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GENDER, RELIGION AND GRASSROOTS DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

DIAGRAMING THE ROLE OF THE FEDERATION OF MUSLIM
WOMEN ASSOCIATIONS (FOMWAN) AND THE CHRISTIAN
ZUMUNTAR MATA

Mukhtar Umar Bunza, 2024

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MUSLIM WOMEN ASSOCIATIONS (FOMWAN) AND
THE CHRISTIAN *ZUMUNTAR MATA***



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Mukhtar Umar Bunza, 2024

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Mukhtar Umar Bunza obtained BA, MA and PhD History from the Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto, and was promoted to the rank of Professor of Social History, in the Department of History of the same University since 2008. Bunza was a Fellow of LEVENTIS Postdoctoral Research, SOAS, University of London, ISITA Fellow, Northwestern University, Evanston, USA, SACRI Fellow for Summer School at Babes Bolyai University, Cluj, Romania, and Fellow, Center of Advanced African Studies, Cluster of Excellence, University of Bayreuth, Germany.

Bunza is the author of *Christian Missions among Muslims: Sokoto Province, Nigeria, 1935-1990*, Africa World Press, NJ, USA, 2007, *Gwandu Emirate: The Domain of Abdullahi Fodiyo*, 2016, co-edited a number of books and proceedings (such as: *The Sokoto Caliphate: A Legacy of Scholarship and Good Governance*, 2006, (ISBN: 978-2076-27-9), *Islam and the Fundamentals of Peaceful Co-existence in Nigeria*, 2014, (ISBN: 978-978-938-154-8), *A History of Yauri Kingdom from 1411 to its Emirate Status*, Gaskiya Corporation, Zaria: 2015, (ISBN: 978-978-53847-2-7), *Nigeria in Search of Stability: The Role of Religion, History and Language*, 2020), and has also published more than eighty journal articles and books chapters nationally and internationally. He served and still serves as External Examiner to Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, University of Maiduguri, Umar Musa Yar'adua University, Katsina, International Islamic University Malaysia, and Abdou Moumouni University Niamey, Niger Republic. Mukhtar has supervised a number of Masters and Doctorate students to successful completion, and has assessed a dozen of Professors and associate professors for confirmation in Nigerian universities and abroad, and also serves as Editor in Chief, Reviewer and assessor and editorial board member of different academic journals in the global academic community.

In administration, Bunza was departmental Examinations officer, Head, Department of History, Deputy Dean and acting Dean Postgraduate School, Chairman UDUS, ICT Management Committee, Dean, Faculty of Arts and Islamic Studies, Member University Council, representing the Senate, and Member, Postdoctoral Screening/Selection Committee at the Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto, and was two times Commissioner for Higher Education, Kebbi State, Nigeria.

Abstract

This study revisits and explores the contributions of women religious organizations in Nigeria, namely, The Federation of Muslim Women Organizations in Nigeria, (FOMWAN) and *Zumuntar-Mata* (Church Women League) of Christian Churches, in comparative and proportional evaluations. The elemental findings reveal that these religious organizations under study are well structured and methodical associations with the primary aim of addressing some major challenges faced by women in Nigeria, and had taken necessary steps to ameliorate them. Initiatives such as Economic empowerment, educational, religious and political enlightenments, and provision of health services are their major contributions to women and the society at large. One interesting manifestation of toleration among the two differing religious groups was that they cooperate and, in some cases, jointly execute some essential and enablement programs to both Muslim and Christian women. Their slogans 'the act of kindness knows no boundary' is always at fore. In the same vein, in order to widen the horizon of their activities and responsibilities they partner favorably and mutually with development partners governmental and non-governmental within Nigeria and beyond with a bid to advance and extend their interventions to as many women as possible in the cities as well as in the rural areas. Through their various programs and initiatives for self-help, therefore, the organizations significantly contributed towards women enfranchisement and impacted in societal development positively.

Keywords: Gender, Religion, Development, FOMWAN, *Zumuntar-Mata*, Nigeria.

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GENDER, RELIGION AND GRASSROOTS DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

DIAGRAMING THE ROLE OF THE FEDERATION OF MUSLIM WOMEN ASSOCIATIONS (FOMWAN) AND THE CHRISTIAN *ZUMUNTAR MATA* ¹

Mukhtar Umar Bunza

1 History, Gender and Society: An Overview

The African societies are largely against what is widely believed on their perception about women, and have placed women in higher esteem. 'Woman' and 'mother' are associated with prospect and success in all dealings emanating from the family to the communal level. The similitude of this is accorded to Earth, due to its importance and undeniable benefits to humanity, referred to as 'Mother Earth'. This is not to repudiate some specific roles and functions in society exclusively for men, the same as there are others specifically for women. To have a daughter worthy of being married in the African tradition is as good as having male children who work for you on the farm and relieve the father-in-law of mostly domestic labor, in the name of *Aikin Sarakuta* in Hausa, 'In-Law-Ship Services'. The betrothed will, together with his friends, colleagues and agemates continue to render services to the bride's father for years before the marriage contract is solemnized. Throughout this period, courage and bravery are keenly demonstrated to convince

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the bride of the strength and reliability of the husband-to-be. Unlike in some societies and civilizations, daughters are paid the dowry by the groom, in cash or in kind, and not the other way round. The Greek, Roman, Hindu, and other civilizations' stance on the status of women in contrast with the African suffices a correlation at this moment.

Collette Suda also noted in her study about the centrality of women in Africa both as 'life-giver and nurturer', and 'connecting rod between families through marriage' (1996). It was through women that entirely unrelated families get connected and become blood relations. She emphasizes that:

The female influence on the moral character of African society is arguably one of the most enduring marks in the history of humanity. Part of the reason for this is women's traditional caregiving roles, which put them in a unique and strategic position not only to produce and sustain life but also to help instill socio-religious values and morals in the family and society as a basis for establishing good and appropriate relationships between members. Through various structures, African women have devoted their lives and time to promoting the welfare of all. Culturally, women are socialized to be relationship-oriented and this process prepares them to be sensitive about the quality of relationships in marriages, families and communities. As agents of religion and moral education, women's role in promoting socio-religious and political moral order in Africa is more critical now than it has ever been in the past because some African states and institutions have lost their morality and are either in the process of being torn apart by conflict and structured inequality or are already deeply polarized along gender, ethnic, racial, religious and ideological lines [Suda 1996, emphasis added].

In spite of all odds, women in African traditions and culture continue to retain and uphold constructive roles in society, within religious and mundane spheres of the community. In Egyptian civilization, women played a very prominent role in almost all facets of the society, especially in social, political and religious spheres. There were the reigns of female pharaohs in Egypt (Lesko 1991). In the tradition of ancient Ghana, women have served as 'queen mothers', queens, and in some areas were political chiefs holding offices in towns and villages, as they have served in high positions in the economic life of their societies and engaged in farming or trade (Abbas 2017). The same encouraging accounts could be found in most African societies where women have played a complementary role as partners with men in the societies and each has had a particular responsibility within the confines of the home and the wider community.

Women have been at the core of all the three religions dominant in this part of the globe i.e., African Traditional Religion (ATR), Islam and Christianity. In the African Traditional Religion, women dominate most of the rights and rituals associated with the cult. In the dancing, the liturgy, incantations and intercession with the spirits, women occupy an illustrious position in the scene. It is unimaginable for a *Bori* performance to be without women. Indeed, most of the *Bori* cults and spirits are associated with and tamed by women. In Islam, the carriers of the religious symbols and emblems through the *hijab* are mostly women. They are described as 'core in Islamic religious rites'. The scenario is the same in their practice and commitment to Christianity in most African societies and in particular, Nigeria. Thus, women among Muslims and Christian adherents

accomplish their responsibilities in service to humanity by forming associations and organizations with the sole aim of addressing and responding primarily to gender particularities, uniqueness and special needs of women in society mainly at the grassroots.

