

Women Activism in Yorubaland: A Catalyst for the Actualization of Gender Equality

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Abstract

The outstanding performances of Yoruba women and their activism in ancient and modern contexts have earned them significant respect in Yoruba societies. In pre-colonial Nigeria, women like Queen Aminat of Zaria and Nana Itshekiri exemplified female activism, while ancient Yoruba women such as Moremi Ajasoro, Efunroye Tinubu, and Efunsetan Aniwura made substantial impacts on their societies through determined efforts that advanced women's causes. Notably, some Yoruba kingdoms recognized women as paramount traditional rulers, including Luwo Gbagida as a woman Ooni in ancient Ile-Ife and Orompoto as a woman Alaafin in ancient Oyo kingdom, demonstrating that women occupied leadership positions in pre-colonial Nigeria. This paper evaluates concepts and activities of Yoruba women activists in post-colonial Nigeria, highlighting their achievements in adding value to women's lives and society at large. Additionally, it examines actions taken to achieve the UN-recommended 35% affirmation for women. Using thematic methods, the paper argues that women have historically gained irresistible positions, forming the basis for continued gender equality agitation. Yoruba women have remained prominent since post-colonial Nigeria, with their activities being notably impactful and elevating many to positions of repute. The study concludes that women's activism has served as a catalyst for women's development in Yoruba land and Nigeria generally. It recommends that women should be more proactive in pursuing their needs, form synergies for unified understanding and presentation, and organize conferences to develop modalities for achieving gender equality goals.

Keywords: Activism, Activist, Gender Equality, Women, Yorubaland.

1. Introduction

Women activism in Yorubaland is as old as the race. Yorubaland occupies a conspicuous portion in Nigeria specifically the Southwestern part of the country. The race is peopled by people of high creativity, integrity, agility, great intellectual heights, industry and perspicacity. These virtues are both exhibited by male and female folks. Women in Yorubaland have consistently robbed shoulders with their male counterparts. There have been women kings for example Luwo Gbagada, female Ooni of Ife, generalissimo like Efunsetan Aniwura. Those of them with western education like Mrs Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti, Professor Bolanle Aawe, Kemi Morgan, to mention but a few, have contemporarily lifted high the crest of women activism and drove home their agitation for emancipation and equality. Explorations have been made by Yoruba women in their activism in copious areas of the following. These include, women activism and gender equality, increased political participation, economic empowerment, promotion of Girl's Education, Legal reforms and protection, social and cultural change, health and wellbeing, building solidarity and networks, and 35 Percent Affirmation Action for Women in Nigeria (Abubakar & Ahmad, 2014).



Women's activism in Yorubaland has been a critical force in advocating for gender equality, challenging patriarchal norms, and addressing systemic gender-based injustices. Historically, Yoruba women have engaged in various forms of activism, both within the domestic sphere and in the public arena, to advance women's rights and social justice. From the pre-colonial era through the colonial and post-colonial periods, their activism has been marked by resilience, resistance, and a commitment to reshaping societal structures that have long marginalized women.

These women have explored their activism to underscore successes by securing appointments for women folk as commissioners, ministers, slots in legislative houses, both local, state and federal, and advocacy in reproductive health and sponsoring bills in legislative houses to ensure quality life for women. In modern times, there is the liberal feminist, arguably the most common response which is based on demands for equal opportunities for men and women in all formal/public spheres, where patriarchal institutions are strong as we observe it in some African countries. The liberal feminist approach had to contend with established male-oriented privileges entrenched institutions.

Majority of African societies are patriarchal in nature including Nigeria where Yoruba people domicile and in this context the major ideology that exist is fully in support of gender inequalities in responsibilities and roles (Falola & Heaton, 2008). Concerning women conditional position, as it has been written by some authors in African, only some delicate parts of women activities painting women as savages, exploited by men for reproductive forces were focused on but recent literature especially those on female circumcision see women as powerless, modern slaves and so docile as to tolerate evils (Falola & Heaton, 2008). In this case, women are seen as not being docile, not from the evidence of their autonomy and struggles in the past. Taking into consideration the role of women, it can be argued that mankind must make an effort to eradicate the subjugation of women.

