups—faith-based organisations, youth, labour unions, and professional bodies—to create a united front for change.

2. Engage Men and Boys as Allies

- o Develop targeted strategies and programs that engage men and boys in challenging patriarchal norms and promoting positive masculinity.
- o Promote male feminist networks and ambassadors to lead by example and amplify feminist voices.

3. Move Beyond Tokenism in Advocacy

- o Replace symbolic workshops and communiqués with strategic, evidence-based, and action-oriented campaigns.
- o Use participatory research and data to inform policy advocacy and citizen mobilisation.

4. Promote Strategic Use of Media and Technology

- o Harness the power of social and digital media platforms to create and sustain awareness, document injustices, and mobilise action.
- o Use creative media tools—storytelling, podcasts, viral campaigns—to

promote feminist narratives and counter misogynistic ideologies.

5. Institutionalise Intersectional Feminist Practices

- o Ensure that movement organising addresses multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination—including class, ethnicity, disability, age, and geography.
- o Tailor interventions to the specific realities and needs of marginalised women and girls.

6. Enhance Capacity of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs)

- o Provide training, mentoring, and financial support to CSOs working on gender equality to enable sustained and strategic engagement.
- o Encourage coalition-building and collective learning across movements and sectors.

7. Create Enabling Legal and Policy Environments

- o Advocate for the passage and implementation of gender-sensitive laws, such as reserved seats for women.
- o Monitor government compliance with international conventions such as the convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Maputo Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the rights of Women in Africa which promotes and protects the rights of women and girls in Africa.

8. Foster Movement Learning and Knowledge Sharing

- o Document lessons learned and stories of change from past and ongoing movements.
- o Institutionalise learning platforms where activists, researchers, and policymakers can exchange ideas and co-create solutions.

These strategies are essential not just for resisting oppression but for envisioning and building a just and equitable society where women and men can thrive equally.

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08

Chapter Eight

Chapter Eight

CONSTITUTIONAL INCLUSION OF WOMEN: A FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE

By
Dr. Ejiro Joyce Otive-Igbuzor

Introduction

Constitutional inclusion refers to the deliberate incorporation of historically marginalised groups—particularly women—into the foundational legal frameworks that govern a nation. It is not merely a legalistic mechanism for representation but a transformative tool for securing dignity, participatory governance, and substantive citizenship. For feminists and advocates of gender justice, constitutional inclusion is essential because the constitution is not a neutral document; it is the blueprint that defines the distribution of power, access, and voice in a society.^{1:2}

In many post-colonial societies, including Nigeria, women have been structurally excluded from constitution-making processes, resulting in legal systems that mirror patriarchal norms. The absence or marginalisation of women within constitutional frameworks often reinforces broader patterns of inequality in political, economic, and social life.³ Feminism, as both a theory and a movement, challenges these systemic inequities and asserts the right of women to full and equal citizenship under the law.⁴ Consequently, constitutional inclusion is not merely about the presence of women in governance spaces—it is a feminist imperative: a project of justice, redress, and transformation.

¹ Tripp, A.M. (2006) 'Women's movements, customary law, and land rights in Africa: The case of Uganda', *African Studies Quarterly*, 7(4), pp.1–19.

² Htun, M. and Weldon, S.L. (2012) 'The civic origins of progressive policy change: Combating violence against women in global perspective, 1975–2005', *American Political Science Review*, 106(3), pp.548–569.

³ Banda, F. (2005). *Women, law and human rights: An African perspective*. Oxford: Hart Publishing.

⁴ bell hooks. (2000). *Feminism is for everybody: Passionate politics*. Cambridge, MA: South End Press.

Beyond justice, constitutional inclusion is also a strategic instrument for sustainable national development. Evidence from countries such as Rwanda and Nepal shows that inclusive constitutions lead to stronger institutions, more equitable governance, and improved developmental outcomes⁵⁶ For example, Rwanda's post-genocide constitution enshrined gender parity and reserved seats for women in parliament. Today, Rwanda has the highest percentage of female parliamentarians globally—an outcome that has transformed public policy priorities and national cohesion.⁷

In contrast, Nigeria's constitutional order remains gender-blind, except in sections where it expressly discriminates against girls and women. For example, Section 29(4)(b) of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended) states: “Any woman who is married shall be deemed to be of full age.” While Section 29(4)(a) defines the age of majority as 18 years, subsection (4)(b) creates an exception by stating that a married girl, regardless of her age, is to be deemed an adult. This clause has been used to justify the continued practice of child marriage, especially in parts of Nigeria where early marriage is culturally or religiously practised. Human rights activists and gender equality advocates have long called for the deletion of Section 29(4)(b), arguing that it undermines the Child Rights Act (2003), which sets the legal age of marriage at 18. Nigeria currently has the highest number of child brides in West Africa.⁸

⁵ Burnet, J.E. (2008) 'Gender balance and the meanings of women in governance in post-genocide Rwanda', *African Affairs*, 107(428), pp.361–386.

⁶ UN Women (2022) *Constitutional reform for gender equality: A global review of trends and challenges*. Available at: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2022/05/constitutional-reform-for-gender-equality> [Accessed 10 Jul. 2025].

⁷ Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) (2023) *Women in national parliaments: World classification*. Available at: <https://data.ipu.org/women-ranking> [Accessed 10 Jul. 2025].

⁸ UNICEF, (2022) **Child marriage in West and Central Africa**, A statistical overview and reflections on ending the practice, https://data.unicef.org/resources/child-marriage-in-west-and-central-africa-a-statistical-overview-and-reflections-on-ending-the-practice/?utm_source=chatgpt.com

Also, the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended) implicitly denies Nigerian women the right to confer citizenship on a foreign spouse: Section 26(2)(a) which deals with the criteria for acquiring Nigerian citizenship by registration states: “the provisions of this section shall apply to – (a) any woman who is or has been married to a citizen of Nigeria; or (b) every person of full age and capacity born outside Nigeria any of whose grandparents is a citizen of Nigeria.”

Despite commitments under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW, 1979) and the African Union's Maputo Protocol,⁹ Nigeria has yet to translate these obligations into binding constitutional guarantees. The 1999 Constitution (as amended) does not contain explicit gender equality clauses, affirmative action provisions, or protections for women's political participation. More troubling is the repeated failure of constitutional amendments and bills aimed at redressing gender disparities, including the rejection of all five gender-focused bills during the 2022 constitutional review process.¹⁰

This chapter argues that the constitutional inclusion of women is indispensable to the achievement of gender equality, democratic consolidation, and national transformation in Nigeria. It draws on feminist conceptual frameworks, international and African best practices, and Nigeria's own constitutional history to illuminate the urgent need for reform. It interrogates not only the exclusion of women in law but also the socio-political forces that sustain it, while advocating for gender quotas, the institutionalisation of affirmative action, and the recognition of gender as a constitutional identity marker—akin to ethnicity or region.

⁹ African Union (AU) (2003) *Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol)*. Addis Ababa: African Union.

¹⁰ PLAC (2022). Electoral Quotas for Women Do Work, Male Political Elites Mostly Responsible for their Adoption, <https://placbeam.com/2022/04/29/electoral-quotas-for-women-do-work-male-political-elites-mostly-responsible-for-their-adoption/>

Ultimately, constitutional inclusion must move beyond symbolic representation. It must dismantle patriarchal legal norms, centre women's lived experiences, and reconstruct the constitutional order to reflect the realities of all citizens—especially those who have long been marginalised by structures of power.

Conceptual Framework

A constitution is the supreme legal instrument that defines the foundational principles, institutions, and power dynamics within a state. It delineates the structure of government, the distribution of authority, and the rights of citizens. Constitutionalism, in turn, entails not just the existence of a constitution, but a culture of adherence to the rule of law, accountability, and the protection of fundamental rights.¹¹ Within this framework, *constitutional inclusion* refers to the extent to which a constitution guarantees equitable participation, recognition, and protection for all citizens—particularly those historically excluded, such as women.

Feminism is a belief system, movement, and global struggle against all forms of patriarchal and intersecting forms of oppression to ensure political, economic, and social equality and justice of the sexes. It is rooted in the historical struggles of women to be recognised as full human beings with equal value and rights as men. In the context of this chapter, feminism is understood not merely as advocacy for women's rights, but as a comprehensive theory of justice and transformation. It critiques power imbalances, challenges patriarchal structures, and seeks to reconstruct institutions in ways that reflect equity, care, and collective well-being.¹²¹³ Patriarchy—defined as a system of male dominance entrenched in law, culture, and practice—has consistently restricted women's access to political, economic, and legal power.¹⁴

¹¹ Hesse-Biber, S. N. (2014). *Feminist research practice: A primer*. 2nd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

¹² bell hooks. (2000). *Feminism is for everybody: Passionate politics*. Cambridge, MA: South End Press.

¹³ Oakley, A. (1981). Interviewing women: A contradiction in terms. In: H. Roberts (ed.) *Doing feminist research*. London: Routledge, pp.30–61.

¹⁴ Haraway, D. (1988). Situated knowledges: The science question in feminism and the privilege of partial perspective. *Feminist Studies*, 14(3), pp.575–599.

Constitutional inclusion is not a neutral legal adjustment. It is a feminist act—an intentional reordering of the constitutional order to correct historic injustices, redistribute power, and affirm the equal humanity of women.

Women are grossly underrepresented in both elective and appointive roles in Nigeria. As of 1st April 2024, Nigeria is ranked 177th out of 185 countries on the Inter-Parliamentary Union's index for women in national legislatures, occupying the last position—54th—among 54 sub-Saharan Africa nations assessed.

In the current 10th National Assembly, women hold only four out of 109 Senate seats—marking a decrease from eight in the previous 9th Assembly. In the House of Representatives, there are just 16 female members out of 360, which is only a slight improvement from the 13 recorded in the last assembly.

Tables 1 and 2 show the historical trend of women's representation in the Nigerian Senate and House of Representatives **from 1999 to 2023**.

Table 1 - Women's Representation in the Nigerian Senate (1999–2023)

Year	Total Senate Seats	Number of Women Senators	Percentage of Women (%)	Remarks
1999	109	3	2.8%	Baseline year after return to democracy
2007	109	8	7.3%	Significant increase
2011	109	7	6.4%	Slight decrease from previous cycle
2015	109	8	7.3%	Return to 2007 level
2019	109	8	7.3%	No improvement from previous cycle
2023	109	4	3.7%	Sharp decline in representation

Table 2 - Women's Representation in the Nigerian House of Representatives (1999–2023)

Year	Total House Seats	Number of Women Representatives	Percentage of Women (%)	Remarks
1999	360	12	3.3%	Baseline year after return to democracy
2003	360	21	5.8%	Increase from previous cycle
2011	360	26	7.2%	Highest recorded representation to date
2015	360	19	5.3%	Drop from 2011 level
2019	360	13	3.6%	Significant decline
2023	360	16	4.4%	Marginal increase from 2019

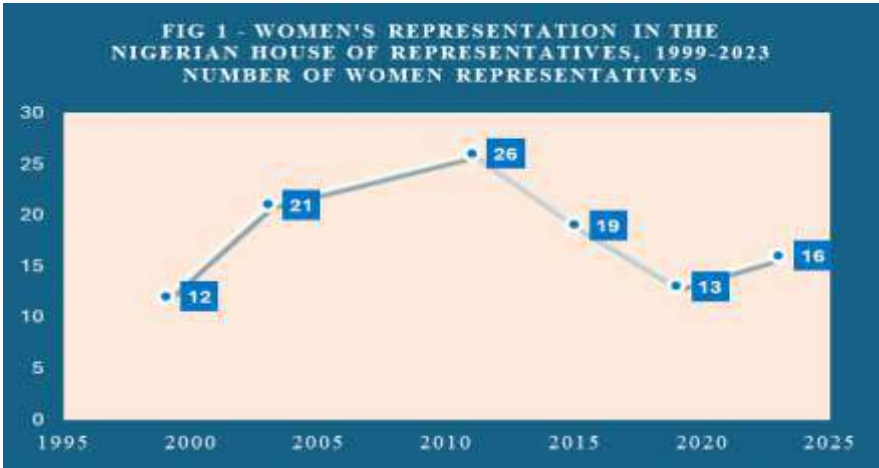


Figure 1 illustrates the undulating pattern of women's representation in the Nigerian House of Representatives from 1999 to 2023, highlighting both progress and regression over time. The highest point was reached in 2011 with 26 women (7.2%), marking the peak of representation across the years. A noticeable drop occurred, with 19 women (5.3%) in 2015 reflecting a setback. Representation declined further to 13 women (3.6%) in 2019 nearly returning to 1999 levels. The 2023 elections marked a marginal recovery with 16 women (4.4%), though still below the 2011 peak.

At the subnational level, the situation remains dire. No woman has ever been elected governor in any of the 36 states. Currently, only six states have female deputy governors. Men occupy 95% of seats in state Houses of Assembly while women occupy only 5%. During the 9th Assembly, 15 states had no female representation in their state legislatures. That number has slightly reduced, but still, 13 states in the present dispensation have no female lawmakers at all. These states include Abia, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Imo, Jigawa, Katsina, Kano, Kebbi, Osun, Sokoto, Yobe, and Zamfara.

The data reflects a trajectory of minimal progress, frequently overshadowed by periods of decline. Despite a few advances over the past two decades, women's political representation in Nigeria remains consistently low and highly volatile. Gains have not only been marginal but are also easily reversed, revealing the absence of institutional guarantees to sustain inclusion. This underscores the critical urgency for structural safeguards, such as constitutional quotas or gender-inclusive electoral reforms to ensure women's full inclusion in governance at all levels.

In deeply patriarchal societies like Nigeria, where women constitute nearly half the population but less than 5% of elected political officials,¹⁵ embedding gender equality in the constitution becomes a critical mechanism for transforming exclusion into inclusion.

¹⁵IPU, 2023, *Op Cit*

This imperative is not unique to Nigeria. Following decades of conflict and exclusion, countries like Kenya and Zimbabwe adopted progressive constitutional reforms that embedded gender equality. Kenya's 2010 Constitution includes Article 27(8), which mandates that “not more than two-thirds of the members of elective public bodies shall be of the same gender”.¹⁶ Though implementation remains a challenge, the constitutional principle provides a legal foundation for gender-based litigation and reforms. Similarly, Zimbabwe's 2013 Constitution introduced reserved seats for women in parliament, significantly boosting female legislative representation.¹⁷

These examples demonstrate that constitutional inclusion is not simply symbolic—it creates enforceable obligations that redefine governance and enable transformative justice. For Nigeria, this means going beyond general equality clauses to adopt explicit gender parity provisions, embed affirmative action mandates, and expand the federal character principle to include gender identity. In a polity where over 90% of legislators are men, such reforms also signal a willingness to share power and to reimagine governance through the lens of inclusion. When male-dominated parliaments adopt gender-affirming provisions—as seen in Rwanda, Tunisia, and Nepal—it reflects the critical role of male allyship in co-constructing democratic futures.¹⁸

Ultimately, the conceptual framework for constitutional inclusion must integrate feminist principles, embrace intersectionality, and position the constitution not merely as a legal document, but as a living social contract that affirms the dignity and rights of all.

¹⁶ Republic of Kenya (2010) *The Constitution of Kenya*. Nairobi: National Council for Law Reporting. Available at: <https://www.klrc.go.ke/index.php/constitution-of-kenya> [Accessed 10 Jul. 2025].

¹⁷ Republic of Kenya (2010) *The Constitution of Kenya*. Nairobi: National Council for Law Reporting. Available at: <https://www.klrc.go.ke/index.php/constitution-of-kenya> [Accessed 10 Jul. 2025].

¹⁸ Flood, M. (2019) ‘Engaging men and boys in violence prevention’, in Lawson, T., Cornwall, A. and Chant, S. (eds.) *The Palgrave Handbook of Gender and Development*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, pp.105–120.

Feminist Theorisation of Inclusion

Feminist theory has long critiqued the androcentrism embedded in legal and political systems. Traditional constitution-making, rooted in liberal democratic theory, often assumes a gender-neutral citizen. However, feminist scholars argue that such “neutrality” masks male norms and sustains structural exclusion.¹⁹ Feminist theorisation, therefore, demands that constitutions not only prohibit discrimination but actively correct historical injustices and embed mechanisms of redress.

A key contribution of feminist theory is its insistence on centring women's lived experiences. Feminist methodology challenges abstract universalism and emphasises contextual, grounded knowledge. As Oakley (1981) argues, knowledge production itself is gendered—and unless women's realities shape policy and legal frameworks, governance remains partial and unjust.