The African society appreciates the role and function of each, male or female, based on his or her biological and physical potential. In essence, it is that division of functions and roles that were in most cases seen and viewed by mostly recluses as discrimination. However, in the historical transition and evolution of the Northern Nigerian societies from the Pre-Caliphate, Colonial and Post-Colonial a lot of the changes, some negative in nature, were recorded with regards to the position of women in the society.

In the pre-colonial tradition of most Nigerian peoples, the place and position of women as wives and mothers had gone beyond the domestic and private, but also public. In the history of Central Bilad al-Sudan's Kingship and political development, women's roles in governance and administration, as well as public conduct, were appreciably documented. In the one thousand years' old Seyfawa dynasty of Borno, one of the longest-lasting states in the region had the specific position for the Mai's elder sister, known as '*Magaram*', and Mai's Mother '*Magira*' as well as the Mai's First Wife, '*Gumsu*' in the government and public administration of the empire (Smith 1983).² The influence of the Mai's mother proved so remarkable that it can even enforce the Shari'ah law and verdict against the high-level officers found guilty. In the 15th century, the mother of Mai Biri imprisoned her son, the Sultan of Borno for failure to adhere to the tenets of the Shari'ah. She received a complaint about her son (who was reigning as the King of Borno) for exceeding the limit of the law in executing a thief, instead of amputation (Hogben and Kirk-Greene 1966).

In the history of Hausaland and the region's political landscape, the role and centrality of women were indubitable. In the formation of fourteen Hausa States, i.e., the Seven Hausa Bakwai and Seven Banza Bakwai (the seven legitimate and seven illegitimate Hausa States), the importance of Queen Daurama of Daura, and her acceptance to marry Bayajida after his heroic killing of the serpent in her territory, was not only a demonstration of the power of a Hausa woman in the political sphere but her influence on public opinion as her decision and resolution were incontestable in the Kingdom. The same legend of greatness and power has been celebrated in the name of Queen Amina of Zazzau. Queen Amina was not only respected as the political and administrative head of the Kingdom of Zazzau but the unmatched warrior of her time, whose effort in the defense and expansion of the border of her kingdom was a tremendous legend (Awe 1992). In the account of a 19th-century widow in Hausaland, Baba of Karo, as noted by Mary Smith (1981), some level of the self-determination and freedom of women in Hausa society was fairly reasonable at the time.

In the Gobir Kingdom, for instance, the office of '*Inna Gobir*' (literally means Mother of the Gobir Kingdom) was, and still is, not only respected in the administration of the kingdom but feared as

² 'Mai' is the title of the absolute ruler in the traditional Borno administration from the 10th century to the 19th century. As a result of the Danfodiyo Reform of the century, and political pressure against Borno, the title has changed to Sheikh or Shehu of Borno with the intervention of el-Amin el-Kanemi in the political affairs of Borno in the 19th century. However, the title, Mai, is still in use for the provincial rulers of the area.

her prowess to invoke supernatural prowess was unsurpassed. Therefore, her powers in the day-to-day administration of the kingdom and determination of who succeeds to the throne cannot be debated. In the opinion of Bawa (2019):

The *Inna* [of Gobir] was also involved in the collection of taxes and had a number of women officials who helped her in collecting taxes from various occupational groups. *Inna Yar Bukuma* was very famous in the Kingdom and she was recorded to have served as the sole regent of Sabon Birnin Gobir [1814-1878]. During her reign *Inna Yarbukuma* was said to have not only launched an attack on Zamfara but also demanded for the ruler's [royal] sword.

That was the depiction of the status of royal women and those inherently at the helm of affairs and general esteem, admiration and appreciation at various levels in the social and cultural milieu among the Northern Nigerian societies for centuries.

In late 18th-century West Africa, the reformers led by Shehu Danfodiyo made the *Tajdeed* reform movement focus primarily on issues regarding gender and women due to their imperative roles in the society. Shehu Danfodiyo (leader and founder of the Sokoto Caliphate in 1817) therefore, advocated for more freedom for women, in terms of expression within the family and in public. Most importantly, access to education and condemnation of some evil cultural practices that impinged on the status and rights of the womenfolk. Indeed, the gender awareness and sensitivity of the Sokoto *Tajdeed* Movement attracted the criticism and opposition of the venal *Ulama'a* who accused Shehu of promiscuity by allowing women to attend and actively participate in the session and proceedings of teachings and orientation programs.

It was in recognition of this fundamental fact that as early as 1786 women were allowed to participate in teaching and enlightenment campaigns embarked upon by the Shehu and his supporters. It was indeed the first challenge that the Shehu received in the course of his Da'awa, propagation and enlightenment missions. Mustafa Goni, one of the renowned Borno scholars of the eighteenth century, wrote a petition criticizing the Shehu for allowing women to attend religious sessions on the same ground as men to receive lectures and learn the religion. The petition by Goni in verse reads:

To you, from us, blessed greetings which caused those who meet us to smell musk and perfume. O son of Fudi [referring to Shehu Danfodiyo], rise and warn the ignorant, that perchance they may understand religion and things of this world. *Forbid women to visit your preaching, for mixing of men and women is sufficient a disgrace.* Do not do what contributes towards disgrace, for God has not ordered vice, which would cause us harm. The verses of al-Mustafa thirteen complete them, in the year twelve hundred, plus a number, which will suffice us [See Abdullahi Fodiyo, *Tazyin al-Waraqat*, 1786, ed. and trans. Hiskett, 1963].

Under the instructions of the Shehu his brother, Abdullahi Fodiyo, responded in the most eloquent and theoretical tune to the letter of Mustafa Goni. Abdullahi in his reaction, denied any acts of committing sins by the Shehu and his *Jama'ah* in the course of teaching their male and female

followers.³ However, he accepted going by a lesser evil of allowing women to come out to learn instead of leaving them in ignorance, which is inseparable from unbelief. Abdullahi's response as presented in his *Tazyin al-Waraqat*, viz:

O you who have come to guide us aright, we have heard what you have said. Listen to what we say. You gave advice to the best of your ability, but would you have freed us from blame! And you spoke- Glory be to God, this was calumny! Indeed devils, if they come to our gathering, spread evil speech, exceeding all bounds! We have not had promiscuous intercourse with women, how could that be... *But I do not agree that their [women] being left to go free in ignorance is good, for the committing of the lesser evil has been made obligatory. Ignorance pardons, even though it was disobedience. We found the people of this country drowning in ignorance; shall we prevent them [women] from understanding? ...* Their number is ten. And the date is twelve hundred and one [i.e. 1201AH /1786 AD] [Abdullahi Fodiyo, 1786, ed. and trans. Hiskett, 1963].

