

**Women and Leadership: Contributions of Women in Nigeria's Political and Sociological Landscape**

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**Abstract**

There is no gainsaying the fact that today, women are playing significant an increasingly prominent role all over the world. Women have proven beyond reasonable doubt that they are not a second class to their male counterparts. In Pre-colonial era those women like Moremi, Queen Aminat and Efunsetan Iyalode of Ibadan land were women that have contributed to nation building particularly in Nigeria. Even in the Post-Colonial era they encouraged children to relate positively to each other and to take responsibility at family, local and national levels. Similarly, they inspire them to participate fully in the community and help to develop an understanding of citizenship. At the societal realm, women are known to constitute the bulk of traders, farmers, while some engage in politics and others in technical professions. In the religious sphere, specifically in the traditional religion of the people, they serve as priestesses, diviners, healers, praise-singers, etc. In Christianity, women are known as evangelist, preachers, choristers, as well as constituting a good proportion of other church workers. This paper adopted survey and purposive method by conducting questionnaire of 150 out of which 108 were recovered. This work noticed that African women are not given total freedom to display their God giving talents yet the view that are at the helm of affairs have proven that gender has nothing to do when it comes to responsibility. It was recommended that both men and women should be given equal opportunity to serve.

**Keywords:** Women and Leadership, Academic, Historical and Political Contributions

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## **Introduction**

### **Women in Yoruba Culture**

Yoruba culture Orebiyi,(2001),opined that Yoruba is highly dynamic. Traditionally women were given prominent roles in religion: there were priestesses and religious leaders among women. To Orebiyi, 2001 it has limits, for there were some cults which were exclusively for men and women could not hold any leadership there. There were some cults where men and women participated equally and the leadership of such cults could fall on male or female members, depending on seniority or heredity, election or choice by the divinity. In such cults as Oshun and Sango cults, women succeeded in asserting their importance and they were treated with a certain degree of dignity and respect. The Yoruba woman took an active part in religion and there were some cults that were essentially women's cults. Akitan 2001 reiterates that it is necessary to note that though there women priestesses among the Yoruba, such women were expected to have passed child- bearing age and sexual manifestations like menstruation which was seen as impurity. Menstruation is considered incompatible with priesthood as a high degree of sanctity is expected of a person who mediates between man and the gods.

Socially and politically the Yoruba women is considered second-class. In fact, to Orebiyi, it is a general saying among Yoruba men that “Oro obinrinko se tele “(which means: “it is not wise for a man to follow a woman's advice or act to woman's suggestion”) this implies that women' ability to reason logically is very low: they cannot give reasonable suggestions or advice. Women are made to suffer much after the death of their husbands. In addition to the loss of her husband, a widow suffers a lot of humiliation. Some may be asked not to eat certain types of food for a period of time. Some others must not see the sun or their own shadows. Some others must not attend any social gathering for as long as a year after the death of their husband. In some cases the woman would have to wear only black dresses and jewelry or navy blue colours (as is the case nowadays) throughout the period of mourning. This does not apply to a man who loses his wife.

In the family, the father is the head of the home: he gives instructions and orders which his wife and children must follow. He takes decisions on his own but may consult his wife if necessary, but he is not under any obligation to do so before taking, his decisions. Whether he takes or refuses his wife's counsel, his decision remains binding on all

members of the family. In the political sphere, traditionally the Yoruba woman is supposed to be under the rule and leadership of the man. In some cases there are women regents, influential Iyalode and Iyalaje (women chiefs, head of women or head of the market) among the political leaders of the community, they are still subject to the leadership of the men. Primary function of woman in Yoruba culture is to raise children and ensure that these children are obedient and loyal to their father. A way-ward child is a shame to the mother, for it shows that its mother is a failure. A woman is not expected to poke her nose into public or political affairs: women who try are seen as *asa*, unruly. The influence of formal education and modern civilization on Yoruba culture cannot be over-emphasised. In the family today, to a large extent, women take part in decision-making. In fact, there are some homes where the woman takes active leadership roles as a result of the understanding and exposure of the husband.

Yoruba women to Orebiyi, 2001 are proving themselves to be a force to be reckoned with in politics. Though men are still kings, there are now women in political positions whose favour the kings need in commissioners, deputy governors, senators, ministers, and special advisers to the President in the government of Nigeria today. To a large extent, such women are no longer being seen as *asa* (unruly): rather they are seen as achievers worthy of emulation. The number of women in leadership positions has grown tremendously in the last few years. It is no longer strange to see women occupy positions hitherto regarded as male exclusives both in companies and government. The likes of Chief (Mrs) Akande, a former Industries Minister and the deputy national president of the Association of Nigerian Women Industrialists; Mrs Titi Ajanaku, special adviser to Presidency on women affair, Mrs Modupe Adelaja, Minister of State for Defence and many others, cannot be looked down upon in Nigeria today.