One of the most influential concepts within feminist theory is *intersectionality*, introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989).²⁰ Intersectionality recognises that “woman” is not a homogenous category. Instead, women's experiences of oppression differ based on their location within multiple systems of power—including age, race, class, disability, religion, geography, and sexuality. For example, while urban elite women may face gender discrimination, rural women with disabilities often face compounded exclusion from both formal political processes and informal power structures.

Thus, constitutional inclusion must be sensitive to these overlapping identities. A gender-inclusive constitution cannot simply assume the needs of one segment of women. It must be deliberately inclusive of diverse categories—ensuring

¹⁹ Hesse-Biber, (2014). *Op Cit*

²⁰ Crenshaw, K. (1989). Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A Black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics. *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 1989(1), pp.139–167.

representation, protection, and participation for all, especially those on the margins. South Africa's post-apartheid constitution is a notable example, with its strong equality clause (Section 9) protecting against discrimination on grounds including sex, gender, sexual orientation, and disability.²¹

Feminist *standpoint theory* further enhances this approach by asserting that marginalised groups, particularly women, possess unique and valid epistemic perspectives. Harding (1987)²² and Haraway (1988)²³ argue that those on the periphery of power can often see its effects more clearly than those at the centre. Consequently, excluding women from constitution-making processes not only sustains injustice but denies society the insights needed for inclusive transformation.

Real-world cases reinforce this claim. In Tunisia, for example, the inclusion of women's rights activists in the drafting of the 2014 Constitution resulted in robust provisions for gender parity, equal opportunity, and protection from gender-based violence²⁴ Similarly, Nepal's 2015 Constitution, which emerged from a participatory, post-conflict process, guarantees one-third representation for women in parliament and embeds gender equality throughout its text.²⁵

²¹Republic of South Africa (1996) *The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa*. Pretoria: Government Gazette. Available at: <https://www.justice.gov.za/legislation/constitution/SACConstitution-web-eng.pdf> [Accessed 10 Jul. 2025].

²²Harding, S. (1987). *Feminism and methodology: Social science issues*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

²³Haraway, D. (1988). *Op Cit*

²⁴Charrad, M. M. and Zarrugh, A. (2014). Equal or complementary? Women in the new Tunisian Constitution after the Arab Spring. *The Journal of North African Studies*, 19(2), pp.230–243.

²⁵UN Women. (2022). *Constitutional reform for gender equality: A global review of trends and challenges*. Available at: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2022/05/constitutional-reform-for-gender-equality> [Accessed 12 Jun. 2025].

Crucially, feminist theorisation of constitutional inclusion is not about inserting women into pre-existing patriarchal structures. It is about *reimagining those structures* altogether—embedding values such as care, justice, accountability, and relational leadership into the fabric of governance.²⁶ It is about creating constitutions that reflect the diverse realities and shared aspirations of all citizens.

Historical Exclusion of Women in Nigeria's Constitutional Development

Nigeria's constitutional development has been characterised by the systemic exclusion of women, both in the processes of constitution-making and in the substance of constitutional provisions. From the colonial Clifford Constitution of 1922 to the current 1999 Constitution (as amended), women have been marginalised in political negotiations, drafting committees, and national constitutional conferences. These foundational moments in Nigerian state-building were overwhelmingly male-dominated, often convened under military regimes with minimal consultation from civil society or women's groups.²⁷

The 1979 and 1999 Constitutions were crafted during transition processes led by male-dominated military governments and elite advisory bodies. Women's voices were largely absent, and the resulting legal texts reflected this exclusion. There was no intentional effort to mainstream gender equality, include affirmative action provisions, or guarantee substantive representation of women in governance. The 1999 Constitution, for example, while prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sex in Section 42, fails to go further in mandating gender equality or representation. Crucially, it lacks any provision for gender quotas, parity clauses, or affirmative action, leaving gender inclusion at the discretion of political actors.

²⁶bell hooks. (2000). *Op Cit*

²⁷PLAC, (2022). *Op Cit*

Furthermore, the language of the Nigerian Constitution reflects a masculine default, with key provisions referring to public officeholders using pronouns such as “he” or “his,” symbolising an implicit bias about who is expected to hold power. This linguistic exclusion reinforces societal norms that associate leadership with maleness, subtly legitimising the political underrepresentation of women.

Efforts to address these gaps through constitutional reform have repeatedly failed. The most recent example was in March 2022, when the National Assembly voted down all five gender-focused constitutional amendment bills. These bills sought to guarantee gender quotas in federal and state legislatures, provide affirmative action in political appointments, and grant citizenship rights to foreign spouses of Nigerian women—parity already enjoyed by men.²⁸ The overwhelming rejection of these proposals revealed not only a lack of political will but also deep-seated patriarchal resistance within Nigeria's legislative institutions.

The consequences of this exclusion are stark. As of 2023, women hold less than 5% of elected positions in Nigeria's national legislature, placing the country among the lowest in Africa in terms of women's political representation.²⁹ By contrast, countries like South Africa and Senegal, which adopted constitutional and legislative quotas, have made significant strides toward gender parity in public office.

The failure to constitutionally guarantee gender inclusion has also undermined Nigeria's commitment to international legal instruments. While Nigeria has ratified key frameworks such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW, 1979) and the African Union's Maputo

²⁸PLAC (2022). *Op Cit*

²⁹IPU (2023). *Op Cit*

Protocol (AU, 2003), these treaties have not been domesticated in a way that binds national institutions to their gender equality mandates.

In summary, the historical exclusion of women from Nigeria's constitutional journey is not accidental—it is structural. It reflects entrenched norms that view governance as a male preserve and treat women's rights as negotiable. Without deliberate, constitutionally guaranteed measures to correct this imbalance, Nigeria's constitutional framework will remain incomplete—and its democracy fundamentally flawed. According to Jibrin Ibrahim, *"Inclusiveness for women will benefit not just them but Nigeria as a whole. More women in governance will only bring progress and respect for Nigeria in the comity of nations. Even more important, by ensuring that Nigerian women fully enjoy the rights that the Constitution says are for all citizens, we deepen our democracy and enhance respect and consideration to the other half of our citizens. It would simply make all of us better human beings."*³⁰

The Federal Character Principle and the Gender Character Gap

One of the most notable constitutional innovations in Nigeria is the *federal character* principle, enshrined in Section 14(3) of the 1999 Constitution. This provision mandates that public institutions must reflect “the diversity of the people” in terms of ethnicity, region, and religion to promote national unity and a sense of belonging among Nigeria's many constituent groups (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999). The principle has been used to justify geographical balancing in federal appointments, university admissions, and public service recruitment. However, this framework conspicuously omits gender as a dimension of diversity, thereby institutionalising gender blindness in Nigeria's governance structures.

³⁰Ibrahim, J. (2025). The push to advance the participation of women in politics , <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/opinion/790453-the-push-to-advance-the-participation-of-women-in-politics-by-jibrin-ibrahim.html?tztc=1>

The absence of a corresponding “*gender character*” principle means that half of the Nigerian population—women—is not recognised as a category requiring constitutional equity. This omission reflects a constitutional logic that views gender as peripheral, rather than integral, to questions of justice, representation, and power sharing.³¹ As Otive-Igbuzor (2022) argues, the federal character principle, while advancing ethnic balancing, has inadvertently reinforced the idea that governance is a male domain, with gender equity treated as optional or supplementary.³²

By contrast, several progressive democracies have adopted constitutional frameworks that embed both regional and gender parity principles. Rwanda's Constitution, for example, recognises the need for inclusive governance across all identity groups, mandating a minimum of 30% female representation in all decision-making bodies.³³ This constitutional commitment has led to structural mechanisms—such as reserved seats and electoral quotas—that ensure women's participation in all branches of government. Similarly, Kenya's Constitution incorporates both ethnic and gender considerations in public appointments and mandates the “two-thirds gender rule” to limit dominance by any one gender.³⁴

Nigeria's federal character framework could be expanded to include gender as a constitutionally protected category, thereby compelling political parties, ministries, and public institutions to consider gender parity in appointments, nominations, and elections. Doing so would not only promote representational justice but also harmonise Nigeria's domestic legal order with its international obligations under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women

³¹Igbuzor O., (2023). Constitutional Inclusion of Women in Governance in Nigeria, Chapter in a book titled Gender and Development in Nigeria: Concepts, Issues and Strategies. (2023)

³²Otive-Igbuzor, E. (2022). *The case for gender quotas in Nigerian politics, An Agora Policy paper.*

³³Republic of Rwanda (2003). The Constitution of the Republic of Rwanda. Available at: https://www.parliament.gov.rw/fileadmin/Documents/Constitution/Official_Gazette_special_30_-06-2003.pdf [Access ed 10 Jul. 2025].

³⁴Republic of Kenya, (2010), *Op Cit*

(CEDAW, 1979) and the African Union's Maputo Protocol.³⁵

Moreover, integrating gender into the federal character principle would provide a constitutional basis for affirmative action and gender quotas across all sectors of public life. It would legitimise gender-responsive budgeting, support gender mainstreaming in public policy, and empower oversight bodies to demand accountability in the implementation of gender equity goals.

Without a “gender character” principle, gender equality remains a policy aspiration rather than a constitutional mandate. If Nigeria is to move toward a truly inclusive democratic order, it must constitutionalise gender as a core marker of diversity, alongside ethnicity and region. Only then can the constitution serve as an instrument of justice for all citizens, irrespective of gender.

Global and African Best Practices in Constitutional Inclusion

Across the world, several countries have reimaged their constitutions to address gender disparities in representation and participation. These constitutions go beyond generic commitments to equality by embedding enforceable provisions—such as quotas, parity laws, and institutional guarantees—that secure women's political inclusion and foster systemic transformation.

Rwanda offers one of the most compelling examples of gender-responsive constitutionalism. Following the 1994 genocide, Rwanda undertook extensive constitutional reform aimed at rebuilding inclusive governance. Article 9 of the Rwandan Constitution mandates a minimum of 30% representation for women in all decision-making organs.³⁶ This provision, combined with reserved seats and strong political will, has resulted in Rwanda having the highest percentage of female

³⁵African Union (AU) (2003). Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol). Available at: <https://au.int/en/treaties/protocol-african-charter-human-and-peoples-rights-rights-women-africa> [Accessed 10 Jul. 2025].

³⁶Republic of Rwanda, (2003). *Op Cit*

parliamentarians globally—61.3% in the lower house as of 2023.³⁷ The Rwandan model demonstrates that constitutional mandates, when backed by affirmative structures, can radically shift gender dynamics in governance.

Tunisia also provides an inspiring case. In the wake of the Arab Spring, feminist activists successfully advocated for the inclusion of gender parity and protection clauses in the 2014 Tunisian Constitution. Article 46 commits the state to “protect women's accrued rights and work to strengthen and develop them,” and to guarantee equal opportunities between men and women in “all fields and responsibilities”.³⁸ The inclusion of these provisions was the result of strategic collaboration between feminist movements and reformist lawmakers, including male allies.³⁹

South Africa's 1996 post-apartheid Constitution has similarly been celebrated for its robust commitment to human rights and gender equality. Its Bill of Rights (Section 9) guarantees equality and prohibits unfair discrimination on the basis of sex, gender, and sexual orientation. The South African experience illustrates how constitutional inclusion can catalyse national gender mainstreaming strategies, strengthen legal frameworks against gender-based violence, and improve women's access to leadership roles.⁴⁰

At the continental level, the African Union has institutionalised commitments to women's rights through frameworks such as the Maputo Protocol and Agenda 2063. Article 9 of the Maputo Protocol obliges states to take positive action to promote the participation of women in political and decision-making processes. Similarly, Agenda 2063 envisions “an Africa whose development is people-driven, relying on the potential of African people, especially its women and youth”.⁴¹

³⁷IPU, (2023). *Op Cit*

³⁸Republic of Tunisia (2014). The Constitution of the Tunisian Republic. Tunis: Constituent Assembly of Tunisia.

³⁹Charrad and Zarrugh, (2014), *Op Cit*

⁴⁰UN Women, (2022). *Op Cit*

⁴¹African Union (AU) (2015). Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want. Addis Ababa: African Union Commission. Available at: <https://au.int/en/agenda2063/overview> [Accessed 10 Jul. 2025].

Kenya and Zimbabwe also provide useful insights. Kenya's 2010 Constitution introduced the “two-thirds gender rule,” stipulating that no more than two-thirds of any elective or appointive body shall be of the same gender.⁴² Though full implementation has been met with resistance, the provision has been used by women's rights groups to litigate for gender parity and push for legislative compliance. Zimbabwe's 2013 Constitution introduced 60 reserved seats for women in the National Assembly, which significantly increased female representation and served as a gateway to wider political participation.⁴³

These examples from Africa and beyond demonstrate that constitutional inclusion is both achievable and transformative. The key enablers across contexts include: political will, feminist mobilisation, male allyship, legal clarity, and sustained accountability mechanisms. Countries that have successfully embedded gender equality into their constitutions have not only improved women's representation but also fostered stronger democracies, more inclusive public policies, and greater social cohesion.⁴⁴

Nigeria's current constitutional framework, by contrast, remains silent on gender parity, lacks affirmative action guarantees, and has yet to adopt best practices from other African nations. This gap reinforces structural exclusion and weakens the legitimacy of democratic institutions. Learning from these global and continental models, Nigeria has both an opportunity and an obligation to redesign its constitutional framework in ways that reflect the realities and aspirations of all its citizens.

⁴²Republic of Kenya, (2010). *Op Cit*

⁴³Tripp, (2016). *Op Cit*

⁴⁴Htun and Weldon, (2012). *Op Cit*

Reserved Seats and Affirmative Action

Globally, one of the most effective strategies for increasing women's political participation has been the constitutional or legislative adoption of reserved seats and affirmative action mechanisms. These provisions seek to correct the systemic, structural, and historical disadvantages that hinder women from competing on equal footing with men in the political arena. Far from undermining merit, affirmative action acknowledges that talent and leadership potential exist across genders, but access and opportunity remain uneven due to entrenched patriarchal norms, economic inequalities, electoral violence, and discriminatory political party systems.⁴⁵⁴⁶

The African Union's Maputo Protocol and Agenda 2063 have both articulated a minimum target of 30% female representation in political and decision-making positions. Many African countries have responded with binding constitutional or legislative measures to meet or exceed this target.

Senegal, for instance, passed a landmark gender parity law in 2010 requiring political parties to ensure that 50% of their candidates are women. This reform led to significant gains, with women winning 43% of seats in the 2012 legislative elections. By 2022, women's representation continued to improve due to sustained enforcement and political will.⁴⁷

Uganda has employed a combination of reserved seats and electoral quotas since the 1995 Constitution. Every district elects a woman representative to parliament in addition to other constituency-based elections. This has resulted in over 30% of Uganda's parliament being composed of women. Similarly, Namibia and South Africa have used party-based quotas and constitutional guarantees to build inclusive legislatures.

⁴⁵Krook, M.L. (2009). *Quotas for Women in Politics: Gender and Candidate Selection Reform Worldwide*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

⁴⁶Htun and Weldon, (2012). *Op Cit*

⁴⁷UN Women, (2022). *Op Cit*

Despite these successes across the continent, Nigeria remains one of Africa's poorest performers in women's political representation. As of 2023, women make up less than 5% of the National Assembly. This stark underrepresentation reflects the failure of both constitutional and legislative efforts to institutionalise affirmative action. The 35% target articulated in Nigeria's National Gender Policy (2006) and the 50% target promised by the successor Gender Policy (2021-2026) remain non-binding and largely aspirational. These have not translated into legal or constitutional mandates enforceable by law.

The Gender and Equal Opportunities Bill, which seeks to domesticate CEDAW and establish legally binding affirmative action mechanisms, has been repeatedly rejected by the National Assembly. Furthermore, in the 2022 constitutional amendment exercise, all five gender-related bills—including one proposing reserved seats for women—were overwhelmingly voted down by male legislators as earlier mentioned. These rejections underscore the deeply embedded patriarchal resistance within Nigeria's political elite.

The argument that quotas undermine merit is a false dichotomy. In reality, affirmative action creates the enabling environment for merit to flourish by removing systemic barriers that otherwise exclude competent women from participating. As Krook (2009)⁴⁸ and UN Women (2022)⁴⁹ assert, quotas are not about handing positions to unqualified individuals—they are about opening closed doors in a structurally biased system.