In order to actualize and justify the egalitarian reforms, which the Shehu and his companions envisaged for the society, the womenfolk must be fully educated and mobilized to be more responsible members of the civilization. In addressing this crucial issue of women's education and other rights and privileges the Shehu authored a book entitled: *Irshad al-Ikhwān ila ahkam jawaz khuruj al-Niswan*, (*Guidance for The Brothers on The Legality of Women Out-Door Activities*), which was widely disseminated all over the region of West Africa with a view to clear the dust on these vital but misunderstood issues. He says in the preliminary part of the treatise, "Let my brothers know that I am prompted to write this book by the split of the people of *Bilad al-Sudan* as to whether women can go out or not" (n.d.). On this matter the people were divided into two, each of them was on the extreme side. One side, which was prone to negligence believed that women should have the absolute right to go out whether or not there is a legal necessity. Though this belief was absolutely erroneous, it was nevertheless widely held in *Bilad al-Sudan*. The other side was also guilty of extremism, for it places an absolute ban on women going out whether or not there is a legal necessity. This practice was wrong. Members of this class were in the community of *Bilad al-Sudan*. Shehu further stressed that:

I am writing this book in order to counsel members of these two classes so as to explain to them the Islamic golden mean- a position between the two extremes. That 'It is lawful for women to go out whether where there is a legal need such as attending to either worldly needs such as economic activity [which with she obtains a livelihood], and the like, or religious necessity like going out for acquisition of knowledge if her husband cannot teach her; *for in matters of religion everyone [male*

³ The letter of Sheikh Mustafa Goni (a renowned Borno scholar of the late 18th century) containing his query against the attitude of Shehu towards women learning and participation in educational activities hand in hand with men is contained in *Tazyin al-Waraqat* of Abdullahi Fodiyo cited above.

or female] is responsible for what he or she does' [See details in Bunza 2016, emphasis added].⁴

Balogun (1990) observes that Shehu condemned those who shut their womenfolk in without affording them the opportunity to learn extensively (the affairs of their religion and the world). The personal example of Shehu Danfodiyo's disposition to women's education, especially amongst his wives and daughters, was a very encouraging and glaring commitment in addressing the issue. In the same vein, Shehu was averse to exploiting women's labor on the farm and at home for domestic purposes, where men were aloof. In the opinion of Danfodiyo, men rather than women should bear the brunt of hard labor in order to cater to the family. Woman's work is only supportive and complementary except where the male counterpart was not available to serve. He declared in his *Nur al- Albab (Elegance of Wisdoms)* and *Wathiqat al-Ikhwan (Treatise to the Brethren)*, that the domestic services rendered by women in terms of cooking, provision of firewood, grinding, fetching of water, and labor on the farm were not compulsory upon them by the Shari'ah, but voluntary. Shehu tirelessly fought for the economic and social emancipation of women, by ensuring their rights to ownership of property, inheritance of estates of deceased relatives and husbands and opening of educational opportunities (Kaura 1990).

In response to the seriousness of the problem, the Shehu adopted some radical measures to match the gravity of the problem. He started by describing the situation of women in the pre-jihad societies in the following:

One of the habits of men, scholars of the Sudan is that they leave their wives, daughters and slaves neglected like a grazing livestock without teaching them what Allah made obligatory on them of their articles of Faith, regulations governing their purity, fasting and their like, i.e. buying and selling. They consider them like a container, which they use; when it breaks, they throw it in dung and rubbish places. It is the duty of every Muslim to start with himself and guards it by performing his duty properly also, to abandon unlawful things, thereafter, he should teach his family and relations [Kani 1985].

Finally, Shehu unreservedly called upon the womenfolk in the strongest terms saying:

O, Muslim women do not listen to the speech of the misguided [group] who misguide others and deceive you by making you to obey your husbands without ordering you to obey Allah and His messenger [peace be upon him]. They claim that the happiness of the women is in obeying their husbands. They do this in order to get their selfish desire out of you. They also ask you to do what Allah and His prophet did not stipulate at all, like cooking and washing of cloth and the like. At the same time, they do not ask you about what Allah and His messenger has ordained to you of obedience. Yes, it is incumbent upon the wife to obey her husband according to the consensus of scholar-jurist in secret and in open even when the husband is very poor or a slave. It is not

⁴ See details in Shehu's *Irshad al-Ikhwan* (n.d, p. 1) for the text of the statements and his appeals for understanding the case of women in the Societies of West Africa.

permissible for her to disobey him at all, according to the consensus unless he orders her to disobey Allah, in which case she should not obey him [Kani 1985].

The relevance of this statement was multifarious in the traditional West African societies. Primarily, it intends to show the women that they have the right to revolt or resist any law or tradition or cultural practices that denied them of their right as enshrined canonically in the Shari'ah (code of law based in the Qur'an and prophetic traditions). It also disabused the minds of the Muslim women, awakening their consciousness as equal partners to men and not servants, or disposable objects of amusement. Shehu also condemned the act of involving women in hard labor as an added burden on them apart from that of motherhood and matrimonial responsibilities (Ogunbiyi 1969).

As a result of that struggle and reform, women in the Muslim societies of West Africa were emancipated and appropriately placed as equal partners in the progress of the realization of the ideals upon which the Sokoto Caliphate was founded. That was contrary to Kari Bergstrom's (2002) assertion that women were, since the Danfodiyo reform, less heard in public affairs. Her position was short of the record of the existing situation on the ground and possibly relied on unsubstantiated claims. One would be left in no doubt of this fact if one views the mobilization of a women's program chaired by Nana Asma'u, the daughter of the Shehu (1864) under the *Yantaru* System.⁵ From the scholarly comments and contributions by Nana Asma'u and other women, the Caliphate did not only create opportunities for women in juristic and spiritual spheres but also in the social and economic as well as administrative ethos such as military expeditions and other related issues in the governance of the society.

The British colonial period set in at the beginning of the 20th century. The Sokoto Caliphate was conquered by the British forces on 15 March 1903, with the occupation of Sokoto, forcing the Caliph to flee. Thereafter, the entire societal fabric in all ramifications started to change in the way and manner that favored the British colonial administration. In the opinion of Hauwa Mahdi (2009), the colonial government with the connivance of the traditional rulers, against the position of scholars, institutionalized the denial of education to women, the same opportunity which was secured for them by Danfodiyo. Further, the commoditization and materialization of society by the new capitalist system imported by the British valued only labor and money to settle colonial imposed taxes. Thus, consequently debasing any individual with no labor to render and without money to pay for taxes. The second-class citizen position of women was further aggravated by these colonial policies (Bunza and Kware 2015). In spite of changes in time and circumstances, women remain an important factor to reckon with in religious as well as temporal dispensations in the society.

⁵ That was an association of the womenfolk, founded by Nana Asma'u, for the advancement of the course of the Sokoto Jihad, principally targeting the women, teaching, re-orientating and enlightening them. For the history and activities of the Yantaru see, Omar S., *Yantarun Nana Asma'u Danfodiyo: Tarihinsu da Taskace Wakokinsu*, ZEETMA Press, 2017b.

2 The Indispensability for Women Organizations in Religions: An Evaluation

The fact that women and children are the most vulnerable segment of society, and the indispensability of the gender question and particularities as well as the historical role of women in the establishment, the spread and development of Christianity and Islam has inspired many women today, and now fulfills that legendary role. Kathleen McGarvey affirms:

Muslim women claim that feminist activism existed since the religion came into existence [the prophetic period of Muhammad SAW]. So too, Christian women recall those who struggled and overcame what they perceived as injustice to women in church and in society since the early days of Christianity. However, feminist discourse is a phenomenon of the last two centuries while feminist theology per se has been developing only since the 1960s. The roots of the term Christian feminist theology are uncertain. However, *it is largely a result of women's increased access to theological education just as Islamic feminism resulted from women's increased access to the study of their religious sources, reducing in both cases the authority of religious leaders as the sole interpreters of their religious truth* [McGarvey 2009, emphasis added].

The position of the Virgin Mary (mother of Jesus Christ), Mary Magdalene, (who was central in the resurrection of Jesus on the third day of his crucifixion) has been indelible in both theological and missionary spheres. Throughout the missionary endeavors in Nigeria, women served and continue to serve as a very vital and crucial tool of the exhibition of the Lord's kindness through serving as choruses, nurses, doctors, and mistresses at orphanages and rehabilitation centers, etc. The history of Christianity in northern Nigeria will remain deficient without reference to active sisters who had forsaken their worldly pleasures and chose to be with the poor, indigent and sick in the rural and remote areas. The names of such devoted sisters like Miss Knowles (popularly known as *Maijinya*, i.e. nurse, in Hausa), Mrs. Playfair and a good number of them from Canada, Britain and the USA who adopted traditional names, Ladi, Ige, Kande and a host of others, will always be remembered in the history of Christianity in northern Nigeria (see Bunza 2007).