### **The Quest for Women's Rights**

Women are not created to be servants or second-class beings. A woman has the right to be given opportunities to enable her develop her potentialities and personality, her talents and other endowments. She has the right to put her training, education and experience into use. God expects a woman to use her strategic position as a mother and her God-given wisdom, tenderness, patience and motherly love to influence the world, to order

her community and bring humility, love and unity into the church, Men need women and their strangely powerful encouragement to complement their masculinity and release their own potentiality. Women are indispensable and of paramount relevance in every human society.

In some countries women have proved themselves able head of states. For instance, in the Philippines, they have been observed to be more efficient and accountable than men Mrs Johnson was an exceptionally competent head of state and the new president in Liberia, Johnson is no less an able women. Thus denying women the right to be leaders because of their temperament, high sensitivity and firmness is to be unfair. Every human being, male or female, has his/her limitations: hence a woman's peculiarities are not to be seen as weaknesses. She has the right to be an individual.

Denying women their right in the political and religious spheres through discouragement and prejudice invariably means denying the society valuable contributions which could enrich the lives of its members and move the society forward. Nigerian women are noles endowed with intelligence, wisdom, spiritual gifts, insight and devotion, leadership qualities, goo human the better for it if women were given opportunities to be president, governors, and council chairpersons. This will encourage girls and women to take their studies more seriously and be ambitious to make a mark in life. It may also encourage parents to be more interested in their daughter's education and progress and see it as equally important as that of their sons.

### **Females Challenges in Academic Pursuit**

In academia, gender disparities persist across various dimensions, including representation, recognition, and advancement. Despite women's increased in higher education, they remain underrepresented in leadership positions and fields traditionally dominated by men.

Glass ceiling in leadership Roles: Women encounter a "glass ceiling" effect, where their advancement to top academic positions is hindered by a systemic biases and institutional barriers. This lack of representation at the highest levels perpetuates gender disparities throughout academia.

Gender Gap in STEM disciplines: Women's chances in STEM disciplines-science, technology, engineering, and mathematics- are limited due to their underrepresentation in these fields Gender bias in research funding: When female researchers seek for research grants and other funding, they encounter gender bias. Imposter syndrome: Women feeling less confident about their abilities and skills. Gender Pay Gap: This gender pay gap reflects broader societal inequalities and undermines women's economic security and professional advancement.

Work-Life Balance Challenges: Balancing academic pursuits with familial responsibilities presents significant challenges for women. The pressure to excel in research, publish prolifically, and secure funding intersects with expectations of care giving and domestic duties, placing additional strain on women's academic careers. Pregnancy and maternity leave can result in many women being made redundant

### **Political Underrepresentation**

Female's representation in politics lags behind their male counterparts globally. Despite comprising roughly half of the global population, women are significantly underrepresented in political decision-making positions. Structural barriers such as patriarchal power structures, gender stereotypes, and cultural biases perpetuate this gender gap in politics

**Stereotypes and Bias:** Stereotypical perceptions often cast females as less capable or suitable for leadership roles compared to men. These biases can dissuade women from pursuing political careers or hinder their progress when they do. Lack of Support and Resources: Females face challenges accessing the necessary resources and support networks crucial for political success. Limited access to funding, party endorsements and mentorship opportunities further exacerbate the barriers women encounter in politics.

**Balancing Family and Career:** The traditional expectation for women to prioritize caregiving roles can deter them from entering the demanding world of politics, where long hours and extensive travel are often required.

Sexual Harassment and Violence: Women who aspire to be politicians may be discouraged from doing so by sexual harassment, intimidation and violence Limited Representation: In March 2025, Senator Natasha Akpoti-Uduaghan, representing Kogi Central, publicly accused Senate President Godswill Akpabio of sexual harassment She alleged that during a private visit to Akpabio's residence in Uyo, Akpabio denied all allegations, describing them as false and malicious. The \*\*Senate Committee on Ethics and Privileges later dismissed Akpoti-Uduaghan's petition on procedural grounds, stating it was "invalid he made inappropriate advances Women make up a very small portion of seats in legislative bodies across the globe, making them underrepresented in political roles.