For Nigeria to fulfil its national and international gender equality obligations, it must enshrine affirmative action into its constitution and electoral laws. Reserved seats, temporary special measures, and gender quotas have proven globally to be effective tools—not only in increasing women's presence but also in reshaping governance priorities, improving legislative outcomes, and deepening democracy.⁵⁰

⁴⁸Krook (2009). *Op Cit*

⁴⁹UN Women (2022). *Op Cit*

⁵⁰Htun and Weldon, (2012). *Op Cit*

Male Allyship and Constitutional Inclusion

In patriarchal political systems, where men dominate legislative and decision-making spaces, transformative gender reforms—especially those involving constitutional change—cannot succeed without the intentional and principled support of male allies. Given that over 94% of Nigeria's National Assembly comprises men, any attempt to enshrine gender equality in the constitution will require a critical mass of male lawmakers willing to challenge the status quo, share power, and champion women's rights.

Male allyship refers to the proactive, sustained efforts of men to support gender justice—not as an act of charity or symbolism—but as a commitment to equity, accountability, and democratic legitimacy.⁵¹ Effective allyship involves recognising male privilege, listening to women's voices, disrupting sexist norms, and using political capital to advocate for systemic change. In constitutional reform, this includes sponsoring gender-responsive bills, voting for progressive amendments, building coalitions with women's movements, and ensuring women's full participation in constitution-making processes.

Globally, male allies have played pivotal roles in advancing constitutional inclusion. In **Tunisia**, during the post-Arab Spring constitutional negotiations, several male members of the Constituent Assembly aligned with feminist civil society organisations to draft a progressive constitution. The result was Article 46 of the 2014 Constitution, which guarantees gender parity and state commitment to women's rights.⁵²

Similarly, in Rwanda, male leaders emerging from the genocide recognised gender equality as essential to national healing and institutional rebuilding. Their collaboration with women's groups led to the constitutional embedding of gender

⁵¹Flood, (2019). *Op Cit*

⁵²Charrad and Zarrugh, (2014). *Op Cit*

parity and the creation of mechanisms like the Gender Monitoring Office (Burnet, 2008). These examples show that male-dominated institutions can become sites of progressive transformation when male actors embrace gender justice as a shared national priority.

In Nigeria, there have been pockets of male allyship in recent years. A few progressive legislators have publicly supported the Gender and Equal Opportunities Bill, co-sponsored constitutional amendments on gender quotas, and engaged with civil society actors to promote women's inclusion. However, these efforts remain isolated, often lacking the cohesion and political weight required to influence constitutional reform. The rejection of all five gender bills during the 2022 constitutional amendment process is a sobering reminder of the fragility of allyship in the face of entrenched patriarchy.

Genuine allyship must go beyond token support or performative gestures. It requires risk-taking, political courage, and a readiness to challenge the norms that benefit men at the expense of equity. Male allies must use their positions of influence to create space for women's leadership and push for gender-just governance as a matter of national interest, not just women's interest.

Moreover, allyship must be institutionalised through political party platforms, legislative procedures, and constitutional conventions. For example, internal party rules can mandate gender balance in candidate selection, while legislative standing orders can ensure gender impact assessments of constitutional bills. When allyship is embedded structurally, it becomes a durable force for change—not dependent on individual goodwill but anchored in institutional norms.

“Following the 2019 general elections, it became clear that without affirmative action legislation, conversations about improving quality and quantity in women's representation are somewhat futile. The Special Seats Bill (SSB), a proposal in the 10th National Assembly aims to

increase women's representation in the Nigerian legislature by creating additional seats specifically for women in the National and State Houses of Assembly. The SSB can be seen from a quota system perspective, that is, a special measure to enhance women's representation in governance, like measures in Senegal, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, etc. It's also useful to analyze it from the perspective of the Nigeria Federal Character principle – that supports ethnic representation.” – Austin Aigbe

The above quote refers to the landmark constitutional amendment bill proposed to significantly enhance women's political representation in Nigeria. The bill seeks to create 74 additional seats in the National Assembly—comprising 27 new seats in the Senate and 47 in the House of Representatives—exclusively reserved for women. These seats would augment the existing 109 senatorial and 360 House seats, rather than replacing them.

Furthermore, the bill proposes the establishment of 108 additional seats across State Houses of Assembly, similarly reserved for women, as a strategic measure to address the chronic underrepresentation of women at the subnational legislative level.

To ensure flexibility and assess long-term impact, the bill includes a sunset clause—mandating a review after 16 years or four electoral cycles. This clause is designed to evaluate the effectiveness of the affirmative action measure and determine whether it should be sustained, modified, or phased out based on progress made in achieving gender-balanced governance.

If passed, this amendment would represent a bold and transformative step toward gender-inclusive democracy, aligning Nigeria with global best practices and commitments under instruments such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Maputo Protocol.

Importantly, if enacted, this amendment will also stand as a classic example of male allyship in action. It demonstrates what is possible when men in power choose to yield privilege, dismantle systemic barriers, and institutionalise justice.

In sum, male allyship is indispensable to constitutional inclusion in Nigeria. Without the active involvement of men willing to yield privilege and embrace justice, efforts to reform the constitution will remain symbolic or stagnant. For Nigeria to build a gender-equal constitutional future, male allies must not only stand beside women—they must walk the path of justice with them.

Proposed Roadmap for Constitutional Inclusion of Women

The infographic below presents a five-step roadmap for achieving constitutional inclusion of women in Nigeria. It begins with building consensus among key stakeholders, followed by institutional advocacy and legal reforms. It emphasises mass mobilisation and visibility, leading to the final goal—formal constitutional change and institutionalisation of gender inclusion in governance, including the passage of the Reserved Seat Bill before the upcoming 2027 elections. Each step is colour-coded and action-oriented, offering a clear, progressive path toward transformative change.



Conclusion and Recommendations

The constitutional inclusion of women in Nigeria is not a symbolic demand—it is a feminist imperative rooted in justice, equality, and the pursuit of a legitimate democratic order. Constitutions are not merely legal texts; they are social contracts that define the distribution of power, rights, and responsibilities. When these contracts exclude women—either explicitly or implicitly—they become instruments of inequality and systemic injustice. As **Oliver Jean Patrick Nduhungirehe**, puts it, promoting gender equality '*is not just a box-ticking exercise, it is a key to unlock the full potential of any society, organisation, or indeed country. It must, therefore, be an absolute priority, and should be hard-wired in all government policies.*'¹⁵³

Otive Igbuzor, in his paper titled *Constitutional Inclusion of Women in Governance in Nigeria* posits that '*There is the need for radical and progressive civil society organisations to join forces with the Feminist movement to advocate and campaign for constitutional inclusion of women in Nigeria; A push for constitutional review by the 10th National Assembly to consider and approve the five rejected gender bills to provide constitutional quota for women in Nigeria; ensure quota for appointments; reserve seats for women; guarantee equal rights on citizenship...*'¹⁵⁴

As this chapter has demonstrated, Nigeria's constitutional history has consistently marginalised women, both in form and substance. The persistent failure to embed gender parity provisions, the absence of a “gender character” principle, the rejection of gender-focused amendments, and the lack of affirmative action guarantees all reflect a constitutional order that does not yet see gender equality as foundational to nation-building.

¹⁵³ Ambassador of Rwanda to the Kingdom of the Netherlands, non-resident Ambassador to the Republics of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, quoted in Otive Igbuzor, 2022, *Op Cit*

¹⁵⁴ Igbuzor, O. (2023). *Constitutional Inclusion of Women in Governance in Nigeria in* Para - Mallam, O.J and Okome, M.O (2023), *Gender and Development in Nigeria: Concepts, Issues and Strategies -A Reader*. Kuru-Jos, National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies (NIPSS)

Yet, feminist theory offers a powerful lens of resistance and reconstruction. Through intersectional analysis, standpoint theory, and an insistence on transforming—not merely reforming—patriarchal institutions, feminists challenge the invisibilisation of women in law and governance. Global and African success stories—from Rwanda and Tunisia to South Africa and Senegal—show that gender-inclusive constitutions are not only possible, but transformative. They enhance legitimacy, deepen democracy, and yield better governance outcomes.

To move from exclusion to inclusion, Nigeria must commit to bold constitutional reforms. These reforms must not only reflect international legal obligations—such as those outlined in CEDAW (1979) and the Maputo Protocol—but also respond to the lived realities and aspirations of Nigerian women across regions, classes, and identities.

Recommendations:

1. Adopt Gender-Responsive Constitutional Reform:

Amend the 1999 Constitution to include explicit commitments to gender equality, non-discrimination, and affirmative action. Introduce a gender parity clause similar to those in Rwanda or Tunisia.

2. Institutionalise Reserved Seats and Affirmative Action:

Create constitutional provisions that mandate a minimum percentage of women's representation in all elective and appointive positions. Temporary special measures should be designed to level the playing field and dismantle historical disadvantage.

3. Expand the Federal Character Principle to Include Gender:

Reform Section 14(3) of the Constitution to recognise gender as a constitutional category of representation, alongside ethnicity and region. This will enable enforceable gender balance in appointments and nominations.

4. Mobilise and Sustain Male Allyship:

Build broad coalitions of male allies in the legislature, political parties, and civil society who will co-sponsor bills, vote for reforms, and publicly advocate for constitutional inclusion. Allyship must move from rhetoric to strategic, institutionalised action.

5. Align Reforms with International and Regional Commitments:

Fully domesticate and operationalise Nigeria's commitments under CEDAW, the Maputo Protocol, and the African Union's Agenda 2063. Ensure that constitutional provisions reflect these obligations in enforceable terms.

6. Promote Inclusive and Participatory Constitution-Making Processes:

Women, especially those from marginalised communities—such as rural women, women with disabilities, and young women—must be meaningfully involved in all stages of constitutional review. Their voices are essential for legitimacy and justice.

In conclusion, constitutional inclusion of women is not an act of benevolence—it is a non-negotiable condition for justice, democracy, and national progress. Nigeria stands at a critical juncture. To continue along a path of exclusion is to perpetuate a flawed and incomplete democracy. To embrace inclusion is to write a new chapter—one that affirms the equal worth of all citizens and lays the foundation for a just and equitable Nigeria.

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09

Chapter Nine

Chapter Nine

FEMINISM IN ACTION: STORIES OF FATHERS WHO LIVED FEMINIST VALUES WITHOUT THE LABEL

By

Dr. Vincent Dania, DMS, PMP®

*Before we called it feminism, some of our fathers were already living it;
quietly, deliberately, without applause.*

When most people hear the word feminism, their minds leap to protests, policies, or passionate voices speaking truth to power. What they often miss is this: feminism, at its heart, is simply fairness lived out loud. It is love with structure. Justice with empathy. Courage in the home. And sometimes, it is found not in grand speeches or hashtags, but in the quiet routines of a father who cooks dinner, pays attention, listens deeply, and raises his daughters with the same dreams he once reserved for his sons.

This chapter is a tribute to such men, fathers across Nigeria who didn't wait for permission or policy to do what was right. They didn't need to wear the feminist badge to live the values. These men, some widowed, some married, some biological fathers, others fathering by choice, became role models not because they used the right language, but because they practiced the right values. They dared to raise daughters like royalty, sons with softness, and homes built on mutual respect.

We met them through the Fathers for Equality Dialogue and Awards, a first-of-its-kind celebration organized by Centre LSD under the Male Feminist Network project, with support from the Ford Foundation. What made this initiative unique was that nominations didn't come from institutions or experts, they came from daughters. Women who had lived under the roof of these men. Women who saw, first-hand, what equality looked like in action.

In the pages that follow, you will meet nine remarkable Nigerian fathers, as described by the very daughters whose lives they shaped. Their stories are not perfect. None of us are. But they are powerful reminders that feminism is not foreign to Africa. It has always been here, dressed in agbada or kaftan, wrapped in fatherly sacrifice, rooted in dignity.

These men didn't just raise girls, they raised legacies. Women who now stand tall, not in spite of their fathers, but because of them.

What Feminist Fatherhood Looks Like in Practice

Feminist fatherhood doesn't begin with theory. It begins with presence.

In Nigerian homes where culture often defines roles with rigid expectations, a feminist father disrupts that script. Sometimes gently, sometimes defiantly. He does not see chores as gendered. He does not raise his voice to command obedience. He does not dismiss a daughter's ambition as rebellion. Instead, he listens, he sacrifices, he protects, and most importantly, he empowers.

Feminist fatherhood shows up when a man:

- Teaches his sons to clean, cook, and care, without shame
- Encourages his daughters to pursue male-dominated fields
- Speaks life into dreams society would have silenced
- Models respect in his marriage, or as a widower, redefines strength through tenderness.

This kind of fatherhood is not flashy. It is found in the silent strength of a man who wakes up before dawn to braid his daughter's hair before school. In the quiet resolve of a father who sells his last goat to pay a daughter's WAEC fee. In the wisdom of one who tells his sons, "Any work a woman does, a man should be able to do."

Many of the fathers celebrated in this chapter didn't grow up with this example. They were shaped by patriarchal traditions but decided to forge a new path. They chose to unlearn, to soften, to support. And in doing so, they planted seeds of transformation in their families and in their communities.

Feminist fatherhood is about intention, not perfection. The fathers you are about to meet lived with that intention daily, quietly, and courageously.

FATHERS WHO LIVED FEMINIST VALUES WITHOUT THE LABEL

1. Baba Ayo: The Man Who Became Both Father and Mother

“He taught us to cook, to clean, to lead, and to believe. He buried his pain and raised powerhouses.”

—Ayotomiwa Ayodele



When Engineer Samson Ayodele lost his wife in 2000, he didn't just lose a life partner. He lost the traditional “mother figure” many Nigerian men lean on to raise daughters. But instead of remarrying to fill that role, he filled it himself. For 25 years, he remained single because of his decision to stand still for his girls.

He raised three daughters in a society that would rather have told them “you are less.” But Baba Ayo told them, “you are limitless.” He cooked their meals, helped with their assignments, tucked them in at night, and pushed them out into the world with wings. Even when his income as a driver couldn't meet all their needs, he took foodstuff on credit just to make sure they never lacked. He made sacrifices they didn't always notice then. But today, they see clearly: their father was doing the work of two people with the heart of one.

Now, his daughters are all thriving professionals. A communicator and gender advocate. An educationist. A biostatistician. And every time they speak, they echo his values, daring, contentment, hard work, resilience.

In a world where many men run from responsibility, Baba Ayo ran toward it. He may never have used the word 'feminist,' but he embodied it.

2. Professor Ukwang: The Scholar Who Raised a Storm of Daughters

“There is always room at the top for the best. Never rest on your oars.” —Prof. Ekere Ukwang



Mfreke was only a teenager when her father, Professor Ekere Ukwang, made a late-night trip across two states to settle her into boarding school. She didn't cry out of fear of the new environment but because she wondered how she would cope without daily contact with the man who had built their home into her safest refuge from the harshness of the world.

A public health advocate today, Mfreke credits her father's unwavering belief in education. “No child of mine,” he would say, “will settle for less than a master's degree, boy or girl.” And he meant it.

He taught them from nursery school. He didn't believe in silence or submission for girls. He raised them to speak, to lead, to think. His daughters were not allowed to shrink.

Through his sacrifices and structure, he raised four daughters and one son, instilling the same expectation of excellence across the board. He gave wings, not walls. Today, Prof. Ukwang may not carry the feminist title, but he built a feminist family with vision, with values, and with love.

3. Mr. Kayode Aiyegbusi: The Man Who Raised a Lioness Among Men

“When others raised eyebrows, he raised my self-esteem.” —Oluwademilade Aiyegbusi



Growing up as the only girl among brothers can either toughen you or silence you. Oluwademilade got the former but not from competition, from support. Her father, Mr. Kayode Aiyegbusi, ensured there was no “boy's work” or “girl's work” in the house, only family work.

He pushed her to pursue male-dominated fields and never flinched when she chose a path that others considered “unfeminine.” While others questioned her, he equipped her with confidence, with encouragement, with courage.

She calls him “senior colleague” because he's not just her dad; he's her mentor. Her loudest cheerleader. The voice in her head on hard days saying, “You are capable. Keep going.”

He didn't need to shout. He didn't need to fight culture with force. He simply raised a daughter who now owns every room she walks into.

4. Dr. Victor Ogbijah: The Father Who Chose to Love Without Blood

“He taught me to think not as a female or a male, but as a human being” — Deborah Inene



Deborah grew up without a father figure until Dr. Victor Ogbijah stepped in. Not by blood, not by obligation, but by choice.