In recent years, women's activism in Yorubaland has taken on new dimensions with the increasing involvement of younger generations in digital activism and grassroots movements. Social media platforms have enabled a new wave of feminist discourse and action, facilitating national and global conversations about women's rights. This shift reflects the evolving nature of gender activism, highlighting the need for intersectional approaches that consider the unique cultural, social, and economic challenges faced by Yoruba women. Therefore, the ongoing women's movements in Yorubaland continue to serve as a catalyst for gender equality, pushing for systemic changes that empower women and elevate their status in both private and public spheres.

In modern times, notable women activists such as Constance Agatha Cummings-John served as voices of comfort and resistance in the wilderness of ideas and activism. In Yorubaland, distinguished figures like Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti, Bolanle Awe, Kemi Morgan and Erelu Bisi Fayemi also emerged as prominent contributors to women's empowerment and societal transformation. Against the above backdrop, this paper has critically looked into the activities of women activists and how they have been able to explore activism to underscore women emancipation and ensure gender equality in Yorubaland.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Activism

Activism as a concept can be referred to as efforts to promote, impede, direct, or intervene in social, political, economic, or environmental reform with the desire to make changes in society. This can come in diverse ways such as protests, strikes, and petitions or come through only types of advocacies that is aimed at bringing change in public opinion or on government policy. It can be the policy or action of using vigorous campaigning to bring about political or social change (Encyclopedia Britannica). Cambridge dictionary defines Activism as the use of direct and noticeable action to achieve a result, usually a political or social one. Activism history in Nigeria is very rich and complex and this is encompassing of various times of economic, social, political struggles in the country. This can be traced back to the early 20th century when they resisted British Colonial Rule, take for instance, Aba Women's Riot of 1929, Nationalist Movement in the 1940s and 1950s that involved teachers like Nnamdi Azikiwe, Obafemi Awolowo, Ahmadu Bello (Falola & Heaton, 2008).

Civil Rights and Political Activism surfaced shortly after independence in 1960. The activists sought to address ethnic tensions and marginalization and also military rule. The pro-democracy movements which happened between 1960s and 1990s fought against military dictatorship during the regime of General Abacha (1993-1998). Activists from various ethnic backgrounds began to mobilize for justice and fairness (Ejobowah et al. (2001). Political activism peaked under military regimes, particularly during General Sani Abacha's rule, when movements like NADECO and individuals such as Gani Fawehinmi, Wole Soyinka, and Ken Saro-Wiwa rose to prominence (Ogundiya & Baba (2007). These movements ultimately paved the way for Nigeria's transition to civilian governance in 1999.

Human rights and Environmental Activism that showed up during the Fourth Republic from 1999 till date bring out some activism such as environmental issues in the Niger Delta region with figures like Ken SaroWiwa, and Ogoni people (Falola & Heaton, 2008). Bring Back Our Girls Campaign of 2014 and #EndSars Movement in 2020 were to raise awareness on specific issues (Martin, 2007). Since the return to democratic rule in 1999, human rights and environmental activism have continued to shape Nigeria's civic and political space. These movements have been fueled by civil society, youth groups, and activists working to challenge institutional failures and raise national consciousness. The foundational efforts of Ken Saro-Wiwa and the Ogoni struggle under MOSOP set the stage for continued environmental justice campaigns (Falola & Heaton, 2008). Movements like Bring Back Our Girls in 2014 and #EndSARS in 2020 further highlight the evolving nature of activism, combining grassroots efforts with digital mobilization to demand accountability, justice, and reform (Martin, 2015).

2.2. Women Activism

Women activism refers to the actions and efforts of women to promote social change, advocate for their rights, and challenge systems of oppression and inequality. It manifests through various forms such as advocacy, lobbying for policy reforms and legislative changes that support women's rights, as well as raising public awareness on critical issues like gender-based violence, reproductive health, and education for girls. In addition, women activists often organize protests and demonstrations aimed at achieving equal pay, reproductive autonomy, and challenging patriarchal structures that marginalize women. Such collective actions are instrumental in empowering women to assume leadership roles in governance, community development, and civic life. Ultimately, women's activism is essential for promoting social justice and gender equality; and when women unite in solidarity, they contribute to building a more inclusive and equitable society for all.