Similarly in Islam, women have been reliable pillars and sources of confidence and succor since the time of the Prophet. It was the wife of the Prophet, Khadija, who first consoled him and encouraged him when he expressed fear and trepidation at the point of the initial revelation he received. She accepted him and financed his missions and trips with her wealth. The Prophet received the same encouragement from Aisha, his wife, who was a repository of wisdom and learning; and his daughter Fatima who was crowned as the leader of the women in heaven.

In the Nigerian case, the role of women in Islamization and educating the society, though still not receiving adequate attention by researchers, however, Babbly Mack and Jean Boyd, provide special coverage on the activities of Nana Asma'u (1793-1864) and her role in the 19th-century reform movement led by her father Shehu Danfodiyo (Boyd and Mack, 1997). In the same vein, Sa'adiya Omar provided a catalog of such committed and educated women who illuminated the towers of Islamic faith since the 17th century as well as women scholars, *Modibbe* (plural of women scholars in Fulfulde language), and institutions that they have established and maintained

to the present (Omar 2017a and 2017b). Under this paradigm, therefore, women's religious activism is not something new or out of place as far as the history and development of religions in the northern Nigerian region are concerned. The view has been succinctly presented by Bergstrom in the following:

Women have new forces to contend with, such as the global economy and new religious movements, on top of the historical legacies they have inherited. More layers are being added to the complexities of the positioning of Hausa women in their societies and world. They will continue to work with the pieces of their heritage and their visions for tomorrow to create their own modernity in Hausaland. From these legacies of colonialism and Islam, one finds plural and diverse Hausa women negotiating their identities and place in society [Bergstrom 2002].

The economic and financial situations, peace and security, displacement and settlements and the general societal problems such as health and disease, food and diets, women are the major stakeholders in almost every aspect of human society. Therefore, organizations for self-help and services to humanity through religious organizations go a long way in actualizing the humanitarian tendencies and humane characters and mood of the womenfolk. In most cases, more men than women die as a result of wars, road accidents, and other disasters, leaving behind widows and orphans to bear the consequences of the situation. As noted by Ayesha Imam,

The new economic policies in recent decades [in most African states] have resulted in untold hardship on most households. *Government withdrawal of subsidies in electricity, education and health sectors adversely affected the society. In response to such situations, women religious actors put forward services in the religious arena.* Such inequalities are largely a product of neoliberal economic policies, which prioritize debt repayment, cut social expenditure, and focus on export-oriented production and privatization. In particular, the destruction of welfare states that has come with neoliberalism has provided fertile ground for the growth in the power of conservative religious actors. *Where states have ceased to provide [adequate] services such as healthcare and schooling, religious entrepreneurs have stepped into the breach, women and children are most vulnerable in these circumstances* [Imam 2016, emphasis added].

Consequently, women view the self-help they render as selfless service to themselves as women, to God, and then to other sections of the society. Para-Mallam sums up the requisite for women's religious organizations to work for God and themselves in her statement:

Religious groups are the most popular and legitimized way for women to organize for development. In both rural and urban areas women make use of religious associations to meet practical, psychological, and spiritual development needs. Membership of such groups supports women in their own individual efforts towards poverty alleviation and helps them to develop coping mechanisms to weather desperate conditions [2006: 409, emphasis added].

Further, in spite of the undeniable and important roles of women in both Islam and Christianity, the extent of male control and domination seeks to sideline, marginalize and muffle the voices of women in the fold of the religion. To change the scenario requires persistent and constant struggle from within the religious fold. The scriptural manipulation and misinterpretation can only be corrected if women emerge as active members who can issue verdicts and statements of authority within their religion. That can only be achieved through action and not subordination. McGarvey supports this view that from the Christian perspective, Christian feminists undertake the awareness that women's voices were absent through the centuries of tradition and their recognition that women were often envisaged theologically as naturally inferior and a source of sin and pollution or as paragons of virtue, which led them to a critique of tradition and to attempt a theological reformulation of some doctrinal themes. Few themes have not been touched on by Christian feminist scholars (McGarvey 2009: 78–79).

So, women must demonstrate their competence and performance in theory and practice in order to reposition themselves in their appropriate status. Thus, the indispensability of women's organization and movement in religion. Niamh Reilly observes in the same light thus:

Religion provides a useful vehicle through which the losers can express their alienation and antagonism vis-à-vis the ruling elites, who in ex-colonial states are condemned not for being exploiters but for being Westernized. Alternatively, religion can be the vehicle adopted by an emerging class that, having gained economic status, is making a bid for political power. In these processes, fundamentalist leaders claim the monopoly on the authentic and definitive version of collective identity and set about imposing this vision on the wider community, often extending beyond the immediate constituency they claim to represent [2009: 9].

In the opinion of this work, the re-emergence of women-gender activism and the bid for empowerment in the religious fold is a part of the agitation to recoup the lost position and status of the womenfolk in the society. The *Zumuntar Mata* (Church Women Fellowship) and FOMWAN (Federation of Muslim Women Organizations in Nigeria) are contextualized and studied in this paper in the above frame and parameter.

3 Background to the Establishment of FOMWAN and *Zumuntar Mata*

The Federation of Muslim Women Association in Nigeria (FOMWAN) was established in 1985 in Minna, Niger State, Nigeria. Though the Association was a recent creation, its legacy follows the one left behind by Nana Asma'u (1793-1864) and her associates in the mobilization, sensitization and emancipation of women from the yokes and shackles of poverty, uncanonical cultural practices and traditions as well as disease and ignorance. "For the leadership of FOMWAN, their authority and inspiration are connected to the 19th-century women's movement under the leadership of Nana Asmau, Maryam and Fatima, her helpers and partners in the *Yantaru* movement."⁶

⁶ Interview with Professor (Mrs) Sa'adiya Omar, the 3rd National Ameerah of FOMWAN, 1993-1997, age 65 years, at her office Center for Hausa Studies, Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto, Nigeria, on Thursday, 12 September 2019.

According to Professor Sa'adiya Omar (one of the founding members, and past President General-Ameerah of the Association), the formation of FOMWAN was immediately followed by the enactment of a constitution to guide the conduct of its members and provide a general frame of action to achieve its set objectives. The first constitution was passed into law as an enforcing and binding document on 12 October 1985. The document has been revised and amended from time to time based on emerging needs and circumstances. In their constitution, the fundamental objectives of the Association are stated in the following:

Recognizing its position as the Federation of Muslim Women's Association in Nigeria, the Organization affirms its loyalty to the Islamic Faith and its ardent commitment to the progress of Islam and commends to its members as worthy Muslims upholding the basic principles of Islam, namely the Unity of God and the brotherhood of mankind as taught by the prophet Muhammad [peace & blessing of Allah be upon him] [FOMWAN 2007a: 8].

The vision and mission of the Association are also expressed as:

Vision:

FOMWAN envisions a world where women are totally empowered to be role models in making [sic] positive impact in the society.

Mission:

to propagate the religion of Islam in Nigeria through Da'awah [propagation], and establishment of educational institutions and other outreach activities. To improve the socio-economic status of the populace especially women, youth and children through training, provision of qualitative education, health and humanitarian services, micro-enterprise scheme and functional advocacy' [FOMWAN 2007a: 9].