In the beginning, she resisted. Love was foreign. Trust, even more so. But Dr. Ogbijah didn't walk away. He waited. Patient. Present. Persistent.

He gave her space, and then structure. He listened to her ideas, even critiquing his own sermons through her lens. He handed her responsibilities that built skills such as writing business plans, making decisions, and dreaming big. When society said, “Women shouldn't study engineering,” he looked her in the eye and said, “Go do it.” She's now completing her degree in Electrical and Electronics Engineering.

He sent her tools, books, and resources to prepare her for graduation, and for a life beyond borders. In a world that often shrinks girls, he expanded her horizon.

Deborah says he taught her to cook, clean, lead, walk, love, and speak. He picked her from the shadows of neglect and taught her to speak, to lead, to rise.

Dr. Ogbijah didn't just raise a daughter. He rebuilt a future, and in doing so, became a father like no other.

5. Mr. Dennis Effiong Jonah: The Man Who Redefined Kingdom Parenting

“Don't raise your daughter for the kitchen, raise her for the kingdom.”—Elder Dennis Effiong Jonah



Grace grew up with a father who saw tradition and chose transformation.

In a culture where many girls are raised for the sidelines, Mr. Jonah raised his daughter for the spotlight. He believed that justice begins at home, and he modeled it with every decision, starting with how house chores were shared. His sons swept, stirred, and served alongside his daughter.

He saw her not as delicate, but as destined. When others said, “It's a man's world,” he replied, “Not in my house.”

He fought for her education with the same fire he would use for a son. No back seats. No asterisks. Just clear, uncompromising support. His home was built on fairness, and his legacy is evident in the boldness of the woman Grace has become.

He didn't just believe in gender equality. He practiced it with quiet conviction, proving that the loudest revolutions sometimes happen in silence.

6. Mr. Femi Adoko: The Rock Who Raised Equals

“He gives equal say, equal share, equal chance to shine.” —Jessica Etanami Femi



In the Femi household, equality wasn't theoretical, it was table talk.

Jessica, the first daughter of the family, grew up seeing her father practice fairness like a discipline. No child was greater. No child was less. Every voice mattered. Every child was heard.

While other fathers stayed distant from emotional conversations, Jessica found herself naturally gravitating toward her dad, not because she was “daddy's girl,” but because he always made hard things easier.

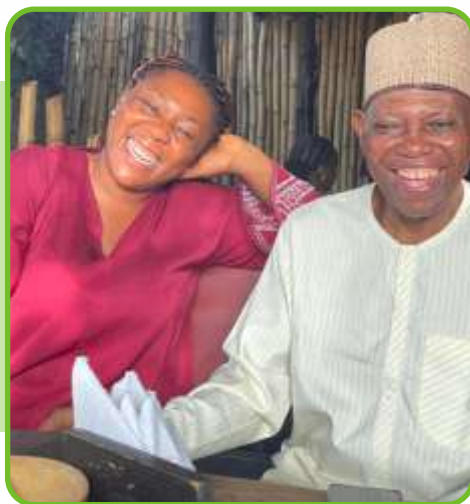
He helped with schoolwork. Listened without judgment. Encouraged without pressure. He loved them without conditions and corrected them without comparison.

Jessica calls him a listener. A guide. A compass. A steady hand in a chaotic world. He didn't just provide, he participated.

His feminist values weren't loud, but they were deeply felt. In his quiet, unwavering presence, his children found balance, strength, and security. And in his fairness, they learned how to become better versions of themselves.

7. Mr. Peter Ocheme: The Man Who Turned Grief into Grit

“He didn't just support equality—he lived it. And because of him, I walk tall.” —Joy Ocheme



When Joy lost her mother, many expected her future to dim. But not her father. Mr. Peter Ocheme stepped into the void, not with helplessness, but with heroic resolve. He worked extra hours, juggled responsibilities, and held the family together with love and grit.

He came from a family that didn't value education, but he rewrote that story for his daughters. When Joy gained admission into the university, he didn't just celebrate, he sacrificed. There was no, “this one is a girl.” There was only “this one is mine, and she must rise.”

When she returned home wearing her NYSC uniform, he didn't just see a graduate. He saw a fulfilled promise. He had raised daughters who dream fearlessly because he gave them the space and strength to do so.

In Joy's words, “My father is the reason I speak boldly. The reason I know I matter.” And in her strength, we see his success.

8. Dr. Lemmy Ughegbe: The Father Who Raised Voices and Built Bridges

“In our house, love, chores, and opportunities were shared equally.” —Uzezi Emmanuella Lemmy-Ughegbe



In many Nigerian homes, the kitchen belongs to the daughters, and the silence to the sons. But not in Dr. Lemmy Ughegbe's home. There, Sunday afternoons meant watching Dad in the kitchen, not for show, but as a statement. Caregiving is not gendered, it's human.

He raised Uzezi and her brother the same way with equal care, equal expectations, equal dreams. He didn't tell his daughter to “act like a lady.” He told her to act like a leader. But his feminism didn't end at home. When Gift, a quiet girl from a background where girls didn't go to school came into their lives at age 11, he gave her a room, an education, a family. She blossomed into a confident, thriving teenager, simply because someone believed she was worth investing in.

Beyond his home, Dr. Lemmy founded the Men Against Rape Foundation, using his voice to challenge norms and demand justice for women and girls.

For Uzezi, her father's daily decisions formed her deepest convictions. He didn't just raise a daughter; he raised a worldview. A belief that justice begins in the home, and that homes like theirs can shape a nation.

9. Mr. Oji Ukeh Uyain: The Quiet Force Who Sang His Way Into Equality

“My father is a quiet force for fairness. Because of him, I believe in equal voices at home, in church, and in society.” —Gift Uyain



Not all heroes shout. Some sing. And Mr. Oji Ukeh Uyain did exactly that, literally and figuratively.

While many men would scoff at the idea of joining the women's choir in church, he stood boldly among them, lending his voice not just to music, but to a message. In that one quiet act, he made a statement that rippled far beyond the pews: there is no shame in collaboration, no weakness in equality.

At home, Mr. Uyain lived what he sang. There was no such thing as “women's work” or “men's duty.” Roles were shared. Voices were respected. He did not preach equality with words alone, he practiced it with presence.

For his daughter, Gift, these daily habits became identity-forming. She didn't have to fight to be heard, her father made space. She didn't have to ask to be seen, he already saw her. Through his humility and quiet consistency, he taught her that strength does not have to be loud to be powerful.

He showed her that equality is not always about grand reforms. Sometimes, it's about a father sharing a songbook with women, helping with chores in silence, and making a daughter feel that her voice carries weight, even when the world tries to mute it.

In his simplicity, Mr. Uyain modeled something deeply revolutionary: that equality, when lived gently but firmly, becomes a way of life others can follow.

Reflections: What These Fathers Teach Us

Across nine different homes, cultures, and personalities, one truth rings clear, feminist values can be lived without the label, and fatherhood can be revolutionary.

These men came from different regions of Nigeria. Some were highly educated, others, self-taught in the school of experience. Some were widowed, others married. Some were professionals, others everyday workers. But they all did one radical thing: they treated their daughters like full human beings.

From Baba Ayo's double-duty love to Professor Ukwang's academic expectations... from Dr. Ogbijah's fathering-by-choice to Mr. Ocheme's tireless sacrifices... from Mr. Jonah's kingdom parenting to Mr. Uyain's choir of quiet resistance, these men gave their daughters a home where fairness was felt.

Common threads run through their stories:

- They were emotionally present. These fathers listened. They paid attention. They made space for their daughters' voices, fears, and dreams.
- They shared power at home. Chores, decision-making, and responsibilities were not coded by gender.
- They included daughters as part of their legacy as equals
- Education was not a favour. It was a right.
- They raised sons with softness. They challenged the myth that masculinity means dominance by involving boys in caregiving.
- They acted intentionally. Whether through caregiving, career support, or simply not remarrying to “find a mother,” every decision was made with the future of their daughters in mind.

But perhaps the most striking thing they shared was this:

They did not need a feminist handbook to know what was right. They simply chose love and they let that love be just and brave.

These are not Western stories. These are Nigerian men, walking through markets in agbadas and hitting potholes in keke NAPEPs, who have quietly proven that our culture is not allergic to fairness. In fact, it has always had space for it.

And now, we have them.

These men show us that fatherhood is one of the most powerful spaces where gender equality can be nurtured or denied. It is the earliest government, the first school, the original stage. And when men like this lead with fairness, generations rise with freedom.

CONCLUSION: FEMINISM AS LEGACY

“Some fathers don't just raise children. They raise standards.”

This chapter has not just documented stories, it has revealed a legacy. A legacy that shows us that feminist values can thrive in the most unexpected places: a village compound, a widower's kitchen, a Pentecostal pulpit, or the front seat of a father's old car on a long school run.

These men didn't wait for the world to change. They became the change, right in their homes. In their quiet choices and daily routines, they preached a better gospel: one where daughters are not diminished, where sons are not hardened, where love does not demand silence, and leadership does not require gender.

They proved that:

- Feminism is not a foreign idea; it's a familiar act of fairness.
- Gender equality is not reserved for activists; it begins with intentional fathers.
- The home is not just a private space; it's the most powerful platform for social transformation.

In a country still battling harmful traditions and rigid patriarchy, these fathers have become walking blueprints of what is possible. They've shown us that it is not enough to critique inequality, we must model its alternative. Not in theory. In practice.

As someone who has spent over a decade engaging men and boys in the fight against gender-based violence, I have seen firsthand how powerful male allyship can be. But I have also learned this: the most sustainable transformation does not happen in workshops; it happens around the dinner table. In how fathers speak to their daughters. In whether sons are taught to sweep. In who carries the baby when visitors come.

The fathers featured here didn't attend gender trainings. Many never read feminist texts. Yet, they raised homes that are safe, strong, and free. And in doing so, they've taught us something the world desperately needs to remember:

Feminism is not a fight against men. It's a fight for fairness. And the best men have always known that.

So, let us honor these fathers. Let us tell their stories. Let us replicate their values. And let us raise a generation of men who will do the same.

Because when fathers rise, families flourish. And when families flourish, society heals.

10

Chapter Ten

Chapter Ten

MALE FEMINISM: LESSONS FROM WOMEN IN NIGERIA (WIN)

By
Ngozi Iwere

INTRODUCTION

Feminism, traditionally associated with women's activism, has increasingly recognized the role of men as allies in the struggle for gender equality. Male feminism, defined as men's active participation in advocating for women's rights and challenging patriarchal structures, remains a contentious yet vital aspect of feminist discourse.¹ In Nigeria, the organization *Women in Nigeria (WIN)* has been instrumental in shaping feminist thought since its inception in 1982.² This chapter examines male feminist praxis in Nigeria through the lens of WIN's activism, exploring how Nigerian men have engaged with feminist struggles, the challenges, contradictions, and the lessons that can be drawn from their involvement.

HISTORICAL AND SOCIAL CONTEXT: WOMEN IN NIGERIA (WIN) AND MALE INVOLVEMENT

WIN was founded in the early 80s. This period was marked by increasing awareness of gender disparities, influenced by global feminist movements and local socio-political struggles.³ At the global level, scholars like Ifi Amadiume⁴ and Oyèrónke Oyewùmí⁵ critiqued Western feminist frameworks and advocated for African-

¹ Flood, M. (2019). Engaging men and boys in feminism. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Communication*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228613.013.637>

² Mama, A. (1995). *Beyond the masks: Race, gender, and subjectivity*. Routledge.

³ Ibid

⁴ Amadiume, I. (1987). *Male daughters, female husbands: Gender and sex in an African society*. Zed Books.

⁵ Oyèwùmí, O. (1997). *The invention of women: Making an African sense of Western gender discourses*. University of Minnesota Press.

centered gender analysis. At the national level, Nigeria was experienced military rule (under General Muhammadu Buhari and later Ibrahim Babangida), which suppressed dissent but inadvertently galvanized civil society resistance. Economic crisis due to falling oil prices led to structural adjustment programs (SAPs) that disproportionately affected women.⁶

WIN distinguished itself by adopting a radical, socialist feminist approach, linking women's oppression to broader structures of class inequality, colonialism, and militarism.⁷ Unlike most other women's groups at the time that focused mainly on welfare and charity, WIN positioned itself as a consciousness-raising movement, challenging patriarchal norms through research, advocacy, and grassroots activism. Within this context, WIN became a critical platform for feminist organizing, publishing influential reports on women's labour exploitation (e.g., unpaid domestic work, agricultural labor), gender-based violence and legal inequalities (e.g., marriage, divorce, and inheritance laws), and the political marginalization of women.⁸

MALE FEMINISTS IN WIN

Male feminists played a critical role in the emergence of WIN as a feminist platform. They were instrumental to the formation, agenda setting, and ideological direction of WIN. WIN emerged from a conference of academics and activists convened at the Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, with Ayesha Imam as the arrowhead. Several male Marxist-Leninist scholars and activists, including Abdul Raufu Mustapha, Jibrin Ibrahim, and Salihu Bappa, were involved in the planning of the conference. In fact,

⁶ Aina, O. I. (1998). African women at the grassroots: The silent partners of the women's movement. *Africa Development*, 23(3/4), 167-191.

⁹ Abdullah, H. J. (1995). Wifeism and activism in Nigerian feminism. *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 29(1), 64-77. <https://doi.org/10.2307/485347>

the point must be made that the participation of male feminists in WIN was not an afterthought. The male Marxist-Leninist scholars and activists who were involved in WIN were already active in working-class struggles against Capitalist exploitation and oppression. They had a clear understanding of the intersection of class, gender, ethnicity, and religion. They brought this ideological clarity and consciousness to the table at the inception of WIN. Male feminists were, therefore, co-creators of WIN as a feminist organisation with both women and men as members. Nonetheless, despite the prominent role played by male activists in the formation of WIN, women occupied all top leadership roles. Men contributed in secondary functions. The issue of establishing appropriate boundaries of male involvement remained topical. WIN instituted bylaws prohibiting men from serving as National Coordinator or Secretary-General, reinforcing women's leadership within the organization's structure.⁹

STRATEGIES OF MALE ALLYSHIP IN WIN

In addition to this pioneering role, male feminists contributed as well in other areas:

- **Collaborative Research and Publication**
 - o Efforts included multi-region surveys on women's literacy, health, and employment, producing both academic articles and the journal *Feminist Agenda*.¹⁰ Male academics co-authored pieces, strengthening feminist data.¹¹
- **Public Mobilisation**
 - o WIN organized nationwide hearings involving up to 1,600 rural participants. Men provided logistical support and media outreach, while women led discussions.¹²

⁹ WIN Constitution, Article 4, Sec. 2, 1985 bylaw amendment.

¹⁰ *Feminist Agenda*, vol. 1, nos. 1–3, 1985.

¹¹ Imam, A& Olu, J., “Gender & Class in Northern Nigeria,” *Feminist Agenda*, vol. 2, no. 1 (1987): 45–62.

¹² WIN organized hearings, Kaduna, Nasarawa, Rivers State, 1986.

Advancing Gender Scholarship

- o Universities became key sites for feminist debates, with male lecturers incorporating gender studies into curricula - a radical move in a male-dominated academic system.¹³

Policy Advocacy and Public Sensitisation

- o WIN's 1985 national conference included male panelists who spoke on "Men and Feminism," sparking debates on allyship.¹⁴
- o Some male lawyers volunteered to challenge discriminatory laws, such as those permitting child marriage or restricting women's property rights.¹⁵

THE LINK BETWEEN CONTEMPORARY MALE ALLYSHIP GROUPS AND WIN: EVIDENCE OF DIRECT AND INDIRECT INFLUENCE

While few of Nigeria's current male allyship organizations explicitly cite Women in Nigeria (WIN) as their inspiration, there is strong circumstantial and ideological evidence that WIN's legacy indirectly shaped their emergence.

At least one organisation, MenEngage Nigeria, had direct linkages and explicit WIN ties, especially to feminist scholars. For example, Edwin Madunagu delivered a keynote at a MenEngage symposium in 2015 in which he referenced WIN's socialist feminist framework as a model for male allyship: "we cannot discuss men's role in feminism without acknowledging the radical foundations laid by WIN in the 80s."¹⁶

In general, there is a paucity of literature on the influence of WIN on contemporary male allyship for several reasons, including generational shifts, NGO pragmatism, and fragmented archives. Many younger activists encounter WIN primarily through academic texts, rather than as a living movement. Donor-funded groups often avoid "radical" labels, distancing themselves from WIN's socialist roots. In addition, WIN's

¹³Aina, O. I. (1998). Op cit

¹⁴Abdullah, H.J. (1995). Op. Cit.