Women Activism has remained a potent instrument to come by a desired change from one unwanted position, women have been seen to have raised their voices by way of advocacy, sensitization, protests, seminars, you may even see women come out half nude to drive home their demands. Women activism refers to the efforts and movements led by women to address and rectify gender inequalities. Inequalities and advocate for women's right and broader social justice issues. It also covers the area of organizing protest particularly in political processes, raising public awareness, lobbying for legislative changes. When explaining this concept, some of these key words are sacrosanct such as advocacy for legal rights on behalf of women like voting rights, property right, economic equality between men and women reproductive rights, considering gender-based violence, political participation, social and cultural changes. Women Status in Yoruba setting is secondary if not inferior to that of men. These issues relating to these women stand has been a major concern to scholars and human rights activist across the globe. The reason for this is not far from the fact that Yoruba culture is built on patriarchy, meaning that men are dominating over women, there are traditions that expose male supremacy in all ramification. It is observed that there is women marginalization and women are kept in the back seat.

Despite historical efforts to silence women and prevent them from expressing their views, such efforts have proved abortive due to the courageous and sustained activism of brave women throughout history (Adeleye-Fayemi (2020). From time immemorial, women have struggled for equality and resisted various forms of oppression from their male counterparts. These struggles have yielded partial victories in political, economic, cultural, and religious domains. However, women, particularly in parts of Nigeria, remain disproportionately affected by gender-based violence and systemic discrimination in nearly all aspects of life. Despite these challenges, feminist consciousness has continued to rise in Nigeria, especially among women who have engaged in organized movements to dismantle gender inequality and challenge patriarchal norms (Aina & Olayode, 2011). In Yorubaland, historical records highlight exceptional women who played influential roles in their towns and villages, examples of female agency that have been shaped by the region's rich cultural history, traditional responsibilities, and contemporary transformations (Oyěwùmí, 1997).

Women in Yorubaland are actively involved in various forms of activism, addressing issues ranging from political participation to gender-based violence and social justice. They leverage both tradition and modern strategies including grassroots organization, engaging with traditional leadership and using online platforms to amplify their voices. The major aspects of women activism in Yorubaland encompass several key dimensions. First, women involvement in political participation shows that women are increasingly seeking to participate more fully in political process. Second, traditional leadership reveals that some women are marginalized in traditional leadership. Third, social justice and rights demonstrates that women are working to address issues of gender-based violence discrimination and unequal access to resources while advocating for policies and law that protect their rights. Fourth, economic empowerment indicates that many women are focused on economic empowerment, seeking to improve their livelihood through education training and access to microfinance. Fifth, online activism shows that social media and online platforms are being used to raise awareness, mobilise support and connect with other activists. Sixth, traditional institutions and practices reveal that women are using traditional institutions and practices such as the Iyalode high ranking female chieftain and various traditional convention to advance their agenda.

2.3. Gender Equality

Gender equality is the principle that individuals, regardless of their gender, should have equal rights, opportunities, and treatment in all aspects of life. This means both genders should have equal access to education that is free from discrimination and bias, as well as equal economic opportunities, fair wages, and equitable access to resources. Gender equality is also out to encourage women's participation in decision-making processes. When this is embraced in the society, there will be improvement in economic growth, enhanced social justice, better health outcome, among others, but when this is lacking in any society, there will be stereotypes and bias among the two genders, there will be discrimination and violence as we have it in our society today, lack of adequate representation and fight against cultural and social norms that affect inequality, and with gender equality, there will be more just equitable and prosperous society for all.

Gender equality refers the state of equal access to resources and opportunities regardless of gender, which can affect economic participation and decision-making. It can also be defined as equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women and men, girls and boys. This does not mean that women and men will become the same but that their rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female (UN Women). This equality must touch all aspect of human life. Take for instance, in economic equality, both men and women must have access to professional work and career. Also, political equality, that is, they must have equal rights to vote and be voted for. Social equality, all gender should have freedom from gender-based violence and discrimination. Finally, they must have equal access to education and this will allow them to pursue academic interest and opportunities without bias.