### **War against Women**

The cultural and gender problem which women have been facing dates back to their birth. In many homes, the birth of a baby girl does not receive the kind of warm reception that would be given to that of a baby boy. The African woman is not encouraged to avail herself of educational opportunities; rather she is encouraged to go into such an institution where functional education is acquired to prepare her for motherhood. Traditional, cultural, religious and social beliefs militate against the education of females. It is a waste to spend money to educate girls. Women suffer when it comes to the issue of inheritance. Inheritance law makes it difficult for women to own land or any property at all (Adetunji, 2024 in Paroart 1989).

It should be noted here that there are some Nigerian societies such as the Ondo of Ondo State, the Ijebu of Ogun State which allow their women to own landed property. However, in Oyo State, women are only allowed to inherit from their fathers if they are still single. Once they are married, they cannot inherit any of their father's property. One of the qualities of women is that they have tremendous collective power when they get behind an issue. The amassed energy of women united in a common cause can be awesome. When women get it together, they will move mountains and the world will be better place to live. Examples of women with integrity who put in their all in order to fight a cause they believe in have already been mentioned above. They were not in it for monetary gain. How do we encourage the African women to start seeing herself in new way? The thoughts we think, the words we speak, and the beliefs we hold as women are powerful. They shape our

experiences and our lives. If there is anything we do not like in our life, we have the power to make changes (Hay, 1997). As we change our thinking and our words, our experiences also changes. No matter where we can make positive changes today. This is a powerful, liberating concept, and as we believe so it becomes true for us

### **Cultural Attitude to Women's Education and Economic Empowerment**

Almost in all things men are preferred to women and the things men do are valued more than women do. Alliyu (1991) believed that women are to be seen and not heard, whereas men can harass and dominate women without any restraints. Men are portrayed as authoritarian, disciplinarian, superior, powerful, courageous and brave while women are seen as weaklings that need men to be able to handle situations and circumstances. Culture and tradition have been identified as contributory factors in the downgrading of women. This is perpetuated through myths, superstitions and other artificial barriers. Society places men and women in particular gender roles and create two worlds- an inferior world for women and superior one for men. In some countries, women, girls and female babies receive less food, less nutritious kinds of foods and poorer health care than men and boys. Purdah and similar seclusion of women from public contact constrain women's freedom of movement from limit their opportunities. Rape, physical abuse, domestic violence and sexual exploitation threaten women's safe and undermine their self esteem (Alan Guttmacher Institute, 1995). The culture that portrays women as less important than men and deserving of fewer privileges thwarts their aspiration and lowers their expectations and self respect. These discriminatory practices have serious consequences for the dignity and the survival of women. Education in its widest form has been identified as tool for freeing women from ignorance and backwardness an bringing them to a position of liberty and awareness (Isiugo- Abanihe, 1996). Women's direct involvement indirect agriculture, production, self-empowerment, particularly in small scale processing, training and small business enterprises is noticeable. They are mostly found in the informal sector where little or no education is required for the task. On the other hand, entry into the formal sector is much more difficult because it requires a higher starting capital and a higher level of education. Education is the only avenue of entry into employment and involvement in the formal sector. Although women's enrolment in schools is increasing, majority of women

are still far behind in education. Statistics show that women's enrolment in formal education has remained much lower than that of men. More men are still getting education than women (Isiugo-Abanihe, 1996). Consequently, industries, banking, insurance, communication, engineering and academics have fewer women workers. A survey carried out by the Ministry of Information (cited in Odubogun, 1996) indicates that less than 10% of those employed in formal activities were females. Odubogun (1996) also found out that in 1984, 53.9% of self-employed persons in trade, restaurants and hotel business in Nigeria are women.

Education can be fine-tuned to bring equal opportunities for the sexes and freedom of choice for uneducated and illiterate women who suffer poor conditions of living. When women get more schooling, they develop skills and acquire information that prepare them to thrive in a changing job market. Erinosh, 1997 identified reasons for unequal educational access: they include cultural beliefs and some religious practices which are retrogressive and discriminatory women (e.g early/forced marriage) and the practice of purdah. Empowerment of women can only be achieved through proper education. Only then can women hope to break the stranglehold of law, culture and age-old tradition which combine to slow down their progress. Moreover, the provision of education is a sure means by which women can acquire power to free themselves from such age-old tradition.

Education has been identified as an important force that can shape women's aspiration. As women's education increases, they will gain knowledge that will allow them to look at the world more critically and help them to obtain well paid jobs, self-confidence and economic empowerment. It is against this background that this study examined the attitude of men and women towards women's education and economic empowerment and to find out whether there are significant differences in attitude of men and women would determine whether or not women receive the education needed for economic empowerment.