¹⁵Imam, A (1997). Op. Cit.

¹⁶Madunagu, E. (2015, March 8). *Male allies and the feminist struggle* [Keynote address]. Lagos Gender Forum, Nigeria.

documents are scattered, with no centralized digital repository for new groups to study.

While Nigeria's contemporary male allyship groups rarely cite WIN explicitly, their models of accountability, intersectional analysis, and grassroots engagement bear WIN's unmistakable imprint. As scholar Charmaine Pereira (2018) argues, "the absence of footnotes does not negate influence. WIN's DNA is woven into Nigerian feminism, even when unnamed."¹⁷

CHALLENGES OF MALE FEMINISM IN NIGERIA

At its inception, WIN included approximately 30% male members, a notable feature distinguishing it from earlier Nigerian women's groups that were exclusively female.¹⁸ The inclusion of men was based on the conviction that men must be allies in the struggle against patriarchy and that feminist ideals necessitate a societal transformation involving both genders.¹⁹

However, over time, male participation waned, partly due to internal conflicts and differing understandings of the theory and practice of feminism and social justice.²⁰

Key historical challenges

Distrust from Feminist Women

Not all women in feminist movements welcome male participation. Radical feminist sections within WIN historically expressed skepticism about men's motives, fearing that their involvement could dilute the movement's radical edge.²¹ Some women

¹⁷Pereira, C. (2018). The circulation of feminist knowledge in Africa. p. 124

¹⁸Women in Nigeria (organization), *Wikipedia*, 2021, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women_in_Nigeria_\(organization\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women_in_Nigeria_(organization)).

¹⁹Royallite Global, "A study of selected Nigerian male feminists' novels," *Hybrid Journal of Literary and Cultural Studies*, 2(3), 37-46, <https://royalliteglobal.com/hybrid-literary/article/view/230>.

²⁰"What's left of Nigeria's feminist left?" *Africa Is a Country*, April 2025, <https://africasacountry.com/2025/04/whats-left-of-nigerias-feminist-left>.

²¹Mama, A. (1995), Op. Cit.

activists argue that men, having benefited from patriarchy, cannot fully grasp the lived realities of women's oppression.²² This distrust is not unfounded; there have been cases where male "allies" later perpetuated sexist behavior, leading to accusations of performative activism.²³ Consequently, male feminists must continuously prove their commitment through actions - not just rhetoric - such as rejecting male privilege in personal and professional spaces.

Internal Ideological Tensions and the Struggle for Influence in WIN

There were already some undercurrents of tensions at the formation of WIN about how to handle the intersectionality between class and gender. The major contention was, which should be prioritised - the class struggle or the women's struggle? These tensions unraveled over time, as WIN organised. There were women feminists and sections within WIN who wanted to prioritise the feminists' struggle, and were not overly interested in engaging in class struggles. On the other hand, there were male feminists who saw the emancipation of workers as emancipative of all the oppressed groups within society, including women. Although such male feminists saw the relevance of a feminist platform such as WIN, their commitment was more to the class struggle. In addition, there was yet another group of male activists in WIN for whom WIN was just another platform for prosecuting the class struggle, and as such, they were not enthusiastic about WIN operating exclusively as a feminist platform. There was, thus, a tendency to instrumentalise WIN for prosecuting broader struggles, such as pushing back on State repression.²⁴

There were also tensions around the power dynamics, in terms of leadership and determining the overall direction of WIN. However, there was no clear gender

²²Nnaemeka, O. (2004). Nego-feminism: Theorizing, practicing, and pruning Africa's way. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 29(2), 357-385.

²³Esplen, E. (2006). Engaging men in gender equality: Positive strategies and approaches. BRIDGE Institute of Development Studies.

²⁴Iwere N. 2007, "Personal Reflections on WIN", in J. Ibrahim and A. Salihu (eds), *Feminism or Male Feminism?* Kano: Centre for Research and Documentation (CRD).

dichotomy with regard to the control of WIN's leadership. There were women and men on both sides of the divide. There were women within WIN who weaponized the participation of men to sideline other female feminists. Similarly, there were men who aligned with other female feminists to enhance male influence on WIN's leadership. This group of male feminists specifically aligned with those female feminists who were less likely to express voice, agency, and demand accountability.²⁵

Major Contemporary Challenges

1. Legitimacy and Authenticity Concerns

A major challenge for male feminists in Nigeria is the question of legitimacy - whether men can genuinely advocate for feminism without centering their own voices. Prominent Nigerian feminist scholar Obioma Nnaemeka²⁶ critiqued the tendency of some male allies to position themselves as "saviors" of women, thereby reinforcing patriarchal dynamics even within feminist spaces. This phenomenon, sometimes termed "feminist hijacking," occurs when men dominate discourse, leadership, or policy decisions meant to empower women.²⁷ For instance, during WIN's advocacy for gender quotas in politics, some male supporters were accused of using feminist rhetoric to advance personal political agendas rather than prioritizing women's leadership.²⁸ This tension highlights the fine line male feminists must walk: they must amplify women's voices without overshadowing them.

2. The Burden of Representation

Male feminists in Nigeria often face unrealistic expectations to speak on behalf of all men or to single-handedly dismantle patriarchy.²⁹ This burden can be

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Nnaemeka, O. (2004), Op. Cit.

²⁷Cornwall, A. (2007). Revisiting the 'gender agenda.' *IDS Bulletin*, 38(2), 69-78. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1759-5436.2007.tb00351.x>

²⁸Abdullah, H.J. (1995). Op. Cit.

²⁹Pease, B. (2000). *Recreating men: Postmodern masculinity politics*. Sage.

counterproductive, as it places the onus of gender transformation on a few individuals rather than fostering collective responsibility. Additionally, when male feminists make mistakes - such as unintentionally reinforcing gender stereotypes - they are sometimes harshly criticized, which may deter other men from joining the movement.³⁰

3. Persisting Cultural and Religious Resistance

Nigeria's diverse ethnic and religious landscape presents unique obstacles for male feminists. Traditional gender roles in many Nigerian societies emphasize male dominance, making it socially costly for men to openly identify with feminism.³¹ In conservative northern Nigeria, where Islamic interpretations often reinforce gender segregation, male feminists risk being labeled as “Westernized” or anti-traditional.³² Even in more progressive circles, men who challenge patriarchal norms, such as advocating for women's inheritance rights or opposing polygamy, face backlash from male peers who view such stances as a betrayal of cultural values.³³ This societal pressure discourages many potential male allies from engaging openly with feminist causes.

4. Institutional and Structural Barriers

Even when men are willing to support feminism, structural barriers limit their impact. For example:

- **In Corporate and Political Spaces:** Male executives who advocate for gender equality in workplaces may face resistance from colleagues who perceive such policies as threatening male dominance.³⁴

³⁰Connell, R. W. (2005). *Masculinities* (2nd ed.). University of California Press.

³¹Aina, O. I. (1998). Op cit.

³²Imam, A (1997). Op. Cit.

³³Madunagu, B. (2004). *Understanding Nigeria and the new imperialism*. Clear Lines Publications.

³⁴Aina, O. I. (1998). Op cit.

- **In Legal Systems:** While some Nigerian male lawyers have supported feminist legal reforms (e.g., combating gender-based violence), the judiciary remains male-dominated, slowing progress.³⁵
- **In Media Representation:** Male feminists are often either ignored by mainstream media or portrayed as "unmanly," reinforcing toxic masculinity norms.³⁶

Despite these challenges, the initial male involvement in WIN provides a critical case study of male feminism - men actively supporting feminist goals and challenging patriarchal norms alongside female feminists.

LESSONS FROM WIN FOR CONTEMPORARY MALE FEMINIST PRAXIS

1. **Intersectionality Matters:** WIN's socialist approach showed that class, ethnicity, and religion shape women's oppression. Male feminists must tackle these complexities by adopting intersectional approaches that address how class, religion, and ethnicity intersect with gender oppression. WIN's approach emphasised that feminist struggles must address both gender and class oppression.³⁷ Male feminists can learn from this by recognising that men's liberation from toxic masculinity is intertwined with women's emancipation and broader social justice.³⁸
2. **Feminism is a Struggle Against Oppression, Not Against Men:** WIN consistently emphasised that feminism is a movement against systems of oppression, not individuals. Male feminists must understand that the struggle is not about reversing gender roles or dominating men, but about creating an equitable society. Allyship requires a shift in perspective from defensiveness to

³⁶Cornwall, A. (2007), Op. Cit.

³⁷Crenshaw, K. (1989). Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex. *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 1989(1), 139-167.

³⁸Adebukola Dagunduro and Adebimpe Adenugba, "Failure to Meet up to Expectation: Examining Women's Activist Groups in the Post-Colonial Period in Nigeria," *Open Cultural Studies*, 2020, <https://www.degruyter.com/document/doi/10.1515/culture-2020-0003/pdf>.

responsibility. Men must unlearn patriarchal norms and recognize their role in perpetuating or dismantling them.

3. **It's Not an Easy Road:** WIN's experience reveals the complexities of male participation in feminist movements, including risks of co-optation and the need for men to engage with humility and a genuine understanding of feminist principles rather than imposing their agendas.³⁹
4. **The crucial role of male feminist intellectuals:** Male feminist scholars, especially in tertiary institutions, can play a pivotal role in nurturing and mentoring a new generation of well-grounded male feminists. This role was powerfully modelled by feminist scholars in WIN, like Abdul Raufu Mustapha, Attahiru Jega, Edwin Madunagu, Jibrin Ibrahim, and Salihu Mustapha.
5. **Importance of sustaining Male Allyship:** The decline in active male participation in WIN highlights the importance of sustained education, dialogue, and commitment to feminist ideals among men to prevent disengagement or dilution of feminist goals.⁴⁰
6. **Allyship must be accountable:** One of the critical lessons offered by WIN's history is that men should support, not lead, feminist movements. Accountability mechanisms are essential to prevent co-option. Genuine allyship involves stepping back in decision-making and actively amplifying women's perspectives.
7. **Male feminists must listen and learn from Women's Voices:** A defining characteristic of WIN was its emphasis on women speaking for themselves. This calls male feminists to practice active listening, allowing women to define their struggles, needs, and goals. Being an ally means elevating women's voices, not speaking over them or taking centre stage in feminist spaces. True male feminism begins with humility and a willingness to learn.

⁴⁰ Women Fund. (2024, June 10). The history of women's political struggle in Nigeria. <https://womenfund.org/media/the-history-of-womens-political-struggle-in-nigeria/>

8. **Need to redirect Male Privilege:** Men benefit from feminist change too, but must leverage their privilege to challenge patriarchal behaviour among other men, rather than reposition themselves as leaders of feminist causes.
9. **Male Feminists need introspection and reparation:** WIN encouraged critical self-reflection among its members. Similarly, male feminists must be willing to confront their own privileges and biases. This means examining how they benefit from patriarchy and taking steps to undo these advantages, both in public advocacy and private relationships. Accountability to feminist principles and women-led spaces is non-negotiable.
10. **Male Feminists must move beyond allyship to Solidarity:** WIN was not only a space for ideological discourse but also a platform for activism - campaigns against discriminatory laws, community organizing, education of rural women, and policy advocacy. Male feminists must move beyond performative allyship to active participation in dismantling gender inequality. This includes advocating for gender-sensitive policies, challenging sexist behaviour among peers, and sharing domestic responsibilities.
11. **Institutional transformation is possible:** WIN's advocacy influenced later policies, such as the establishment of the Ministry of Women Affairs and the National Gender Policy (2006), proving that sustained pressure yields results. Male feminists should play more proactive roles to promote transformation in male-dominated institutions in both the public and private sectors. Institutional transformation, not just individual change, should be the ultimate goal.
12. **Feminism is Local and Contextual:** This is one of the most important lessons from WIN. WIN's approach was grounded in the Nigerian socio-cultural context. It resisted Western-imposed definitions of feminism and instead developed frameworks that resonated with Nigerian realities. Male feminists should, therefore, reject universalist and elitist approaches and instead engage with feminism in ways that reflect local culture, language, and lived experiences, without compromising on human rights.

CONCLUSION

The experience of Women in Nigeria (WIN) offers invaluable insights into the possibilities and pitfalls of male feminism in a patriarchal society. Male feminists, when genuinely committed, can play a transformative role in challenging gender inequalities. However, this requires a clear understanding of feminist principles, humility, accountability, and an intersectional approach that situates gender justice within broader struggles for social equity. WIN's legacy is a testament to the power of inclusive feminist activism and a call for renewed male engagement in feminist movements in Nigeria and beyond.

The story of WIN offers a nuanced case study of male feminism in action: inclusive yet leadership-driven by women, successful yet fragile. The key lessons for male allies today are clear: support, don't supplant; challenge oppressive power structures, don't dominate spaces; and sustain the movement beyond personal involvement.

In sum, WIN's early inclusion of men laid important groundwork for understanding male feminism in Nigeria, highlighting both the benefits and challenges of male participation in women's rights movements. The experience underscores that men's involvement can help advance gender justice if men commit to genuine allyship, support women's leadership, and work to transform patriarchal systems collaboratively.

Women in Nigeria (WIN) offers a powerful example of principled, inclusive, and radical feminism rooted in Nigeria's social realities. For male feminists, WIN is a school of learning - a reminder that supporting gender equality is not an act of charity, but a shared commitment to justice. Male feminism must be guided by feminist-led wisdom, grounded in solidarity, and committed to dismantling the systemic roots of gender-based oppression. Only then can the vision of true equality become a collective reality.

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11

Chapter Eleven

Chapter Eleven

MASCULINITY IN TRANSITION: YOUNG MEN’S PERSPECTIVES ON FEMINISM, PATRIARCHY AND POSITIVE MASCULINITY IN THE 21ST CENTURY

By

Victoria Oseyande Ikearu-Udoh

1. INTRODUCTION

In Nigeria, culture, religion, and historical factors have continued to influence how masculinity is viewed and perceived. One of the best illustrations of this is Okonkwo (Ebube Dike), portrayed in “Things Fall Apart”, who represents a strong patriarchal ideal of masculinity grounded in power, control, the suppression of feelings, and opposition to change. This character reinforces systemic patriarchy in both the home and the community by reflecting long-standing social expectations for Nigerian men to take charge, provide for their homes and others, and avoid vulnerability.¹

However, recent studies and initiatives on gender equality show a contradiction between obstinate norms and ongoing efforts for gender equality. Although academics, development practitioners, and civil society advocates have sustained their advocacy for changes in gender norms, their efforts have, however, consistently encountered opposition due to the close connection between gender equality and religious interpretations and cultural traditions.²

Despite these oppositions, initiatives such as HeForShe Nigeria, MenEngage Africa, and Women In Nigeria (WIN), as well as several other organizations, actively

¹ Achebe, Chinua. *Things Fall Apart*. Heinemann, 1958.

² Connell, R. W., and James W. Messerschmidt. “Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept.” *Gender & Society*, vol. 19, no. 6, 2005, pp. 829–859.

encourage men and boys to reject stereotypes and adopt positive masculinity, offering hope for a positive shift. These programs provide more inclusive and comprehensive alternatives to the traditional "Okonkwo" model of masculinity by promoting empathy, emotional transparency, and shared accountability.³

a. Masculinity Before the 21st Century

Many older men in Nigeria and similar contexts may not have identified with the feminist movement. Still, they are silently challenging patriarchy and practicing feminist values, as documented in previous chapters, particularly Chapter 10, "The Stories of Fathers Who Lived Feminist Values Without the Label." These men consistently modeled gender equality, which was evident in how they educated their daughters, shared domestic responsibilities at home regardless of gender, appreciated and respected their wives' and daughters' independence and contributions to the family as well as society. These actions stemmed from personal convictions, religious beliefs, and a strong sense of fairness, rather than ideological feminism.

Although these men did not identify themselves with the word "feminism," due to prevailing cultural stigma or ignorance, they lived and practiced these values. These values are reflected in their actions and practices. Despite benefiting from the patriarchal structures, they morally opposed harmful and toxic patriarchy. Their opposition was more due to an ethical disposition than a systemic issue. They viewed them as an injustice, rather than challenging stereotypes or patriarchy.⁴

b. Masculinity in Transition from Quiet Pioneers to Contemporary Voices

In contrast, the 21st-century generation of men, especially those in Generation

³UN Women. *HeForShe Nigeria Report*. UN Women, 2018. See also: MenEngage Africa. *Annual Activity Summary*. 2020.