Gender equality, in a nutshell, is generally pursued to reduce to the barest minimum, gender-based discrimination in all areas of life. This will enable both genders to make use of their potential and contribute their quota to the development of the societies. Right away from the creation, man and woman are co-equals, a commonwealth of equal partners. Equality is a fundamental goal and essential characteristic of social association for nation building. In the ancient period in Yorubaland, the position of women was not at the back seat, for their leaders believed in the fundamental power of women in shaping the society and by so doing, involving them in the implementation and process to actualize gender equality, justice and sustainable development.

3. Methods

The research employed thematic methods as its analytical approach to examine Yoruba women's activism across different historical periods and contexts. This methodological framework involved identifying and analyzing recurring patterns and themes related to women's roles, achievements, and activist activities from ancient times through post-colonial Nigeria. The thematic approach enabled the researchers to systematically categorize and interpret various aspects of women's activism, including political participation, traditional leadership, social justice advocacy, economic empowerment, and the use of both traditional institutions and modern platforms. Through this method, the study was able to trace the evolution of women's positions in Yoruba society and establish connections between historical precedents and contemporary gender equality movements, ultimately demonstrating how women's activism has served as a catalyst for development in Yoruba land and Nigeria at large.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Women Activism in the Global World

Women as agents of change and mothers of the nation had paid a supreme sacrifice for their people, societies and the nation at large. In the whole universe, women contributions in all facets of life cannot be underestimated, when it comes to the following aspects, biological, social upbringing of children. The high standard of women be it in politics, social, economic and the likes will dictate the final standard of the whole world (Fasiku, 2023). Starting from when women have been integrated into the development processes especially in all developing world, they have been contributing their quota in overall development, yet they are still underrepresented when looking at the political activism of the nation and when compared with the number of men in politics.

Many of our women all over the world are legendary, women of valour, of unique personality and patriotic in all their capacity. Globally, we have some notable women activists, who have done great exploits to fight for women and the girl-child in all facets of life. Among these global notable women activists are:

- 1) Malala Yousafzai from the country of Pakistan who advocated for the education of girl child to bring to a close, the wider gap between the education of male child and girl child (Yousafzai & Lamb, 2016)
- 2) Wangari Maathai, the founder of the Green Belt Movement, is recognized as the first African woman to win the Nobel Peace Prize. She played a pivotal role in environmental activism and empowering women through sustainable development (Maathai, 2006)
- 3) Gill & Orgad (2018) reveal that Tarana from the United States works assiduously to highlight and combat sexual harassment and assault.
- 4) On the other hand, Emmeline (1914) created a movement that helped women of the time to gain right to vote during electioneering in their country.
- 5) Another woman is Steinem from the United States, a journalist and social, political activist, who is well known when it comes to issues of feminist emancipation (Steinem, 2015).
- 6) Adichie from Nigeria is a prominent woman who authored some books and advocates on feminism that centres on gender equality and women identity in the society (Adichie, 2014).

All these and many more, just to mention a few, have made significant impacts in various angles to affect women's lives in some areas like education, peace-making, gender equality and human rights.

4.2. Areas Explored in Women Activism

Women activism has diverse approaches and consists of collective efforts to achieve gender equality and social justice. It has contributed significantly in shaping societies, advocating for systemic changes, and empowering women worldwide. Concerning women activism and gender equality, women activism plays a crucial role in the actualization of gender equality in Yorubaland by addressing systemic economic and political empowerment. The following are the major advantages.

First is increased political participation. Women activists push for increased representation of women in political offices, ensuring that women's voices are heard in decision-making processes, and also help women in participating in politics and promote gender equality as they protect women's rights. Second is economic empowerment. Activism helps women gain better access to economic resources such as credit training, and job

opportunities thereby reducing the gender gap in economic participation through it, they often provide support and advocacy for women entrepreneur, which assist them to contribute to the country economy.

Third is promotion of girl's education. One of the major achievements of women activists is Girls Child Education, they focus on the importance of education for girls, advocating for policies and initiatives that ensure equal educational opportunities. Fourth is legal reforms and protection. They work to change discriminatory laws and policies, ensuring that women have equal rights and protection under the law. Fifth is social and cultural change. Activism in women challenges traditional gender roles and promotes more equitable social norms and values which allow them to gain confidence and empowerment.