In the above constitutional objectives and the stated vision and mission of FOMWAN, it is visibly clear that the Association adheres to the teaching of Islam, that the Association believes that Islam has given women what they require as equal in the sight of God, and that rights will be regained to women through propagation and advocacy. Fundamentally, the vision is more gender-biased, as regardless of religion or ethnicity or geographical entity, the main apparition and concept of FOMWAN is to create or assist in creating 'a world where women are totally empowered'. Gender sensitivity and consciousness are undeniably at the fore. Further, empowerment programs, health and education for women and children are the set mechanism for the actualization of its vision and aspiration.

Researchers confirmed the commitment of FOMWAN to achieving the said objectives, according to Sulaiman,

the Federation of Muslim Women's Associations in Nigeria [FOMWAN] is a faith-based umbrella organization that links Islamic women's groups in Nigeria and promotes Muslim women's viewpoints on the national stage. The Association has

been working to spread Islam through dawah and to advocate for Muslim girls' education—and thus, to improve the status of Muslim women and children, to advance Nigerian development projects, and to promote the “positive social behavior of Muslim girls”. Implementation of girls' education as a means to eradicating poverty, the association engages in programs to increase the retention rate of girls in school, continue education for married women, and integrate literacy and vocational training into established Qur'anic schools [Sulaiman 2015: 6].

Most of the members of FOMWAN are Muslim women elites: doctors, lawyers, academics, politicians, and wealthy merchants. They serve as the bridge between the conservative Muslim scholars who frown at and, in some instances, prohibit women from pursuing western education, by setting themselves as examples of a blend of Islamic moral ethos and western or modern training. The organogram of the Association is a pyramid from the Board of Trustees, National Executive Council, National Committees, Zonal Coordinators, State Executive Council and finally Local government Executive Council. The structure and checks and balances, as well as the democratic apparatus in the Association, make its survival virtually crises free in spite of differences in class, ethnic, linguistic and regional affiliation among its diverse membership.

On the other hand, the *Zumuntar Mata* [Women Christian Fellowship] as highlighted earlier, unlike the FOMWAN, is fragmented under varied church denominations. As such, it does not have a single historical evolution, structure as well as common aims and objectives. However, the two fundamental cornerstones and identifiers help in creating a functional synergy and aim to serve Christ through doing good to humanity, especially among women. Each church denomination has a separate women's wing, known as *Zumuntar Mata* in Hausa language or 'Women Fellowship', with different periods of establishment, the structure of leadership and without a unified single national governing body. The possible earliest branch of the women's movement in the churches of Nigeria is the Women Fellowship Union, WFU, which belongs to the Church of Christ in Nigeria, COCIN.

According to Para-Mallam,⁷

WFU is a faith-based and indigenous Church organization set up in 1942 to cater for the spiritual and developmental needs of women and girl-children within the framework of the church mission and administrative structure. It functions as a unit under COCIN's Department for Evangelism and Church Growth. Its objectives, programmes, and projects address both strategic and practical gender interests [Para-Mallam, 2006].

WFU's goals and objectives aim 'to produce a holistic woman' who will be ready and equipped to meet the needs and challenges of her present-day community. It has three wide-ranging objectives:

⁷ Oluwafunmi Josephine Para-Mallam is a Professor of Gender and Development in Nigeria, and currently Director of Studies at the National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies (NIPSS).

- To inculcate in women and girls a spiritual and biblical understanding of God's valuation and requirement of women.
- To train wives to partner with husbands to build wholesome and godly families.
- To enhance the human resource potential of women and girls towards socioeconomic development for individual, family and societal well-being (Para-Mallam 2006: 417).

According to Nehemia Galadima, Borno State COCIN Woman Leader, the Church of Christ in Nigeria (COCIN) has a four-part structure. At the top is Athens General Church Council GCC; Regional Church Council RCC; Local Church Council LCC; and Church Council, CC. The COCIN Women Fellowship is structured along those lines. It exists at four levels. Decisions are made at the GCC level and passed down the chain to the CC level. In terms of objectives, the fellowship exists by carrying the Gospel to the list; providing assistance to needy members with wrappers, soap, detergent, slippers and money; and helping members to know God through Bible studies. "Every week we hold Women's Week of prayer during which they are taught the word of God".⁸

Similarly, in the Evangelical Church of West Africa, ECWA *Zumuntar Mata* followed with almost the same aims and objectives, but under a different church denomination and umbrella. ECWA belonged to the defunct Sudan Interior Mission, SIM, and protestant missionary organizations mainly from Canada, the United States, and the United Kingdom, with the sole aim of converting the Muslims of northern Nigeria to Christianity (Bunza 2007).

The women's wing of the church known as *Zumuntar Mata* came into being around the 1950s and operated under the guidance of the church. In the opinion of Mrs. Ether Andrew, ECWA Women Fellowship exists at four levels. The highest leadership is at the National or General Church Council Level (GCC), followed by the District Church Council (DCC), the Local Church Council (LCC) level; and the Local Church Board (LCB) Women Fellowship. According to Esther Andrew,

The objectives of the fellowship are to 'build women spiritually' through Bible Studies; annual women's week of prayers is observed in each LCB, LCC and DCC conferences are also organized to teach and encourage their members. They also teach them the responsibilities of a Christian woman; provide assistance to the needy ones among them; and provide financial, material and spiritual support to the sick and those who lost their loved ones.⁹

McGarvey adds that,

When ECWA was established in 1956 the Women's Fellowship officially changed its name to ECWA Women's Fellowship established by a SIM missionary, Miss E. Varley. Although ECWA is much more stringent than other churches, the aims of the

⁸ Interview with Mrs. Salome Nehemiah Galadima, Church of Christ in Nigeria, Borno State, Northeastern Nigeria, on Saturday, 14 September 2019 at Maiduguri.

⁹ Mrs. Ether Andrew, Woman Leader, ECWA, Borno State Chapter, Maiduguri, was interviewed in Maiduguri on 13 Friday September 2019. The same information was confirmed by Mrs. Sara Jibrin, ECWA woman leader, Kebbi State, Northwest Nigeria on 17 July 2019 at Birnin Kebbi.

fellowship are quite similar. A married woman is only considered acceptable in the Church if she has an ECWA Woman Fellowship [WF] Membership Card. Members are expected to be buried in their ECWA WF uniform. A book written in the USA in 1977 by a male author is used as the textbook for all weekly meetings. The format for conducting meetings is very clearly outlined in the ECWA WF Guide. Similar to other Women's Fellowships, conferences, workshops and seminars are held from time to time at all church levels. The pastor's wife is considered an advisor and must attend all weekly programmes [McGarvey 2009: 223-224].

The Catholic Women Fellowship, as well as Baptists, Anglicans and other church denominations all as a matter of necessity in fulfilling the need of the women members of the church established the 'Women Fellowship', known as *Zumuntar Mata* in the northern parts of Nigeria at different times and terms of reference. However, the aims and objectives are generally the same. In their findings and appreciation of the *Zumuntar Mata*, Badejo et. al. sums up the powers, as well as the inter-denominational spiritual and mundane functions of the Associations thus:

Zumunta Mata has great influence in the economic, social, political and religious lives of northern Christian women, with ecumenical impact on the Church, breaching the barriers between Christian denominations and enriching the litany through inclusion of traditional music and instruments. These groups constitute a bona fide theological community with significant contributions to evangelism, promoting Christian living and inspiring religious vocation. In terms of agency, *Zumunta Mata* has redefined women's roles and given them a strong voice and platform within society. *Zumunta Mata* is 'very powerful', able to exert considerable influence to gain security for women, widows and girls through effective engagement with traditional, administrative and political authorities. *Zumunta Mata* has successfully reduced the impact of many negative cultural practices. Men acknowledge the power of this organization and engage with it in various ways, some leveraging the influence of the organization to mediate with women as a group in society or in individual marital disputes [Badejo et. al. 2017, emphasis added].