⁴Ratele, Kopano. "Masculinities without Tradition." *Politikon*, vol. 40, no. 1, 2013, pp. 133–156.

Alpha (born from 2010 onward), as well as Millennials (Generation Y) and Generation Z, have seen significant changes in the conception, performance, and contestation of masculinity. Modern cultural, social, and economic shifts are changing the definition of masculinity. Male identity is currently undergoing a visible metamorphosis as dominant concepts of masculinity change in reaction to changing social norms, the emergence of diverse role models, and a greater acceptance of more fluid gender expressions.⁵ These developments are promoting a departure from rigid gender roles and norms, toward more dynamic and multifaceted understandings of masculinity.

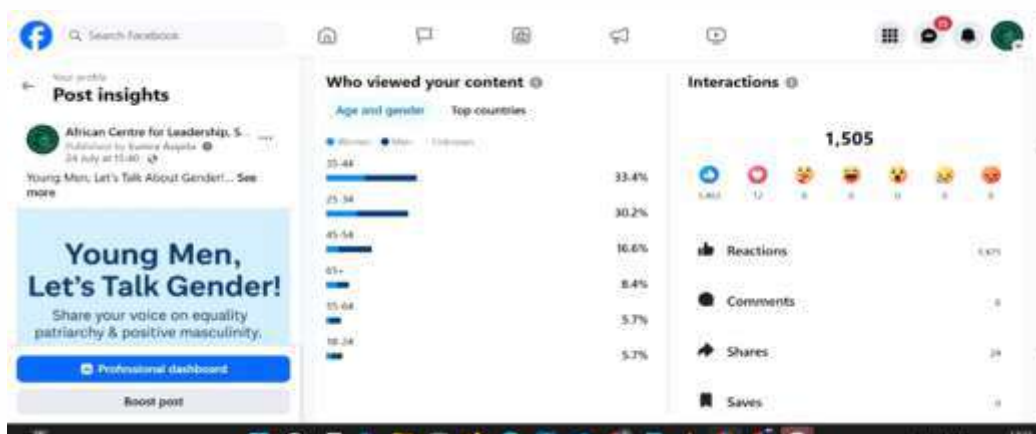
To better understand these evolving perspectives, Centre LSD designed a survey to capture young men's perceptions on key gender-related issues and to grasp these changing viewpoints. The target audience for the survey was young men aged 15 to 40 years old. The survey explored definitions and perceptions of masculinity and feminism; beliefs about gender equality and patriarchy; how they feel about how girls and boys, wives and daughters are treated, whether they think gender is superior or inferior, and what influences and shapes their gender perspectives.

The survey included fifty-one (51) respondents from diverse ethnic, religious, and geographic backgrounds. The findings indicate a complex yet encouraging positive shift in attitudes toward feminism, patriarchy, gender equality, and masculinity. The results showed a subtle but positive change in perceptions of masculinity, gender equality, patriarchy, and feminism. The responses, representing the views of today's young men, offered insights into shifts in masculine identity and gender relations, as well as potential directions for gender justice in future programs. Most respondents (88.2%) fell within the 30- to 40-year-old age range, indicating mature young adults actively engaged in social and professional spheres. A significant portion (68.6%) lived in Abuja, Nigeria's capital, while others came from cities such as Kaduna, Jos, Maiduguri, and additional locations in Borno and Adamawa states, as well as Port Harcourt and Benin.

⁵ Edström, Jerker, et al. "Engendering Men: A Collaborative Review of Evidence on Men and Boys in Social Change and Gender Equality." Institute of Development Studies, 2015.

Considering their educational level, 74.5% of the respondents had postgraduate degrees, indicating their high level of education. Analyzing the participants' religious affiliation, 13.7% identified as Muslim, while 86.3% identified as Christian. The survey's results demonstrate a high level of awareness of gender concepts: 90.2% of respondents supported men's active participation in advancing gender equality, 72.5% acknowledged the idea of positive masculinity, and 92.2% were familiar with the term patriarchy. Remarkably, the majority support for male allyship and good masculinity indicates a readiness among this generation to participate and support in reforming gender norms, even though many respondents made a distinction between feminism and gender equality. These perceptions support the growing acceptance of a more inclusive and thoughtful view of gender roles and responsibilities among Nigerian young men, especially those in the educated urban population.

However, the cultural shock of the lack of interest and expertise in technical terms/issues like gender equality, masculinity, and feminism was one of the survey's primary discoveries. Many of these young men wrote responses stating that they do not participate in surveys where they will not receive payment, that they cannot spend more than 60 seconds on a document, and that they find the phrases "feminism, gender equality, and masculinity" too technical. Just 51 people completed the survey out of the 1,500 potential responders who opened the survey, liked it, or left comments. There is an urgent situation! "Our young people aren't reading and not ready to read."



2. DEFINITIONS AND INTERPRETATIONS OF FEMINISM AND GENDER EQUALITY BY YOUNG NIGERIAN MEN

Young men in Nigeria demonstrated a strong alignment with the values of gender equality but expressed more fragmented and skeptical views about feminism. This disconnection in views is influenced by cultural, religious, and educational contexts, as well as the way these terms are framed and communicated.⁶

The young male respondents in the survey conducted offered a wide range of definitions for *feminism* and *gender equality*, reflecting both informed perspectives and significant misconceptions. Many of them defined feminism as advocacy for women's rights and empowerment, a movement aimed at achieving equality between men and women, serving as a corrective force against historical gender imbalances. However, others described feminism in more skeptical terms, interpreting it as a movement that promotes women over men; an aggressive or anti-men ideology; a Western construct disconnected from African values, etc. These varying interpretations suggest a lack of consensus among young men regarding what feminism truly means. Cultural context, religious values, media representation, and social upbringing strongly influence these divergent views.

In contrast, gender equality was more consistently and positively defined. Most respondents in the survey described it as equal rights and opportunities for all genders, fairness in access to leadership, education, employment, and family roles, and the abolition of gender-based discrimination. A comparison of participants' responses on feminism and gender equality revealed a more neutral and less emotional tone, indicating that it is a more accepted and accessible concept among young men. Further analysis shows that language plays a significant role in shaping how gender concepts are perceived and understood. From participants' responses, the term "*feminism*" generated more resistance than "*gender equality*". This is primarily due to its politicized framing and perceived foreign origin. These misconceptions

⁶ Izugbara, Chimaraoke O., et al. Young People's Sexual and Reproductive Health in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA): Bridging the Research to Practice Gap 2021.

included viewing feminism as inherently hostile to men or as a movement that undermines traditional male authority. These misunderstandings contribute to the hostility and emotional distance many young men feel toward feminist discourse, even when they support its core values in practice.

Interrogating these distinctions between feminism and gender equality, through their lens, several respondents explicitly distinguished between feminism and gender equality. To some, feminism is a strategy or advocacy platform that seeks gender equality, particularly from a women's rights lens. Others viewed feminism as narrow or biased, while gender equality is a universal concept that is inclusive of all genders. And several believed that feminism is often misrepresented, while gender equality remains a more neutral, objective goal. This distinction between the two concepts highlights a semantic and ideological gap. While many young men support the outcomes that feminism seeks, they resist the label due to confusion or cultural misalignment.

Despite the differences in how these terms were defined, most responses revealed fundamental values of fairness, equity, and respect for human dignity. Statements such as ***"men and women should have equal rights and opportunities"*** and ***"gender roles should not limit anyone's life choices"*** were widely endorsed. Even among respondents who expressed skepticism about feminism, there exists a strong support for the principles it promotes, especially when framed as justice, balance, and opportunity for all, indicating that, although values align, terminology differs. This difference in terminology, therefore, shows that young Nigerian men demonstrate a strong alignment with the principles of gender equality, even though their acceptance of feminism is more fragmented and shaped by cultural, educational, and linguistic factors. And of course, this suggests the need for intentional framing, more transparent communication, and contextualized education to bridge the gap between shared values and divisive terms. To achieve this, there must be a conscious effort to "meet young men where they are", which involves using relatable language and inclusive discourse, allowing gender justice movements to cultivate a more profound understanding and broader allyship.⁷

⁷ Flood, Michael. *Engaging Men and Boys in Violence Prevention*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2019.

3. YOUNG MEN'S PERCEPTIONS OF PATRIARCHY AND GENDER ROLES

In Chapter 10 of this book, older Nigerian men, though they were not self-identified feminists, were shown to have modeled equitable gender behavior by educating their daughters, sharing domestic responsibilities, and opposing violence against women. These men operated within patriarchal systems, and they morally challenged their harmful manifestations. They achieved this through their progressive actions. These unrecognized or unnamed acts laid the groundwork for modern interpretations of gender roles and justice among today's youth.

In contrast, today's younger generation of men, shaped by globalization, education, and urbanization, is more directly exposed to critical conversations about Patriarchy and gender roles. However, their perspectives vary significantly, shaped by region, generational outlook, education, and religious or cultural background. Their understanding of the word "patriarchy" is complex and mixed. While most acknowledge its existence and negative impacts, particularly on women, their views are shaped by regional, generational, and ideological differences. Many recognize the privileges it affords men, but a number also perceive themselves as constrained or unfairly criticized by modern critiques of Patriarchy.

Young Men's Perceptions of Patriarchy and Social Implications.

a. Young Men's Belief in the Existence and Effects of Patriarchal Systems

Survey analysis shows that 92.2% of respondents were familiar with the term "patriarchy", indicating high awareness.⁸ Many defined it as: "*a system where men dominate power and decision-making*"; "*a structure that limits women's opportunities*"; "*a traditional way of life that places men above women*"; *etc.* These descriptions show that young men understand Patriarchy both as a social structure and a cultural legacy. Respondents identified its societal impacts as limiting women to domestic roles; expecting men always to lead or provide; resisting women's participation in leadership and politics and suppressing men's emotional expression in favor of dominance and stoicism.

⁸Ibid., survey response data.

b. Young Nigerian men's Perception of Benefits or Disadvantages of Patriarchy on Genders.

While many young men acknowledged that Patriarchy benefits men through access to resources, authority in family structures, and societal privileges, they also highlighted its disadvantages. Some respondents expressed that Patriarchy places unfair burdens on men, such as forcing them into rigid provider roles, denying them emotional expression, and making them targets of unfair blame in discussions of gender equality. This reflects an emerging self-awareness among young men about the double-edged nature of patriarchal systems, offering privilege on one hand, while demanding conformity and emotional sacrifice on the other.

Case Example: "Patriarchy favors men in decision-making, but it also forces men into pressure roles they didn't choose."

c. Generational and Regional Differences in these Perceptions.

Generational and geographical contexts remarkably influenced how young Nigerian men perceive Patriarchy, and these include:

Generational Differences: This is inferred from the respondents under 30 years old. They were generally more critical of patriarchal norms and demonstrated higher knowledge of concepts like *positive masculinity* and greater openness to sharing domestic responsibilities.⁹

Regional Differences: Analysis shows that respondents living in urban centers, such as Abuja and Port Harcourt, expressed more progressive views and demonstrated greater awareness of gender equity. In contrast, some responses from the North reflected stronger adherence to traditional roles shaped by religious and cultural norms.¹⁰

⁹ ⁴ Ibid., qualitative responses from open-ended survey questions.

¹⁰ ⁵ Ibid.

One key takeaway from these insights is that perceptions of Patriarchy among young Nigerian men are shifting. Although many still operate within patriarchal systems, there is a growing critical consciousness of its limitations and harms for both men and women, especially their emotional toll on men and its structural oppression of women. Education, urban exposure, and generational change are driving more reflective and inclusive attitudes. Compared to the quiet, practice-based resistance seen in older men (as noted in Chapter 10), today's younger men are becoming more vocal, self-aware, and ideologically engaged in challenging traditional gender norms.

Case Example: A respondent from Kaduna noted, "In my community, men still have the final say, but I try to make room for my wife's voice at home, even if others see it as weakness."¹¹

4. YOUNG NIGERIAN MALE: FAMILIARITY AND ACCEPTANCE OF POSITIVE MASCULINITY

The survey shows a growing trend of openness among young Nigerian men toward the concept of positive masculinity. However, this openness is met with different levels of understanding and acceptance compared to the more traditional impression of masculinity. However, cultural values, religious teachings, and limited exposure to gender-equitable discourse were both seen as barriers and, in some cases, facilitators to embracing more inclusive and balanced forms of masculinities.¹²

According to the survey conducted for this research, 72.5% of respondents indicated familiarity with the term positive masculinity. These responses are a clear indication of the growing awareness of modern masculinity frameworks associated with values like emphasizing empathy, emotional intelligence, and shared responsibility.¹³ However, deeper analysis revealed that most respondents had only surface-level

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Nwafor, Chika, and Tolu Adebayo. *Masculinity and Change in African Youth Identity: A Sociological Perspective*. Ibadan: Heritage Press, 2021.

¹³ <https://www.centreformalepsychology.com/male-psychology-magazine-listings/positive-masculinity-is-what-we-need-to-be-talking-about-now>

awareness. Few could provide clear definitions or concrete examples. One respondent from the survey described it as *"being responsible and emotionally available while respecting women's rights."* At the same time, another framed it as *"the kind of masculinity that is not toxic"¹⁴, that protects rather than oppresses."*

Comparing Traditional and Emerging Masculinity Discourses, many respondents acknowledged a tension between traditional masculine expectations. This includes dominance, stoicism, and financial provision, as well as newer ideals such as emotional presence, caregiving, and gender equality. In most instances, traditional norms continue to exert a significant influence, particularly in rural and conservative communities. Again, educated younger men in urban areas are increasingly redefining masculinity, advocating for balance and mutual respect in male-female relationships. A classical case is one of the respondents who observed that, *"Men are still expected to dominate and provide for the family. But times have changed. Women are now also providing. Therefore, men need to learn to nurture, too."*

a. Barriers and Facilitators to Gender-Equitable Masculinity

Positive masculinity seems to be gaining ground, but its full acceptability and integration into everyday practice remain a work in progress. This survey, however, identified some of these barriers, and these are:

- **Cultural Norms and Upbringing:** Many young men were taught not to cry, to suppress emotions, and to reject women's leadership, buttressing outdated views of manhood.
- **Misconceptions about Feminism and Gender Roles:** Some feared that embracing gender-equitable masculinity would be seen as weakness or make them less of a man.
- **Social Pressure:** The most common reasons given by respondents for resisting change were the fear of being ridiculed by peers or labeled as "soft" or "controlled by women," or what is referred to in the local palace as "woman control."

Despite these challenges, key facilitators were also identified:

¹⁴ <https://www.centreformalepsychology.com/male-psychology-magazine-listings/what-is-positive-masculinity>

- **Education and Exposure:** Respondents with higher educational levels, particularly postgraduates, were more likely to support and practice positive masculinity.
- **Progressive Faith Values:** When interpreted through a lens of compassion and mutual respect, religious teachings are perceived to support gender-equitable behavior.
- **Advocacy and Role Models:** Programs such as *HeForShe Nigeria* and *MenEngage* were referenced as impactful, helping to normalize inclusive masculinity through campaigns and mentorship initiatives.¹⁵

5. INFLUENCES ON GENDER NORMS AND BELIEFS OF YOUNG NIGERIAN MEN

There is a complex interplay of social, cultural, religious, and media influences that often controls the beliefs of young Nigerian men about gender norms. These influences range from family and community traditions to religious teachings and social media. While many of the young men in this survey expressed progressive views on gender equality, their perspectives were shaped by conservative cultural, religious, and social frameworks, as well as personal relationships and social media content. The survey findings highlight four primary sources of influence:

a. Social Influences: Reactions from these young men show that Family and peer groups play a crucial role in shaping the perspectives of young Nigerian men on gender roles, particularly the distinct roles of mothers and fathers. For many of these young men, mothers modelled resilience, multitasking, and emotional strength, while fathers often reinforced authority, provision, and discipline. A few of the respondents alluded that siblings and peer pressure influenced their attitudes toward masculinity and femininity, especially during their adolescence. A cue shared by one of the respondents, “*My father taught me to be strong and provide, but my mother showed me that women work twice as hard to be respected.*” This demonstrates

¹⁵UN Women Nigeria. HeForShe Nigeria Campaign Summary Report 2023. Abuja: UN Women, 2023.

that family dynamics often lead to conflicting models of gender roles and introduce alternative values, such as respect and empathy.

b. Cultural Influences: Cultural norms and community expectations continue to shape how gender, masculinity, and femininity are constantly expressed and enforced by young men. Some respondents portrayed men as the providers, protectors, and heads of the family, often reinforced through ethnic-specific traditions and customs that assign different roles or values to men and women (e.g., in Igbo, Hausa, or Yoruba cultures). One participant noted, *“In my community, it is still odd for a man to be seen carrying a baby or doing house chores. He is seen as weak.”* It is important to note that despite increased education and urbanization, deeply ingrained cultural expectations still exert pressure, especially around masculinity performance in public spaces.

c. Religious Influences: The influence of religious beliefs (both Christian and Islamic) tops the chart as the key influencer in shaping attitudes of young men toward gender roles. This is indicated by the overwhelming responses from 86.3% of respondents who identified as Christians and 13.7% as Muslims. Many linked their religious upbringing to values like respect, responsibility, and family structure. Complimenting these views, some participants opined that religious interpretations (from the Bible and the Quran) often reinforced hierarchical gender roles, citing scriptures that designate men as the "heads of the home." For some, this justified leadership roles for men and submission for women.¹⁶ One respondent wrote, *“My faith teaches me to be a good husband and father, but not necessarily to see my wife as equal in decision-making.”* This typifies a conflict between religious doctrine and evolving gender consciousness.