Sixth is intersectionality. There are intersecting factors that affect women in Yorubaland. These intersecting factors include race, class, sexuality, and ability. Women Activism addresses these intersecting factors, dealing with the challenges marginalized groups within the women's movement face as regards them. Seventh is health and wellbeing. Women activists advocate for better health care services among women especially in the areas of maternal health and reproductive rights. Eighth is building solidarity and networks, it is another function performed by activism.

4.3. Women Activism in Yorubaland

Women Activism in Yorubaland has a rich history, with women playing significant roles in promoting social change advocating for their rights and contributing to the development of their communities. Pre-colonial era Yoruba women played important roles in traditional society such as, in trade, helping their husbands in the farm and governance. During colonial period, the introduction of colonial rule and western values led to a decline in women's status and rights. In the post-colonial period, the Yoruba women activism has continued to evolve with women advocating for their rights and empowerment through protest publicly to create awareness and ask for change.

During the colonial period, n have some notable women activists among which are Funmilayo Ransome Kuti, she was a pioneer activist who founded the Abeokuta Women's Union (AWU) to fight against unfair taxes and advocate for women's rights. Another woman activist was Madam Efunroye Tinubu who wielded and influenced her community and advocated for women's rights. Efunsetan Aniwura, a legendary Iyalode of Ibadan, was known for her leadership and bravery. Women like Queen Moremi of Ile-Ife, was known for her bravery in her time.

Further, Elizabeth Adekogbe was also known for her leading role in the women's protests against unfair taxes in 1953. Her activism brought women together from different ethnic groups to stand against colonial rule. Chief (Mrs) Alimotu Pelewura was a leader within the Lagos Market Women's Association, and advocated for the economic independence of Nigeria women. All these women have played some significant roles in shaping the history and culture of Yorubaland and their contributions continue to inspire and empower women today. We have others like, Adetoun Ademiluyi from Ijebu Ode, Ladi Omo Osagie from Ondo, Erelu Bisi Fayemi from Ekiti State, Adebisi Akande from Osun State.

4.4. Women Activism in Yorubaland and Gender Equality

Women activism in Yorubaland and plays a crucial role in advocating for gender equality and this cuts across social, political and economic spheres and is driven by both historical and contemporary figures and movement. In the pre-colonial Yoruba Societies, women like Moremi of Ile-Ife took courageous step to deliver her people from external aggression and she is still being recognized until this day, she held this powerful position, sacrificing her only son

for the love of his people. Efunsetan Aniwura of Ibadan also demonstrated women's capabilities in leadership and governance and in her days, she was economically buoyant and this gave her power. Also in Yoruba kingdoms chronicles, we have some women as paramount traditional rulers such as Luwo Gbagada was a woman Ooni in ancient Ile-Ife while Orompoto was a woman Alaafin in ancient Oyo kingdom (Denzer, 1994). Some of them also occupied chieftaincy titles and played some significant roles in decision-making process and advisory roles. Another reputable woman in Yoruba land is Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti, she was one of the women that fought for women's rights, social justice, and political representation during her time, to be specific Funmilayo-Kuti played a significant role in the Abeokuta Women's Union, which opposed unfair taxation and colonial policies (Mba, 1982). Through the activities of women during the time in Yorubaland such as the Nigerian women's trust fund and the women Advocates Research and Documentation center (WARDC), work to empower women and promote gender equality through research; advocacy and capacity building (Oy  w  m  , 1997).

Women in the past were key custodians of cultural heritage, preserving traditions, oral histories, and customs. They played vital roles in Yoruba routines, such as rituals, ceremonies, and festivals. Madam Tinubu, a prominent businesswoman and political leader in Lagos and Abeokuta, is an example of a woman who used her wealth and acumen to exert significant influence in the political affairs of her community (Falola & Heaton, 2008). Another figure among women that is very active when it comes to women activism is Erelu Bisi Fayemi, former First Lady of Ekiti State, a very prominent gender advocate who co-founded the African Women's Development Fund (AWDF) and supports women's right organizations across Africa. She was instrumental in promoting policies that protect women's rights and address gender-based violence in Ekiti State. She has really worked on women's rights and empowerment in terms of legislative framework for women emancipation and equality. She sponsored some bills that affected women and the girl-child in Ekiti State House of Assembly as First Lady to enhance women and girl-child value (Adeleye-Fayemi, 2020).