In spite of its division into different church affiliates, the *Zumuntar Mata* provides a unifying shade under its 'Mother Church' through which women vent their feelings and address or respond to specific issues and problems that are central to women either in the church or in the wider societal fabric. Today, to be a Christian woman from the north is to be a member of the *Zumunta Mata*, and many observers believe that the future of Christianity in many parts of the north depends on them. This is especially because the movement has become a focus of great ecumenical attraction for many women who now have meetings and share one another's experiences, songs, and so on.

Undoubtedly, not only have they contributed immensely to the enrichment of the liturgy in the Christian churches today, but they are most probably, we dare to say, the energizing force behind the priestly and religious vocation boom in the Catholic Church in the North [Enwerem 1995: 56, emphasis added].

Thus, both FOMWAN and *Zumuntar Mata* have developed specialized and focused programs and initiatives for women's upliftment and empowerment spiritually and materially in Nigeria.

4 Empowerment and Development Initiatives of the *Zumuntar Mata* and FOMWAN

4.1 Education and Enlightenment

Education is the most important factor in societal transformation and development. It was under this premise that religious women organizations under review have dedicated a lot of energy and resources to be invested in education. It is with education, first and foremost, that orientation and reorientation of society could be made possible. Therefore, both FOMWAN and *Zumuntar Mata* pursued this factor with vigor and enthusiasm through the establishment of schools and enlightenment classes.

As enshrined in their constitution the *Zumuntar Mata* and the FOMWAN articulated and synthesized a clear roadmap of operations and function. In both groups, education and health services, followed by economic empowerment in terms of training in trade and craft are the major initiatives embarked upon for the welfare of their members.

FOMWAN, for instance, in order to achieve its educational objectives established schools at various levels from nursery, kindergarten, primary and secondary schools.

As of 2019, the Association had records located in over one hundred [100] schools in the 36 states of the Nigerian federation. The schools were registered at different phases by the government for authority to conduct the National and Regional West African Examinations and to prepare their students for admission into universities and colleges in Nigeria. Similarly, it opened opportunities to dropouts among the married women or aged girls who had no opportunity of an education. In order to provide harmony between western and Islamic education, FOMWAN established *Islamiyya* Classes for all, especially in the evening, working women whose careers could not allow the attendance of classes during working hours [FOMWAN Education Demand 2007b: 1-9].

The major enlightenment activities of FOMWAN as interestingly appraised by Olarinmoye are,

principally pursued through peaceful persuasion propagated through coordination of activities of existing Muslim women organizations, encouraging such organizations where such does not exist, developing a national curriculum/guideline for women and children of Islamic education, organizing congresses through suitable literature for Muslim women and children and maintaining contact with the state and federal governments and press as spokespersons for Muslim women in all matters affecting them and most importantly through protection and promotion of the rights of Muslim women and children [Olarimonye 2013: 62].

On the other hand, the *Zumuntar Mata* has issued under 'Church Education Units' of their denomination, classes made specifically for women. This is with the sole aim of educating the less educated as well as teaching hygiene, arithmetic, reading and writing to rural women, with which to be able to understand the Bible, home management, knitting, soap and detergent making, etc. An example of such rural operations is the Catherine F. Sullivan Center of the Catholic Church at

Malumfashi in Katsina State, Nigeria. Some women received certificates after graduation to further their education in higher educational institutions.¹⁰ The specific *Zumuntar Mata* organization may not necessarily own an independent school of its own, unlike the FOMWAN, however, quite a significant number of beneficiaries of the church's schools are women. Indeed, different church denominations own over twenty universities currently in Nigeria.

On the other hand, FOMWAN has had a set of goals and objectives regarding its educational policy and system, which include:

- Advocacy for retention of girls in schools
- Advocacy for continuing education for married women, because marriage should not be a barrier to learning
- Promoting education as a means of poverty eradication
- Promoting the integration of Quranic schools to include vocational training
- Promoting the nomadic education and education for the handicapped and others in difficult or exceptional circumstances
- Promoting market women's education in basic literacy skills
- Implementing a Shari'ah and Women's Right Project in the 12 Shari'ah implementing states (FOMWAN 2015a: 3)

FOMWAN made it categorically clear that education was and is still the only vehicle that efficiently empowers people and societies. In its declaration 'FOMWAN EDUCATION DEMAND', it succinctly stated that:

Education is the process of physical and mental development. It is the cornerstone and the foundation for the development of any community. The survival and destiny of any human community are directly linked to education. Education, [therefore] should be total, and should not aim at teaching a person how to read and write alone, or how to survive economically alone. It must be an all-embracing system that combines efficient literacy and professional proficiency, with fear of God, respect for values, culture, patriotism and good governance [FOMWAN 2007b: 3].

It is therefore imperative for women who aim at liberating and empowering women in a state like Nigeria to use educational parameters in all ramifications to achieve the desired objectives.

¹⁰ Interview with Gideon Chukwu, Sokoto 13 September 2002. See also David Ambiam, *A History of Catholic Dioceses of Sokoto*, M. A. History, Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto, Nigeria, 2016. The dissertation provides general survey of social, humanitarian activities of the Sokoto Diocese, including Malumfashi, Katsina State.

FOMWAN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS/CENTERS IN NIGERIA

| S/N | STATE | No. of Nursery Schools | No. of Secondary Schools | No. of adult & Continuing educ Centers for women | Enlightenment Programs |
|-----|-------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | Adamawa | Twenty-one (21) Nursery Schools in all the 21 local government areas of the state known as Iqra' Academy | Twenty-one (21) Secondary Schools in all the 21 local government areas of the state known as Iqra' Academy | Computer Centre and Business Center in Yola, and Islamiyya Schools | Annual Ramadan Tafsir, lectures and conferences |
| 2 | Bauchi | FOMWAN Nursery and Primary Schools, Bauchi | FOMWAN Model Secondary School, Bauchi, established Girl Child Secondary at Dagauda, Danbani LGA | A number of adult literacy classes, skill acquisition and empowerment programs successful | Workshops, Tafsir, advocacy and collaboration with other NGOs conducted |
| 3 | Borno | FOMWAN Nursery and Primary Schools, Kushi ward | FOMWAN Secondary Schools, Kushi ward | 6 Islamiyya schools with about 3000 women studying different fields of knowledge | Rural and outreach program for women sensitization to enrol for schools and IDPs due to Boko Haram crises that ravaged Borno State |
| 4 | Cross River | Established one Nursery and Primary School in Calabar the State Capital | One secondary School in the State Capital | Training women in knitting, sewing, & poultry for economic empowerment | Pamphlets and booklets printing and distribution |
| 5 | Delta | Delta State FOMWAN Nursery and Primary School | NOT YET | Skill acquisition programs, soap making, tailoring, baking and others for women | Ramadan tafsir and enlightenment activities |
| 6 | Edo | FOMWAN Nursery and Primary Schools | FOMWAN Secondary Schools | Multi-million Education endowment fund, providing bursaries and scholarships to indigent pupils in the state since 2012 | Annual Ramadan Tafsir, quiz and lecture series for women |