### **Methodology**

One hundred and fifty questionnaires were administered to men and women in Akinmorin of Afijio Local Government of Oyo State while one hundred and five were dully complete and used for the analysis.

### **Social-demographics characteristic of respondents**

Out of 100 hundred and five responded Two out of four wards were randomly selected. The sample comprised of 70 men and 80 women between ages 20-30. Out of these 35. % were male, while the remaining 55% were female.

Respondents of age groups of age 31-39 were 34.3% (32.6% mal, 35.8% female). The age group 40-49 had about 15.2% respondents (21.7% male, 9.4% female). 11% of male, 9.4% of male avereraging 10.1% were of age group 50 and above.

About 9.2% of the respondents had no formal education (8.8% were male and 9.5% female). 17.3 of respondents primary education (22.0% male, 13.3% female) respondents with secondary school education totaled 28.6% (28.6% male, 28.6% female). Only 2.0% respondents had other forms of education (1.1% male, 2.9% female).

A total 72.1% of the respondents were Christian (61.1% male, 81.3% female). Twenty four percent of the respondents were identified as Muslims (32.2% male, 17.8% female). Four percent of respondents practiced traditional religion. There were no female respondents found practicing traditional religion. About 1.5% of respondents were found practicing one form of religion or the other different from those mentioned above (2.2% male, 0.9% female).

Out of 25.9 found to be single, 26.9% were male and female. Seventy percent were married (68.8% male, 70.2% female). Only 1.0% of respondents were separated (1.1% male, 1.0 female). 2.5% were widowed (2.2% male, 2.8% female).

*Lead City University Postgraduate Multidisciplinary Serial, (Series 4)*

	<b>Strong Agree</b>		<b>Agree</b>		<b>Undecided</b>		<b>Disagree</b>		<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	
	<b>Me n</b>	<b>Wome n</b>	<b>Me n</b>	<b>Wome n</b>	<b>Me n</b>	<b>Wome n</b>	<b>Me n</b>	<b>Wome n</b>	<b>Me n</b>	<b>Wome n</b>
Education will help women to acquire resources needed for self, family and nation	66.0	69.7	21.3	25.7	3.2	0.9	7.4	1.8	2.1	1.8
Educated women are disobedient	6.4	0.9	25.5	15.6	13.8	4.6	38.3	41	16.0	37.6
Men always support girls' education	17.0	7.3	48.9	42.2	11.7	18.3	21.3	29.4	1.1	2.3
Women support girls' education	25.5	29.4	36.2	51.4	7.4	5.5	26.2	11.9	4.3	1.8

more than men										
A women should not receive as much education as her husband	14.9	4.6	28.7	16.5	6.4	3.7	33.0	39.4	17.0	35.8
Educated women are asserts to their husbands	34.0	26.6	43.6	56.0	10.6	8.3	6.4	6.4	5.5	2.8

**Source: Author’s finding, 2025**

A number of attitudinal statements were raised, to which men and women responded to the statement “Education will help women to acquire resources needed for self family and nation”. 87% either disagreed or strongly agreed. 95% of women either agreed or strongly agreed.

About 65.9% of men agreed that men always support girls’ education and 30.9% disagreed with the statement. Women who agreed with the statement were 49.5%; 32.2% disagreed.

The statement that a woman should have equal education with her husband was perceived by both men and women differently. About 50% of men disagreed with the statement while a greater percentage of women. About 43.6% of men agreed while just

about 21.1% women agreed. This is an indication that men are not in support of women education.

About the statement that, “women should have higher qualifications than their husbands”, 76% of men disagreed outright. Just about 58.7% women disagreed with the statement. The statement “Educated women are asserts to their husbands” elicited 77.6% agreement from the men.

The responses revealed a lot concerning why women are still in the background and are only seen and not heard. From the responses of men to some to some statements that seem to place women on equal status with men, it can be seen that majority of men were against. This is an indication that men are not sensitive enough to the other hand seem to be against any negative statement about them. This shows that women are becoming aware of their state of marginalization. On the whole the right of educations women’s education should be allowed in both men and women to pave way for better future.