Other notable women activists who have made significant impact to human rights, legal advocacy for women and girls include; Abiola Akiyode-Afolabi, Hafs  t Abiola-Costello, Jumoke Akinjide, Princess Ademola. Deserving a special mention, is Joe Okei-Odumakin whose activism efforts encompasses advocating for gender equality, social justice and economic empowerment and political participation.

4.5. Gender Equality in Yorubaland

In Yorubaland, Gender equality is not totally strange, each gender has their assigned roles in the effective governance of the cultural society. Women in Yorubaland have historically played dynamic roles in both public and private spheres, they have leveraged cultural influence, grassroots mobilization and political engagement to advocate for gender justice, and these have served as powerful catalysts for gender equality across the region. There had been women-Obas like Ooni Luwo Gbagada, Alaafin Orompoto woman generalissimo, Moremi Ajasoro and Efunsetan Aniwura. It is crystal clear that Yoruba women were never passive when it comes to the issue of injustice, and other things that affects women.

In their activities, they organized protest which led to women associations, and formed coalition with other groups of related interest to demand equal rights and representation. Take for instance, the Abeokuta Women's Revolt of 1947-1949, this finally formed the basis of women participation in modern political parties and governance such as serving as councilors, lawmakers and commissioners. They also played some roles in the areas of education especially that of Girl child, women empowerment, engaged in traditional and religious institutions with all these, there are still challenges such as patriarchal resistance and

backlash, cultural norms that limit women's autonomy, male dominance through religious interpretation.

In a nutshell, Women Activism in Yorubaland is a formidable force for gender equality, in that, there are legal reforms about law on domestic violence and inheritance rights, awareness of women's rights, empowerment of women in politics, business and education, and reduction in harmful traditional practices such as widowhood rites, forced marriage. The activities of activists in the past in Nigeria right from the pre-colonial days till today in Nigeria has formed a very major part in the history of the country. These have served as catalyst to gender equality in the Southwestern part of the country called Yorubaland. This is by providing historical precedents, mobilizing communities, and influencing contemporary social and political movements. The activities gave way to historical precedents and role models, whatever happened today becomes history tomorrow. Some of our women leaders and activists have legacies as influential Yoruba women and their action serve as role models, their efforts in leading protest and advocating for women's education and political participation inspire current and future generation.

One of the key ways activism has contributed to gender equality is through demonstrating the effectiveness of grassroots mobilization in challenging entrenched social norms and advocating for women's rights. Women's groups and community organizations have made significant strides in areas such as education, healthcare, and political representation. The successes of past campaigns in altering discriminatory laws and policies have laid the groundwork for ongoing advocacy efforts and legal reforms that continue to promote gender equality. These historical achievements provide a foundation that contemporary activists can leverage to secure further legal protections for women.

The educational campaigns by the past activists laid great emphasis on the importance of education in achieving gender equality in continuing to advocate for girls education and raising awareness about gender issues and this confronts the persistent challenge, gender biases, and therefore, empowers women and girl child in Yorubaland (Oyèwùmí, 1997). It has assisted to dismantle harmful gender norms and promote a more egalitarian society and finally by continuing to build and strengthen these networks of gender equality.

4.6. Effects of Yoruba Women Activism among the Yoruba

In Yorubaland, women activists have contributed immensely in the areas, social, political, cultural and economic to the development of the society, the Southwestern part of the country and the country as a whole and this has affected the lives of women and the whole society positively. The contributions of Yoruba women activists span several critical areas that have significantly transformed women's status in society. In terms of political participation and leadership among women in the Yoruba communities, their activities have given way for more women representatives in politics and political leadership positions (Denzer, 1994).

Regarding women's rights and social reforms, the activities of women activists in Yorubaland have assisted a lot in the area of women's rights, encompassing women education, marriage right, social equality among others and this has generally boosted the women awareness on political issues, legal reforms empowerment in the society and these are attributed to the contribution of Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti (Johnson-Odim & Mba, 1997).