| S/N | STATE | No. of Nursery Schools | No. of Secondary Schools | No. of adult & Continuing educ Centers for women | Enlightenment Programs |
|-----|---------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 7 | Ekiti | Established FOMWAN Nursery and Primary Schools in Ado-Ekiti | Not Yet | Qur'anic School in Ado Local Government Area | Regular meetings and teaching sessions in all local governments |
| 8 | Gombe | Well established Nursery and Primary Schools in all the Local Government areas of the State | FOMWAN Secondary Schools in Gombe | Education Crisis Response (Special) Program with 3 centers: Life Hope Initiative, Kimishi and Gaddi | Organized workshops within and outside the State for enlightenment. Observes during the 2015 and 2019 elections |
| 9 | Jigawa | FOMWAN Nursery & Primary Schools Dutse | FOMWAN Secondary School, Dutse | | Lectures and teaching by FOMWAN in all LGAs |
| 10 | Kaduna | FOMWAN Faisal Nursery and Primary Schools | FOMWAN Model Institute, (for secondary and advanced studies) | FOMWAN School for Deaf and School for Qur'anic memorization in Kaduna. Skill acquisition detergent, soap, spices, sewing, knitting and others taught to women | Youth Camp for career, guidance and Counselling, Ramadan classes & others |
| 11 | Kano | FOMWAN Nursery and Primary Schools established in Kano and other areas within the state | FOMWAN/TAWAL Schools well equipped with ICT facilities in Kano | Trained 6000 women in various skills such as tailoring, beads making, shoes and bags, tomatoes preservation etc | Periodic lecture series, workshops, and Ramadan tafsir for women. Education Sector Support Program on going |
| 12 | Katsina | Newly established Nursery and Primary Schools | Yet to | No established center in this regard | Ramadan tafsir and rural dawah and enlightenment programs |

| S/N | STATE | No. of Nursery Schools | No. of Secondary Schools | No. of adult & Continuing educ Centers for women | Enlightenment Programs |
|-----|----------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 13 | Kebbi | 2 FOMWAN Nursery and Primary Schools in Birnin Kebbi, and 1 in Zuru | FOMWAN Secondary Schools, Birnin Kebbi | No much activities | Annual Ramadan lectures held, workshops and other classes for women |
| 14 | Kogi | FOMWAN Nursery and Primary Schools Lokoja | FOMWAN Girls Science Secondary School, Lokoja and 1 school in Bassa LGA. | FOMWAN Islamiyya School in Dekina | Capacity building workshops, election monitoring and observers, etc |
| 15 | Kwara | FOMWAN Nursery and Primary Schools in Ilorin | FOMWAN Secondary School in Ilorin | Participant in Education Sector Support Program in Nigeria (ESSPIN) in collaboration with DFID since 2010. Introduced HALAL Cooperatives to support women financially | Engaged in Radio and Television programs for women enlightenment |
| 16 | Lagos | FOMWAN Nursery and Primary Schools | FOMWAN Secondary Schools | Engaged in Zakat collection and distribution and skill acquisition programs for women | Support for women prisons in Lagos, as well as publication of magazines, radio and television programs |
| 17 | Nasarawa | FOMWAN Nursery and Primary Schools | FOMWAN Secondary School, Lafiya | Azara FOMWAN School for married women established | Hijab use mobilization, prisons visitation and financial support for women inmates |
| 18 | Niger | FOMWAN Nursery and Primary Schools, Minna | FOMWAN Secondary School, Minna. A total number of 10 schools were established in LGAs such as Mokwa, Edati, and Rafi | A number of women empowerment programs held by FOMWAN | Weekly tafsir, Thursdays, & annual Ramadan, guidance & Counselling etc |

| S/N | STATE | No. of Nursery Schools | No. of Secondary Schools | No. of adult & Continuing educ Centers for women | Enlightenment Programs |
|-----|---------|--------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 19 | Ogun | FOMWAN Nursery and Primary Schools at Ilisan and Ogere | FOMWAN Secondary Schools established | Women adult literacy classes as well as Quranic classes at Gbogila and Ado-odo | Organized sporting activities for girls in schools, rural daawa and Ramadan teaching |
| 20 | Ondo | FOMWAN Nursery and Primary Schools | Not yet | Computer Center, Quranic center, FOMWAN Garri processing factory, and water project established | FOMWAN Cooperative, Ramadan and weekly lectures |
| 21 | Osun | FOMWAN Nursery and Primary Schools in 5 LGAs | FOMWAN Secondary Schools in 5 LGAs with equipped libraries, laboratories and ICT centers | FOMWAN Multipurpose Halls in LGAs, Orphanage and Adult Quranic Centers, etc | Annual Ramadan tafsir, lectures and workshops, etc |
| 22 | Oyo | FOMWAN Nursery and Primary Schools | FOMWAN Secondary Schools in many LGAs | Special School for Orphanage home. A storey building of 16 shops donated to FOMWAN | Carried out annual tafsir, adult literacy classes in LGAs |
| 23 | Plateau | FOMWAN Nursery and Primary Schools in Jos | FOMWAN Secondary Schools, Jos | Weekend Islamiyya classes for married women | Part of peace and reconciliation committee of Government in Jos, regular lectures and awareness classes |
| 24 | Sokoto | FOMWAN Nursery and Primary Schools, Sokoto | FOMWAN Secondary Schools in Sokoto very successful with large number of enrolments | Vocational skills and apprenticeship programs | Director Catholic Relief Services visit for collaboration, lectures, literacy classes and workshops |

| S/N | STATE | No. of Nursery Schools | No. of Secondary Schools | No. of adult & Continuing educ Centers for women | Enlightenment Programs |
|-----|---------|-------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 25 | Taraba | FOMWAN Al-Qalam Nursery and Primary Schools Jalingo | FOMWAN Al-Qalam Secondary Schools Jalingo | Alheri Orphanage affiliates with FOMWAN, Widows receive special training for empowerment | |
| 26 | Zamfara | FOMWAN Nursery and Primary Schools, Gusau in progress | FOMWAN Secondary School, in progress | 25 well-established FOMWAN Women Islamiyya schools, 10 Adult literacy classes, 2 Skills acquisition centers | Advocacy to ulama and emirs in the State for sensitization about women education and rights |

Table 1: FOMWAN Educational Institutions/Centers in Nigeria. FOMWAN Quarterly Report, December 2015a, and FOMWAN 2015b, 30 Years Anniversary Review

4.2 On Health Care Support

Health is a concern of all; however, it is of special importance in developing countries and it is the highest concern for women. They bear the pregnancy, childbirth and nursing which are thorny and life-threatening due to low investment in the health sector by the government. The rate of child mortality and death at birth has been on the increase in spite of the claims of intervention by the government due to poor planning, corruption and population surge. The intervention of FOMWAN and *Zumuntar Mata* is generally welcome as a supplement to what the government provides. That also increases the bond of commitment and loyalty among members as beneficiaries. The two organizations hold periodic sessions on health talks, distribute treated mosquito nets largely provided by government and philanthropists, and conduct sanitation at the church/ mosque and at home premises to ensure a healthy environment, which is a prerequisite for healthy persons and families. In its recent publication *FOMWAN at a Glance* (2012), it has been confirmed that the association has established four functional hospitals and a number of maternity/welfare clinics, pharmacies and two orphanages under its control and care.

In health matters, provision and advocacy require a legal framework with which to pin and compel the government to fulfill the needs of its citizens. Legislation to ensure access and availability of health services has been sponsored by FOMWAN to the National Assembly for enactment. That effort was appreciated since:

FOMWAN's work on the maternal-health bill illustrates how organizations with social capital have the ability to move women's issues onto the political agenda with the right framing. Although the passage of the bill has been delayed largely because the healthcare facilities lack the capacity to provide the maternal care required, advocacy efforts continue with the specific components of the bill proposing solutions to the logistical challenges [Wallace 2014: 301].

Aysha Imam reminds us that,

Apart from other diseases associated with pre- and post-natal problems as well those against children, HIV and AIDS is increasingly a burden for women and the poor, and it has increasingly become a disease of exploitation and extortion. The majority of the people you see in HIV clinics are women. And these are the same women in the churches or mosques seeking healing [Imam 2016: 15].