	<b>Strong Agree</b>		<b>Agree</b>		<b>Undecided</b>		<b>Disagree</b>		<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	
	<b>Men</b>	<b>Women</b>	<b>Men</b>	<b>Women</b>	<b>Men</b>	<b>Women</b>	<b>Men</b>	<b>Women</b>	<b>Men</b>	<b>Women</b>
Women are not as hardworking as men	27.7	9.2	35.1	3.3	6.4	7.3	21.3	26.0	9.6	26.6
Men contribute more to economic activities than women										

*Lead City University Postgraduate Multidisciplinary Serial, (Series 4)*

Women should be allowed to participate in any economic activities of their choice	25.5	24.8	55.3	66.1	3.2	5.5	12.8	3.7	3.2	41.5
Women should not receive as much education as her husband	14.9	4.6	28.7	16.5	6.4	3.7	33.0	39.4	17.0	35.5
Men are leaders of the home therefore the benefits of economic activities should be enjoyed by both men and women	4.3	0.9	5.3	6.4	0	0.9	50.0	40.4	40.4	51.4

Women are weaker vessels and should therefore not be allowed to venture into tasking economic activities	20.2	6.4	29.8	31.2	7.4	7.3	26.6	16.0	16.0	29.4
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**Table source: author finding 2025**

Differences in attitude were noticed between men and women on some attitudinal statement on women’s economic empowerment. For example, a wide gap is seen in the responses of both men and women to the statement that “women are not as hardworking as men “63% of men agreed with the statement. Only about 39.5% of women agreed and 52.0% (a greater percentage than men) disagreed between men and women on this statement.

On the statement that “women are weaker vessels and should therefore not be allowed to venture into some tasking economic activities”, 50% of men agreed, and 42% disagreed with the statement. But 55.1%of women disagreed with the statement and 37.6% agreed. From all responses to the above attitudinal statements, it seems that a greater percentage of women have a positive attitude towards their economic empowerment than men. More women than men disagreed with the statements that seem to show their contribution as less significant than of men. More women than men did not consider women to be weaker vessels incapable of being as hardworking as men. Majority of the

women claimed that they were up to any task and they should not be underrated. But it appears the men are still holding on their views of having total control of their women.

### **Discussion of Findings**

The results of the research provide an insight into the attitude of both men and women in Akinmorin of Afijio Local Government Oyo State towards women's education and economic empowerment. Majority of respondents agreed that education is a resource for uplifting women to the top of their careers. The respondents all claimed that when a woman is educated, it helps her to develop herself, her home and her nation. More women claimed that they contribute more to economic activities than men, whereas majority of men were opposed to this assertion. Odobogun 1996 gave the evidence to support to the claim that more men than women are found in the formal sector of the economy. It depends therefore on which side the men and women are looking at. Apart from the contradictions inherent in African patriarchal social structures which are detrimental to women gaining social status and prestige, there is also the influence of exogenous cultures (Capitalism, colonialism and foreign religion, amongst others) and their impact on African social structures (Adetunji, 2024, in Akitan 2002). Another contention is that the education of men at all levels was given greater priority than the education of women. Despite urbanization, women are still constrained in taking full advantage of urban opportunities, Apart from educational deficiencies and the structure of the family which circumscribes women's economy autonomy, another possible restrictive factor is the idea that increasing the status of women may be threatening to men (Akorede, 2011). This fear reaches back to traditional attitudes towards women, and is a major barrier to women in the professional real. Meanwhile, a woman has the right to be given opportunities to enable her develop her potentialities and personality, her talents and other endowments (Sotunsa, 2015).

### **Pathways to Overcoming Challenges**

Addressing the challenges faced by women in politics and academia requires concerted efforts from multiple stakeholders, including policy makers, institutions, and society as a whole. Promoting Gender-Responsive Policies: Implementing gender-responsive policies and initiatives can help dismantle systemic barriers and create more

inclusive environments in politics and academia. This includes measures such as gender quotas, family-friendly policies, and equal pay initiatives. Fostering Mentorship and Support Networks: Establishing mentorship programs and support networks can provide women with guidance, encouragement, and opportunities for professional growth and advancement. Challenging Gender Stereotypes: combating gender stereotypes and biases through education, awareness campaigns, and advocacy efforts is crucial for creating cultural shifts that value and support women's participation and leadership in politics and academia.

### **Conclusion**

The challenges faced by women in politics and academic pursuits are multifaceted and deeply entrenched in societal norms and structures. However, by recognizing these challenges, advocating for gender equality, and implementing targeted interventions, we can create more equitable and inclusive environments where women can thrive and contribute fully to shaping our political and intellectual landscapes. Empowering women in politics and academia is not just a matter of fairness- it's essential for fostering diverse perspectives, driving innovation, and building a more just and equitable society. By promoting gender sensitive policies, challenging gender stereotypes and supporting women's leadership, we can create a more inclusive environment and society for women to succeed in these fields.

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