In the area of economic empowerment, Yoruba women activists have played very vital roles in making sure that women have access to resources, take part in training and adequate facilities through their initiatives that will enhance their economic empowerment, entrepreneurship and financial stability. The contribution of Alhaja Abibatu Mogaji as a market leader and women activist was cardinal. Furthermore, education and literacy represent a very prominent role that women activism in Yorubaland play among women and girls child.

This has led to increased enrollment of girl child in the elementary schools and thus reduced illiteracy among Yoruba women. Among the key figures was Efunsetan Aniwura, who was a successful business woman in Ibadan who also had passion for women's education and entrepreneurship during her time (Falola & Heaton, 2008).

Adeleye-Fayemi (2020) sees health and welfare of women and girl child as very important, she advocates for their right, supported bill that was majorly on women health, welfare, maternal health, gender-based violence during their administration as wife of Ekiti State Governor. She fought on behalf of girl-child that happened to be pregnant in the secondary school not to drop out of school but be allowed to continue with her schooling and give birth to the child and this has to a greater extent reduced the number of drop outs among secondary school girls. She has zero tolerance for gender-based violence especially violence between husband and wife. Women activism activities have also served as an eye opener to new generation of women to come out from their shell and participate massively in national issues. Also, all these activities have given room to the fading away of the erroneous belief that women should not be heard in the society.

4.7. The 35 Percent Affirmative Action for Women in Nigeria

In Yorubaland, women have historically played dynamic roles in both public and private spheres challenging gender norms and asserting their rights through various forms of activism. Right from pre-colonial times to the present day, Yoruba women have leveraged cultural influence, grassroots mobilization and political engagement to advocate for gender justice. With Nigeria's adoption of the 35% Affirmative Action Policy for women's representation in political and decision-making spaces, there are significant implications for Yoruba women in realizing equitable participation and influence. With the 35% Affirmative Action target; there is a policy backed opportunity for Yoruba women to increase their presence in leadership positions, hold public offices and influence policy making. Women activism in Yorubaland has helped the 35% Affirmative Action Policy.

Women Activism in Yorubaland is a formidable force for gender equality and the 35% Affirmative Action Policy serve as a catalyst to deepen this progress. Through historical resilience, modern tools and collective strength, Yoruba women are strategically positioned to challenge systemic inequalities. The 35% Affirmative Action Policy in Nigeria, which advocates that at least 35% of all positions in political, public service and decision-making space be reserved for women, has had influence on Women Activism in Yorubaland, take for instance, women in Lagos, Ekiti, Oyo, Osun and Ondo have increasingly taken part in local council, state assembly and even national elections, often citing the 35% benchmark in their campaigns, student unions and youth movements now have more women leaders than before, especially in Yoruba-dominated institutions, women were included in traditional councils and chieftaincy increases in women societies.

Moreover, gender issue has remained topical among people in the recent times in Nigeria. The clamour for more equitable distributions of positions to favour the women folk has led to the thirty five percent affirmative programme which seeks to allot thirty five percent of elective positions for women in the National Assembly. Women are still underrepresented in leadership position across various sectors, though there has been gradual improvement (Sandberg, 2015) and inspite of being entirely circumscribed by their counterparts, some women activists in Nigeria still engaged in vigorous struggles against the infringement of their interest and those of their communities (Fasiku, 2023).

The content of a policy or advocacy for 35% women's representation in Yorubaland would focus on increasing the participation and influence of women in various sectors, particularly in political, economic and social arenas. The goal aligns with broader gender

equality initiatives and aiming to ensure that women have a significant and equitable role in decision-making processes. This policy is to ensure that at least 35% of all political position at local, state and federal levels are occupied by women. Also to enact law and regulation mandatory 35% representation of women in all elected and appointed political offices.

4.8. Obstacles to Women Activism and Gender Equality in Yorubaland

Until issues regarding women are possibly resolved, cogent development may not be assured under roles based on old belief that culture can only rationalize gender inequality. These are on the basis of activism by women to ensure that women are given their due in the society that is traditionally patriarchal in nature. Women have been weakened for long in our traditional society in that (1) from their childhood as girls, they are prepared for subservient roles through female circumcision (2) They are meant to abandon their maiden name. When they are married, they lose power and compelled to be subordinate to their husband. (3) Some roles are seen as feminine in nature like cooking of food, taking care of house, remaining shy and silent, and in some places, could only talk by the permission of their husband (Falola & Heaton, 2008).