In its reports of activities marking 30 years of FOMWAN, the Kano branch of the organization highlighted some basic achievements in the health sector inter alia:

Polio eradication initiative intervention in partnership with SMOH, Kano, NPHCDA, UNICEF, WHO and COMPASS polio program. As part of consortium of Nigerian partners for USAID, funded COMPASS project, FOMWAN took the lead in achieving reduction in number of children missed during immunization due to non-compliance ... applying the same strategies, FOMWAN broke down barriers and ended silence surrounded by HIV/AIDS issues in rural communities ... FOMWAN in championing reduction of infant and maternal mortality through the Malaria Control Program worked with DFID funded SUNMAP in providing community mobilization, supervision and logistics for distribution of ITNs [FOMWAN 2015a: 52].

The Association through its numerous volunteers among Muslim women doctors, pharmacists, nurses and other health professionals was able to establish dozens of hospitals, clinics, maternity homes, and orphanages with free or highly subsidized services to women and children, especially the less privileged such as widows and orphans across Nigeria.

Some of its major objectives of its' health projects FOMWAN have achieved the following:

- Reproductive health training programs in 10 states in the northern parts of Nigeria
- Training of clinical health workers in HIV/AIDS prevention and management
- HIV training for religious and community leaders in four states with sponsorship from the National Action Committee on AIDS (NACA)
- Training of workers in post-miscarriage care in FOMWAN hospitals in Jos, Kaduna, and other Muslim hospitals in Sokoto, Kano and Yobe States
- Training of 114 Muslim Health workers in Borno and Bauchi (north-eastern states of Nigeria with additional care challenges due to Boko Haram terrorists' attacks and IDPs) (FOMWAN 2015a: 3).

Therefore, the commitment and investment of the *Zumuntar Mata* and FOMWAN on health and related issues are aimed at providing succor and solace to the afflicted among women and children.

List of FOMWAN Health Institutions for Social Services

| S/N | STATE | HOSPITAL/CLINIC | OTHER HEALTH PROGRAMS | REMARK |
|-----|---------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | Adamawa | Maternity Clinic in Yola | Provided humanitarian & hygiene support to women and children at the IDP camp at Malkohi and other areas in the State | |
| 2 | Bauchi | FOMWAN Clinic with equipment and doctors on shift duties | Sensitized women on Ante Natal Care and maternity support | In partnership with Primary Health Care run project for Maternal and Child Health in Africa(sponsored) |
| 3 | Gombe | Maternal and Neo Natal Health project going on in all LGAs | Prevention of mother to child transmission of HIV/ Aids | Over 14,000 women were recorded to have visited their facilities in recent years |
| 4. | Kaduna | FOMWAN Hospital & Maternity, Kaduna with both in and out patients. Over 4000 received treatment in a quarter of a year. | Sensitization campaign against breast cancer, as well as environmental sanitation and hygiene | High patronage and mass response to their health and related appeals in rural communities |
| 5 | Lagos | FOMWAN Hospital/Clinic daily receiving patients | Health talk, medical screening, and prevention campaigns against infectious diseases | Health committee goes round LGAs for mobilization and enlightenment |
| 6 | Oyo | Participated in the smooth running of Muslim Hospital at Mosfala, Ibadan | Health talk, free medical check, sugar and blood pressure tests rendered in localities | |
| 7 | Kano | Provides health care services, in hospitals and clinics in the metropolis and rural areas of Kano | engages in fight against Pneumonia among children and pregnant women through the use Amoxillin DT, Zinc-LO-ORSCO-pack, etc | Collaborates with DFID, USAID, UNICEF, WHO, NPHCDA and the Kano State Government. Had secured through advocacy and lobby upward increase of Kano budget allocation to health sector, particularly for women and children |

Table 2: List of FOMWAN Health Institutions for Social Services. FOMWAN Quarterly Report, December 2015a, and FOMWAN 2015b, 30Years Anniversary Review

4.3 Political and Enlightenment Roles

As the popularity of these movements is increasing by the day, women continuously appreciate and identify with *Zumuntar Mata* and FOMWAN and their influence and voices are listened to and respected by the team members on issues that are not directly connected with the church or

mosque. At a national level, the FOWMAN has committees such as the Committee on Good Governance, Human Rights and Gender Issues, as well as the Education Committee. These committees serve as representatives at various fora within the country and abroad on matters relating to governance, human rights and gender issues, etc. (see FOMWAN Quarterly Report, August to December 2015).

The *Zumuntar Mata* on the other hand also engages in enlightenment for women in the church and at home to not be left behind in voter registration, elections and other empowerment and development drives. These were achieved through the organization of public lectures, house-to-house visits and persuasions.¹¹ Due to the wider acceptance and increased influence of the two organizations, they participate in political development activities such as monitoring elections, voter registration, and anti-corruption campaigns:

FOMWAN seeks to protect and promote the different rights of women and children under Islam. It seeks to promote their general rights, which are the rights to life, worship, education, self-respect, to choose a husband, fair treatment in marriage, divorce and expression. It promotes their economic rights to a dower, maintenance in matrimony, right to property to enter into contracts, to have a will, to inherit, to have a job and engage in economic activity; and their political rights to a political view, to participate in politics and to vote. It also promotes their rights in difficult circumstances that for a divorcee include the right to shelter, to a dower, to maintenance, and support during maternity, for widows' rights to maintenance, not to be inherited and to re-marry, and for Muslim women refugees, the right to remarry and political rights (Olarinmoye 2010-2011: 142).

In order to carry out their activities, their source of funding has been largely from the members through levies, donations, registrations, *Zakat* and grants from national and international donor agencies. These groups are cautious about the types of funding they accept because they are operating on the margins of both the development and faith-based communities. In my interaction with the leadership of these organizations, they confirmed receiving and collaborating with agencies like DFID, USAID, UNFPA, UNICEF, and the like in executing projects that are directly under the funding provisions of these agencies. They do this without prejudice or compromise of their principle and objectives. It is also interesting to note the level of cooperation and understanding between the Muslim and Christian gender organizations even at a time of some inter-religious conflicts. FOMWAN and *Zumuntar Mata*, especially in Sokoto, established a bond of unity and technical support to one another in order to serve their members better and bridge the gulf of misinformation, which breeds hatred and unwarranted suspicion.

¹¹ Interview with Mrs. Esemec Cecilia, Woman Leader of the ECWA Good News Church Sokoto, through the administration.

5 Conclusion

This study explored the necessity for the establishment of women's gender organizations in religious folds in Nigeria, primarily identifying the important and indispensable position and role of women in religion (Islam and Christianity) and society. That was further supported by the fact that in most of the social and economic interventions targeted at the society, women are the most desperate due to family burdens and associated responsibilities. The emergence of these two faiths' gender-based organizations, the Muslim FOMWAN and Christian *Zumuntar Mata*, has gone a long way in the eclipse of the hitherto unfounded but widespread religious and cultural beliefs and superstitions against women's involvement and participation in religious as well as temporal public engagements. Similarly, collaboration and cooperation with other agencies governmental and non-governmental, national and international has opened the horizon and scope of understanding and tolerance among the two organizations and hence among their wider membership. This work found out that the two women religious organizations, though from Muslim and Christian perspectives, contributed significantly to societal developments albeit at the grassroots. In a more crystal form, they support women and society at large through the provision of education and enlightenment, health and social support, economic empowerment, tradecraft and increased professionalism among women for self-reliance and productivity. Indeed, their bold contribution through their gender appeals yielded positive results as women generally are emerging to be in control of their destinies and future in religious and societal loops, away from harmful traditions and cultures and in consonance with the teachings of the religions. This research recommends more government and non-governmental support and encouragement to these organizations for sustainable development, gender balance, and to fight extremisms from both sides of Islam and Christianity and to ensure more peaceful coexistence and empowerment, which are the most needed initiatives by all religious, ethnic and regional divides in Nigeria and beyond.

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