¹⁶Adesina, Olutayo, and Adeyemi Akinsulure-Smith. “Religion and Gender Norms in Contemporary Africa.” *African Journal of Gender and Religion*, vol. 7, no. 1, 2020, pp. 45–58.

d. Media and Online Influences: Media influences, particularly social media platforms, entertainment content, etc, were evident in many responses as a powerful influence for young men. Some young men reported learning about feminism and gender equality through social media influencers, podcasts, YouTube content, and international news. While a few credited platforms like Twitter and Instagram for shaping more liberal views, others pointed to toxic content from hyper-masculine influencers (e.g., Andrew Tate, manosphere communities),¹⁷ as reinforcing dominance-based masculinity. A few participants also noted contradictions in popular music and Nollywood films, where themes of male authority and female submissiveness still dominate. In one of the reflections from a participant, *“social media showed me what feminism is. But at the same time, you see so many men attacking women for speaking out.”* This reflects a double-edged effect, which shows that media can both liberate and polarize gender perspectives, depending on the content consumed and the echo chambers in which users reside.

6. STRATEGIES FOR GENDER-TRANSFORMATIVE EDUCATION AND ADVOCACY AMONG YOUNG NIGERIAN MEN.

To foster genuine gender-transformative change among young Nigerian men, education and advocacy efforts must be context-sensitive, practical, youth-driven, and culturally grounded. Evidence from the survey data reveals strong support for gender equality in principle but mixed or skeptical views on feminism. Therefore, the development of future interventions must be built on shared values while addressing knowledge gaps and misconceptions through accessible, relatable, and participatory methods. Outlined below are some suggested practical approaches for Gender-Transformative Change among young men in Nigeria and the related context:

¹⁷<https://divineprinciple.com/>

a. Curriculum Development and School-Based Interventions Approach: Integrate gender studies modules into civic education and social studies curricula across secondary and tertiary institutions. This is critical because findings from the survey showed that while 92.2% of young men are familiar with the term patriarchy, only 72.5% understood what positive masculinity means. In comparison, many struggle with the term feminism. This indicates that terminology and theoretical concepts are not well internalized, despite general support for gender equality. Therefore, designing curriculum content using local examples, storytelling, and roleplay would go a long way in bridging this knowledge gap. Additionally, the use of real-life case studies (e.g., fathers who embody feminist values without the label) to demonstrate positive male engagement, including engaging educators through gender-sensitivity training, will also be helpful.

b. Peer-Led Workshops and Community Dialogues Approach: Establish peer-led gender dialogues and workshops that use informal, interactive methods (e.g., debates, theatre, sports discussions). One key revelation from the survey is a tendency among many young men to avoid technical gender language or long reading formats. Respondents preferred direct, relatable discussions. For example, organize “Barber Shop Dialogues” or “Football + Gender Talks” where trained male youth facilitators initiate conversations around masculinity, relationships, and gender norms.

c. Structured Messaging and Delivery Channels for Youth Engagement Approach: Messaging like “Gender equality benefits everyone. “Masculinity is not defined by dominance.” “Being a man includes being fair, caring, and responsible.”; etc. This is revealed in respondents' statements such as “*Men and women should have equal rights and opportunities*” and “*Gender roles should not limit anyone's life choices*”, etc, foretell broad agreement in the survey, showing that fairness, inclusion, and shared responsibility resonate more than ideological labels.

Some suggested delivery channels include social media (Instagram Reels, TikTok skits, YouTube shorts); edutainment (comics, animations, short web series); influencer/celebrity engagement (male musicians, comedians, athletes promoting positive masculinity), and WhatsApp communities and discussion groups. For example, a short skit series that contrasts the “*Okonkwo model*” of masculinity with a more equitable and emotionally open male role model could stimulate reflection among youth.¹⁸

d. Partnership Opportunities Approach: Working with young Nigerian males as allies for the male feminist network will entail a multi-stakeholder approach. These should include:

- **Partnership with Secondary Schools and Universities:** Work with secondary and tertiary institutions to embed gender norms education in general orientation or life skills programs. This could include hosting annual “Gender Awareness Weeks” organized by male student-led groups.
- **Partnership with Youth Organizations:** Partner with NYSC, student unions, and local NGOs to co-develop youth-friendly toolkits and training. For example, co-host camps or hackathons themed “rethinking masculinity.”
- **Partnership with Religious and Traditional Institutions:** Collaborate with faith-based leaders to promote narratives that align gender justice with moral and spiritual values. Deliberately identify “champion pastors” or imams to lead by example and speak during youth fellowships or Friday sermons.
- **Partnership with Media and Creative Arts:** Invest in short films, spoken-word poetry, and music videos that challenge harmful gender norms. Identify and partner with local content creators to co-produce relatable content.

e. Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Approaches: Develop a mixed-methods M&E framework that measures changes in knowledge, attitude, and behavior (KAB). Tools such as pre- and post-workshop surveys, measuring change in

¹⁸ Achebe, Chinua. *Things Fall Apart* Heinemann, 1958; Edochie, Pete. Interview. BBC Africa, 2021.

understanding and beliefs; reflective journaling or storytelling for qualitative insights; periodic SMS/WhatsApp polls to track opinion changes; and long-term follow-up focus groups can be adopted to track these changes in KAB. Some of the metrics for measuring the KAB could include the percentage increase in participants who can correctly define positive masculinity, the percentage change in ease of discussing gender issues publicly, and testimonials of changed behavior at home, school, or among peers.

Conclusion

This chapter reflects the progress made over the years by various interventions in shifting the culture and changing the mindset of men and boys concerning gender equality and masculinity in Nigeria. Despite existing challenges, there are significant improvements and a willingness for transformative change, particularly in areas of fairness, inclusion, and shared responsibilities. These changes have been modeled through family teachings, cultural expectations, religious convictions, and social media content, with elements such as traditional institutions, misinformation, and patriarchal structures playing significant roles. To correct this misinformation, efforts must be intensified to promote media literacy, so that young men can critically assess online gender content and advocate for faith-based reinterpretations of religious texts to foster equality and mutual respect. Additionally, transforming traditional masculinity through influencers and peer educators, while creating safe offline and online spaces for young men to examine their beliefs and learn from diverse perspectives critically.

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Chapter Twelve

Chapter Twelve

GAPS IN THE FEMINIST STRUGGLES AND THE WAY FORWARD

By
Iroro S. Izu, Ph. D

Introduction

This concluding chapter x-rays some fundamental gaps in extant policies, prospects for gender equality and pragmatic recommendations for action. It sums up key discussions and recommendations in the preceding chapters. First, it is important to reiterate that gender equality in Nigeria is governed by a complex patchwork of constitutional guarantees, statutory laws, international treaties, and policy instruments. The research conducted by Gupta¹ indicates that, although legal frameworks for women's rights have improved globally, their effectiveness is often constrained by implementation challenges and context-specific barriers. In Nigeria, religious and customary resistances constitute such context. What follows is an integrated analysis of the main legal and policy instruments intended to advance gender equality and women's empowerment in Nigeria, and the way forward for positive and sustainable change.

1. The 1999 Constitution of Nigeria

Nigeria's supreme legal document, the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (CFRN) as altered, provides a foundational framework for non-discrimination and equal rights. Section 42 prohibits discrimination based on sex, among other grounds, thereby creating a formal legal basis for gender equality. However, the Constitution suffers from critical shortcomings. Notably, Chapter II, which outlines social and economic rights such as education, employment, and adequate healthcare, is explicitly non-justiciable under Section 6, subsection (6), paragraph (c). This means citizens cannot seek judicial enforcement of these rights, effectively nullifying their practical value².

¹Gupta, P., Chintala, L., Rao, & Chakraborty, N. (2024). Legal and policy frameworks for women's empowerment: Global perspectives. *Journal of International Equality Research*, 4(3), 1526-4726. <https://doi.org/10.52783/jier.v4i3.1334>

² Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999) as Amended. <https://nigeriarights.gov.ng/files/constitution.pdf>

Furthermore, gendered language pervades the 1999 Constitution, reflecting covert patriarchal bias in the framing of institutional power. For instance, Section 130, subsection (1) states that *“There shall be for the Federation a President who shall be the Head of State, the Chief Executive of the Federation and the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of the Federation”*. In the section that follows and its attendant paragraphs, the President is consistently referred to as *“he”*, rather than using gender-neutral terms like *“the person”*. Similarly, Section 42(1), which prohibits discrimination, uses masculine pronouns in its illustration of rights, stating: *“A citizen of Nigeria of a particular community, ethnic group, place of origin, sex, religion or political opinion shall not, by reason only that he is such a person...”*³

While the intention may not have been to exclude women, the persistent use of masculine terms to denote citizenship and leadership subtly reinforces the assumption that men are the default holders of power.

In addition, the Constitution fails to address key gender-specific issues, such as violence against women, reproductive rights, and gendered socio-economic disparities, nowhere in the text is there an explicit recognition of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), nor are terms like *“rape,” “domestic violence,”* or *“maternal health”* mentioned⁴. This silence on gender-based harm reveals a gender-blind legal structure, despite growing societal and legal recognition of such issues. Scholars like Durojaye⁵ and Ekhatior⁶ argue that this omission leaves Nigerian women vulnerable, as it limits legal grounds for demanding systemic protection and equality under constitutional law.

While the Constitution offers formal equality, it fails to guarantee substantive equality, the kind that addresses historic disadvantage, entrenched patriarchy, and structural barriers to women's empowerment. This aligns with African feminist

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ezeifeke, C. R., & Osakwe, N. N. (2013). Gender representation in the 1999 Nigerian constitution: A critical discourse analysis for socio-political equity. *Discourse & Society*, 24(6), 687-700. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24441461>

⁵ Durojaye, E. (2013). "Woman, but not Human: Widowhood Practices and Human Rights Violations in Nigeria." *International Journal of Law, Policy and the Family*, 27(2), 176-196.

⁶ Ekhatior, E. O. (2015). Women and the law in Nigeria: A reappraisal. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 16(2), 285-296.

critiques of liberal legalism, which argue that legal texts, without context-specific enforcement and cultural transformation, remain symbolic rather than transformative.

2. International Commitments: The Dormant Power of CEDAW

Nigeria ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1985. As a comprehensive international treaty, CEDAW obligates states to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women in public and private life. However, under Section 12 of the Nigerian Constitution, international treaties must be domesticated by the National Assembly before they can have the force of law. To date, CEDAW remains undomesticated, meaning Nigerian courts cannot use it as a legal basis for adjudicating gender discrimination cases. Attempts to domesticate CEDAW through legislative means (such as the Gender and Equal Opportunities Bill) have repeatedly failed, facing opposition from conservative religious and cultural blocs in the National Assembly. Critics argue that CEDAW's provisions on gender equality in marriage, divorce, and family relations conflict with Sharia-based personal laws⁷, as is reflected in the Northern part of Nigeria.

The failure to domesticate CEDAW underscores the tension between Nigeria's plural legal systems (statutory, customary, and Islamic law) and the challenge of integrating universalist human rights norms into culturally pluralistic societies. African feminist scholars call for “nego-feminist” approaches, which advocate negotiation, community-rooted advocacy, and incremental cultural shifts rather than adversarial legalism.

⁷Simuziya, N. (2023). Perceptions of the Feminist Movement and Women's Rights in the Context of Universal Rights vs Cultural & Religious Norms in African Societies: Feminism in Historical Perspective. *International Journal on Minority and Group Rights*. 30. 1-37. 10.1163/15718115-bja10108.

3. National Gender Policy (2006, 2021): Framework Without Force

Nigeria's National Gender Policy (NGP) was adopted in 2006 and revised in 2021 to guide government actions toward gender mainstreaming, inclusive governance, and women's socio-economic empowerment. It recommends increased affirmative action for women's political appointments and seeks to integrate gender considerations into all development planning processes. However, the policy is non-binding and lacks the statutory backing required for enforcement. Implementation has been patchy at best. While some ministries and agencies have established gender focal points, these units are often under-resourced and marginal within bureaucratic hierarchies. Monitoring and evaluation frameworks are weak, and there is little coordination among federal, state, and local agencies in enforcing gender-related mandates.

The National Gender Policy serves more as a declaratory vision than a legally enforceable instrument. Its impact is hampered by lack of legal status, elite-driven formulation, and disconnection from grassroots realities. A transformative feminist framework would require gender policies that are contextualized, localized, and backed by institutional power and funding.

4. Statutory Laws: VAPP, CRA, and the Geography of Protection

Two major legal instruments stand out in the effort to combat gender-based violence and protect vulnerable populations:

- The Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act (VAPP), passed in 2015, criminalizes rape, domestic violence, harmful traditional practices (including female genital mutilation), and other forms of abuse.
- The Child Rights Act (CRA), adopted in 2003, sets the legal age of marriage at 18 and guarantees the rights of the child to education, health, and protection from exploitation.

Despite their significance, both laws require state-level domestication. The implementation of these laws across Nigeria remains slow or restricted; while all 36

states have adopted the CRA as of 2025, yet the VAPP Act suffers from limited geographical application⁸.

Northern states frequently resist these legal protections, citing conflicts with Sharia family law principles and cultural practices regarding early marriage. This resistance is partially evident in the high-profile abduction cases of female school-age children, including the Yauri Eleven, Chibok girls, and Leah Shuaibu. Consequently, a patchwork of inconsistent protections has emerged, where women's ability to access justice varies significantly based on geographic location and religious identity⁹, ultimately compromising the principle of universal rights and exacerbating the fragmentation of legal safeguards.

5. Institutional Mechanisms: Symbolism vs Substance

Nigeria has established several institutional structures to advance gender equality, including the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs, the National Human Rights Commission, [National Council of Women Societies](#), (NCWS) and gender desks within the police, Federal Inland Revenue Service and various ministries. These bodies are meant to coordinate policy, oversee implementation, and serve as advocacy hubs. However, in practice, they suffer from limited budgets, bureaucratic inertia, and tokenistic positioning within the broader governance structure.

Feminist critiques highlight the dangers of institutional tokenism, where gender equality structures exist but lack real power or budgetary control. Without political will, inter-ministerial coordination, and community accountability, these institutions become performative rather than transformative.

⁸ Danjuma, I., & Joel, K. A. (2021). The legal conundrum in the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in Nigeria. *Sriwijaya Law Review*, 5(1), 1-13. <https://doi.org/10.28946/slrev.Vol5.Iss1.603>.pp1-13

⁹ MacDowell, E. L. (2018). Vulnerability, access to justice, and the fragmented state. *Michigan Journal of Race and Law*, 23(1), 51-93. <https://repository.law.umich.edu/mjrl/vol23/iss1/3>

Parameters for Women's Empowerment

Education

Education is often identified as the foundation of empowerment. In Nigeria, however, gender disparities persist in access to education, particularly in rural and northern regions. According to UNICEF¹⁰, approximately 10.2 million children of primary school age, and another 8.1 million of junior secondary school age are out of school in Nigeria, the majority of whom are girls. Educational disparities persist across Nigeria's northern region, with the gender parity index (GPI) for secondary education in all 15 northern states falling below national averages for female enrollment¹¹. This inequality is further evidenced by the documented dropout rates for girls in the north at 5.4%, almost twice the 3% rate observed among boys¹². Moreover, female participation in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) remains alarmingly low due to deeply ingrained gender stereotypes and insufficient institutional support¹³.

However, initiatives such as the Girls' Education Project (GEP3), funded by the UK Department for International Development and implemented by UNICEF, have contributed to a notable increase in girls' enrollment and retention in schools. African Feminism views education not just as a means of social mobility but as a way to reclaim agency in patriarchal and postcolonial structures. The disparities in girls' education (particularly in northern Nigeria) highlight the colonial legacy of gendered educational exclusion and the need for culturally sensitive solutions. Thus, empowerment through education also translates into better health outcomes, economic participation, and political engagement, marking it as a critical enabler across all domains.

¹⁰ UNICEF (2024). Immediate Action Needed to Protect Nigeria's Children and Schools. <https://www.unicef.org/nigeria/press-releases/immediate-action-needed-protect-nigerias-children-and-schools#:~:text=ABUJA%2C%20September%202024,%20%E2%80%93%20Nigeria's,action%20to%20protect%20education%20nationwide>

¹¹ Ajayi, A. I., Alex-Ojei, C. A., & Ahinkorah, B. O. (2023). Sexual violence among young women in Nigeria: A cross-sectional study of prevalence, reporting and care-seeking behaviours. *African Health Sciences*, 23(1), 286-300. <https://doi.org/10.4314/ahs.v23i1>.

¹² UNICEF. (2024b). Nigeria: Education Country Brief. retrieved from <https://www.icba.unesco.org/en/nigeria#:~:text=According%20to%20UNICEF%2C%20the%20primary,%20and%20girls%20and%20360%25>.

¹³ Ndirika, M., & Agommuoh, P. (2017). Investigating factors influencing girls participation in science and technology education in Nigeria. *IOSR Journal of Research & Method in Education*, 7(3), 50-54. https://doi.org/10.9790/7388_070303054

Politics

Women remain underrepresented in Nigeria's political space despite the introduction of quotas and affirmative action policies. Yiaga Africa¹⁴ reports that women constituted only 12.9% of the total candidates in the 2019 general elections, a figure that declined further to 8.9% in the 2023 elections. This downward trend reinforces the arguments advanced by Awofeso and Odeyemi¹⁵, who identified entrenched cultural norms, limited access to financial resources, and the prevalence of political violence as key barriers to women's political participation in Nigeria.

The National Gender Policy recommends a minimum of 35% affirmative action in elective and appointive positions, yet this target remains unmet. At the grassroots level, however, women are increasingly participating in community development councils and local governance initiatives, demonstrating incremental gains in political empowerment. Civil society groups such as Women in Politics Forum (WIPF) have also advocated for gender-inclusive reform in electoral laws.

Despite policies promoting inclusion, women's underrepresentation in politics reveals the symbolic, not substantive nature of many reforms. African Feminism critiques such tokenism and instead supports bottom-up political empowerment, such as grassroots organizing and participation in community councils. This aligns with precolonial traditions where women had structured, recognized political roles, an indigenous legacy undermined by colonial patriarchy.

Economy

Economic empowerment is central to enabling autonomy and agency among women. In Nigeria, women constitute about 43% of the agricultural labor force and dominate the informal sector, yet they face limited access to financial services, property rights, and credit¹⁶. The gender gap in financial inclusion remains

¹⁴YIAGA Africa (2020). No Country Without Women. Retrieved from <https://yiaga.org/publications/no-country-without-women-2/>

¹⁵Awofeso, O., & Odeyemi, T. I. (2014). Gender and political participation in Nigeria: A cultural perspective. *Journal of Research in Peace, Gender and Development*, 4(6), 104-110. <https://doi.org/10.14303/jrpgd.2014.029>

¹⁶Oseni, Gbemisola; Goldstein, Markus; Utah, Amarachi. ²⁰¹³. Gender Dimensions in Nigerian Agriculture. Africa Region Gender Practice Policy Brief;No. 6. © World Bank. <http://hdl.handle.net/10986/25459> License: CC BY ^{3.0} IGO

significant, only 35.4% of women had access to bank accounts as of 2020 compared to 47.2% of men¹⁷.

Programs such as the National Women Empowerment Fund (NAWEF) and the Government Enterprise and Empowerment Programme (GEEP) under the Social Investment Program have targeted women entrepreneurs with microloans, but these efforts are often undermined by weak infrastructure, market access barriers, patriarchal constraints¹⁸, and systemic corruption. Empowering women economically requires not only access to credit but also skills training, legal protections, and supportive networks.

African Feminism resists framing empowerment purely in terms of economic productivity. While women dominate Nigeria's informal sector, their limited access to credit and ownership reflects entrenched structural inequalities. African Feminist thinking calls for systemic transformation (property rights, legal reforms, and social safety nets) not just microloans. Empowerment must prioritize *redistribution of power*, not merely integration into a flawed system.

Health

Health is both a basic and essential component of empowerment. Nigeria faces a critical maternal health challenge, with mortality rates ranging from 512 to 1,747 deaths per 100,000 live births. This high rate is largely driven by inadequate access to skilled prenatal care (received by fewer than 60% of women) and a continued reliance on non-institutional deliveries¹⁹. The inadequacy of reproductive healthcare services, especially in rural areas, has intensified the vulnerability of women.

¹⁷ BusinessDay. (2023, May 17). Only 35% of Nigerian women own bank accounts - NBS. BusinessDay.ng. <https://businessday.ng/financial-inclusion/article/only-35-of-nigerian-women-own-bank-accounts-nbs/>

¹⁸ Lincoln, A. A. (2012, November 28). Prospects and challenges of women entrepreneurs in Nigeria. SSRN. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2181943>

¹⁹ Bankole, A., Sedgh, G., Okonofua, F., Imarhiagbe, C., Hussain, R., & Wulf, D. (2009). Barriers to safe motherhood in Nigeria. New York: Guttmacher Institute. Retrieved from <https://www.guttmacher.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/pubs/2009/05/28/MotherhoodNigeria.pdf>; Harrison, K. A. (2009). The Struggle to Reduce High Maternal Mortality in Nigeria. African Journal of Reproductive Health / La Revue Africaine de La Santé Reproductive, 13(3), 9-20. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27802604>

Family planning, access to skilled birth attendants, and education on sexual and reproductive health remain critical. Although Nigeria has taken steps to align with global public health priorities aimed at reducing maternal mortality, major obstacles remain, such as underfunded health systems, weak infrastructure, and a shortage of skilled healthcare personnel²⁰. Non-governmental organizations like Marie Stopes Nigeria and Pathfinder International have played pivotal roles in bridging service gaps, particularly in underserved areas.

The maternal mortality crisis is read by African Feminists as a manifestation of state neglect and structural violence against women's bodies²¹. Lack of access to skilled care, reproductive health services, and family planning reflects the devaluation of women's health and lives. Efforts by NGOs to close these gaps align with the African Feminist principle of community care and self-determination, especially when they work within local cultural contexts.

Roadblocks to Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Nigeria

Sociocultural Norms and Political Underrepresentation

At the root of gender inequality in Nigeria is a deeply entrenched patriarchal culture that defines gender roles rigidly. These norms prioritize male leadership, decision-making, and inheritance while relegating women to the domestic sphere.

The expectation that women remain submissive to male authority (fathers, husbands, elders) is reinforced through family customs, religion, and informal institutions²². This inhibits women's autonomy in choosing careers, running for office, or even deciding whether to access healthcare services. These norms also shape educational and economic choices. For example, in many northern communities, girls are married off early under the guise of religious or cultural duty, truncating their education and economic potential. Even in urban centers, women are underrepresented in high-paying STEM careers due to socialization that discourages ambition in male-dominated sectors.

²⁰ Bankole et. al., Barriers to safe motherhood in Nigeria. New York: Guttmacher Institute..

²¹ Tibandebage, P., & Mackintosh, M. (2010). Maternal mortality in Africa: A gendered lens on health system failure. Socialist Register, 46. https://esrf.or.tz/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Maternal_mortality-SR-final.pdf

²²Oyekanmi, F. (2005). Institutionalization of Gender Inequality in Nigeria: Implications for the Advancement of Women. Population Review.

44, 56-71. DOI:10.1353/prv.2005.0005

Despite a democratic framework, Nigerian politics remains heavily exclusionary toward women. High entry costs, patronage networks, and political violence all serve to marginalize female aspirants²³. Women are less likely to receive party nominations, media visibility, or financial backing compared to their male counterparts. Legal reforms like the National Gender Policy and proposed Gender and Equal Opportunities Bill have sought to address these inequities, but implementation remains weak. The lack of enforcement mechanisms and political will further entrenches exclusion.

Economic Barriers, Legal Inequities and Gender-Based Violence (GBV)

Although Nigerian women are economically active, they face disproportionate barriers to asset ownership, financial services, and formal employment. In many Nigerian communities, women are traditionally excluded from land ownership, whether the land is held communally or as family property. Data shows that only 8.2% of women in Nigeria have sole ownership of land, in contrast to 34.2% of men²⁴. Women are also less likely to benefit from economic safety nets or government-funded entrepreneurial schemes due to lower literacy levels, lack of awareness, or cultural restrictions on public engagement.

Informal employment, which engages the bulk of Nigerian women, offers no social protections (e.g., maternity leave, pensions, healthcare), reinforcing cycles of poverty and dependency.

Nigeria's legal landscape is complex, with statutory, customary, and Sharia laws often overlapping, and sometimes contradicting each other. While the 1999 Constitution

²³ Onyishi, A., Eme, O., & Nwaoha, C. (2014). Women marginalization in electoral politics in Nigeria: A historical perspective. Nigerian Chapter of Arabian Journal of Business and Management Review, 2(7), 1-17. <https://doi.org/10.12816/0011606>

²⁴ Umukoro, B. E., Kore-Okiti, E. T., & Megbele, O. J. (2024). Customary land ownership and women's land rights in Nigeria: Extending the frontiers of feminist environmental justice. Journal of Environmental Law & Policy, 4(3), 203-229. <https://doi.org/10.33002/jelp.040308>

guarantees non-discrimination (Section 42), customary laws in many communities still restrict women's inheritance rights, land ownership, and marital autonomy²⁵.

In some northern states, Sharia-based family law limits women's mobility and participation in public life. Courts also often prioritize customary rulings that are unfavorable to women, and many women lack the legal literacy or resources to challenge such outcomes²⁶.

Gender-based violence remains pervasive in Nigeria and is both a cause and consequence of gender inequality. The 2018 Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS) reveals that approximately 35% of women aged 15-49 have experienced intimate partner violence (IPV), exceeding the global acceptable level of 30%²⁷. Sexual violence remains a critical concern in Nigeria, with prevalence rates reported in various studies ranging from 12.1% to 39.5% among women²⁸.

The Violence Against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) Act (2015) represents a major legal milestone, criminalizing rape, female genital mutilation, and spousal battery. However, the Act has not been domesticated in all states, and enforcement is often lax. Cultural taboos, victim-blaming, and a lack of legal support services deter survivors from seeking justice.

Access to Education, Health Services and the Digital Divide

Educational attainment among Nigerian women is severely impacted by early marriage, poverty, and gender bias in school enrolment. Even when enrolled, girls

²⁵ Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999)

²⁶ Nnaeto, J. O., Uzor, E. E., & Ndoh, J. A. (2022). Appraisal of the conflict between Sharia law and rule of law on rights of women in Nigeria. *Global Journal of Politics and Law Research*, 10(6), 1-26. <https://www.eajournals.org/wp-content/uploads/Appraisal-of-the-conflict.pdf>

²⁷ Alawode, O. O. (2024). Socioeconomic Determinants of Domestic Violence Against Women in Nigeria: Empirical Evidence from National Demographic and Health Survey Data. *Science Frontiers*, 5(4), 175-187. <https://doi.org/10.11648/j.sf.20240504.15>

²⁸ Ajayi, A. I., Alex-Ojei, C. A., & Ahinkorah, B. O. (2023). Sexual violence among young women in Nigeria: A cross-sectional study of prevalence, reporting and care-seeking behaviours. *African Health Sciences*, 23(1), 286-300. <https://doi.org/10.4314/ahs.v23i1.31>

face barriers such as lack of sanitary facilities, sexual harassment, and curriculum biases. UNICEF data reveals disparities in Nigerian education completion rates in 2020, with 59 percent of boys completing primary education compared to 51 percent of girls. This gender gap persists at the secondary level, where completion rates decline significantly, 42 percent for boys and only 36 percent for girls²⁹.

In health, women, (especially in rural areas) struggle to access skilled birth attendants, contraceptive services, and postnatal care. The high maternal mortality rate as earlier stated (512-1,747 per 100,000) reflects systemic weaknesses in the healthcare system and gender discrimination in service delivery.

In an increasingly digital economy, access to ICT tools is a critical factor in empowerment. In Nigeria women are less likely than men to use the internet, with a gap of 19% reported in Nigeria³⁰. This exclusion hampers women's participation in e-commerce, online learning, and political activism. The digital gender gap reflects broader patterns of inequality in literacy, mobility, and affordability.

Summary of Key Findings

Among the key findings in this research are the following:

- I. There is a consensus in all the chapters that men are very important in the struggle to achieve gender parity between men and women
- II. That the process of mainstreaming men into the feminist movement should be guided by some clear mitigating protocols or principles so that men will not high-jack feminist bodies, for a or crusades to which they have been enlisted.
- III. Gender-related laws such as the VAPP are unevenly domesticated across Nigerian states.
- IV. Lack of political will is rife across administrations in Nigeria towards the

²⁹ UNICEF. (2024). Nigeria: Education Country Brief. retrieved from <https://www.iicba.unesco.org/en/nigeria#:~:text=According%20to%20UNICEF%20the%20primary,%25%20and%20girls%20and%2036%25>.

³⁰ Singh, S. (2017). Bridging the gender digital divide in developing countries. *Journal of Children and Media*, 11(2), 245-247. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17482798.2017.1305604>

implementation of pro-women laws and regulations

- V. Women's experiences of inequality vary significantly across ethnic, religious, and regional lines.
- VI. Comprehensive gender, consent, and reproductive health education is lacking in public schools.
- VII. Everyday empowerment is driven by local actors, market women, rural teachers, and health workers.

Recommendations for Action

In light of the foregoing analysis, the following policy recommendations are hereby proposed:

- i. **Universalization of Male Allyship (academics, religious leaders, traditional rulers and other organized settings)** - Men should be mobilized directly or indirectly, covertly or overtly, politically or socio-culturally to support their mothers, sisters, wives and daughters in the daunting tasks of gender equality and women empowerment crusade; also men who have distinguished themselves in this regard should be publicly and celebratorily commended and rewarded as mechanism to encourage other men. This should cut across all critical actors and stakeholders in society – lecturers, pastors, imams, chief executive officers, business tycoons, political leaders, etc. for instance, a **Campus Force for Good (CForceForGood)** can be pursued to specifically reward lecturers who display gender-friendliness towards to the female and who promote high sense of parity between the sexes
- ii. **Domestication and Harmonization of Gender-Related Laws:** Federal and state governments must work towards full domestication and harmonization of gender-related laws, particularly the VAPP and CEDAW.
- iii. **Peculiarity of Intersectionality:** Federal and state governments must work to ensure that gender policy addresses intersections of ethnicity, religion, geography, and class. For instance, interventions for Muslim women in

northern Nigeria must differ contextually from those targeting Igbo widows in the southeast – yet the thrust remains the same: the emancipation of the female citizen.

- iv. Intentional Interventions:** Government and donors should provide targeted funding, micro-insurance, and legal aid for women-led cooperatives in agriculture, trade, and services.
- v. Education for Equality:** Government should revise school curricula to include gender equality, consent, and reproductive health education, while partnering with religious and traditional leaders to ensure these reforms are communicated through culturally resonant narratives.
- vi. International Donor Partners:** International donors and state actors should redirect more funding to local and community-based actors—market women, rural teachers, midwives, who may not wear the “feminist” label but practice empowerment daily.
- vii. Women Rising to the Occasion: the Esther-Courage Approach** – first ladies at all strata should be at the front burner to make their husbands male feminists in support of women – all governors and ex-governors' wives, all presidents and ex-presidents' wives, all local government chairmen and ex-chairmen's wives, etc, should work with the same drive of Queen Esther who said she would not allow her people to perish even at the expense of her own life; and she talked her husband into saving millions.
- viii. Sincerity, Forthrightness and Homogeneity in the male feminist Contribution:** the struggle to emancipate women must be fought with organic oneness; there should be no room for polarization, balkanization or any form of divisiveness among the women who champion this movement – personal status should be silenced for the greater feminist objective. In the same vein, women should be wary of self-serving, politically motivated men who want to use the banner of male feminism to score political points for purposes of election, re-election or appointments.

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