The idea of man as the “breadwinner” permeated in the society while women are confined to lesser occupation. Women have always been discriminated against, often justified by cultural practices and established traditions. A lot of decisions are taken by men on their behalf even when such decisions are against their interest, comfort and well-being. These have no doubt ignited the resolve for women activism. Men will assuage the feeling of women by reshaping their life and orientation to respect women and accept equality, democratize household spaces and treat women not as sex object but as human being with individual destinies (Falola, 2018). Be it at the local or global levels, women have been affected in various ways by changing cultures, either traditional or modern, they have been discriminated against, often justified by cultural practices and established tradition. Men tend to make choices for them, where they live, what they do, choice of career and level of education. Millions of poor women continue to work in lowly paid jobs, performing hard domestic chores. Those that can combine everything like great occupations, great household management, manage politics of dual membership are referred to as “super women” (Falola & Heaton, 2008).

4.9. Challenges to Women Activism in Yorubaland

Women activism and the pursuit of gender equality in Nigeria generally face a number of challenges. These challenges hinder the progress of women's rights and equality across various sectors. These challenges range from cultural and societal norms, political and legal barriers, economic disempowerment, violence and harassment, lack of solidarity and support networks, and inadequate representation in decision-making.

4.10. Practical ways to overcome the obstacles to women activism in Yorubaland

In order to overcome the obstacles to women activism activities in Yorubaland, efforts shall be taken to look into the following areas; education, cultural, political, social and economic. Gender sensitive education and awareness, empowerment through economic independence, inclusion in traditional and religious structures, capacity building for women activists, access to the use of media and technology, political will and party reform. Lastly, women must possess educating minds, empowering hands, reforming systems and unifying voices among themselves.

5. Conclusion

Women's activism in Yorubaland has played a pivotal role in challenging gender inequality and advocating for the empowerment of women. From the early resistance movements led by iconic figures such as Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti to contemporary grassroots campaigns, Yoruba women have consistently used their activism to confront entrenched patriarchal structures. Efforts have been made in this paper to show that women activism has been part of governance in Yorubaland. Its importance has been felt in various areas of its contributions, politically and economically. Women have stood against oppressive systems, marginalization, campaigned for civil rights and achieved significant legislative changes. This has equipped women and enhanced their worth. Women are now better positioned to confront challenges that could inhibit the needed progress in their emancipation.

The evolving nature of women's activism in Yorubaland, particularly with the advent of digital platforms, reflects the dynamic nature of gender advocacy in the contemporary era. The shift toward digital activism has expanded the reach and impact of women's movements, fostering both local and global solidarities that continue to drive social change. This transformation highlights the need for sustained efforts to address the multifaceted challenges women face in Yorubaland and beyond. As women continue to challenge both historical and modern forms of gender oppression, their activism remains a powerful catalyst for the ongoing pursuit of gender equality in Nigeria.

Women activism has come to stay and must be improved upon. This paper recommends that comprehensive education on gender equality and women's rights from an early age should be advanced to foster a culture of respect and inclusivity. This will enhance the contributions women activists and further position the upcoming generation of young women activists. There should be constant review of legal instruments to put in place workable legal framework, detailing rules and policies that overtly entrench women rights on all fronts. The enactment and enforcement of laws by the government that protect women's rights, ensure equal opportunities, and address issues such as gender-based violence, workplace discrimination, and reproductive rights.

Women should be more involved in collaborative efforts to combat the issue of finances. NGOs, both nationally and internationally, whose purview favours human rights should be collaborated with. Also, there should be provision of funding and resources to women-led organizations and initiatives that advance gender equality and support women activists. Institutional mechanisms should be established to ensure women's participation in decision-making processes at all levels. The diverse experiences and challenges faced by women from different backgrounds should be recognized and addressed, including those based on race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and sexual orientation. Policies and activism efforts should be inclusive and intersectional to effectively support all women.

Advocacy and awareness programs should be organized to enhance women understanding of leadership roles in activism, politics, and other sectors. Women should be encouraged to take on leadership positions which will amplify their voices and influence. International cooperation and exchange of best practices among women activists and organizations worldwide should be promoted. Global solidarity can strengthen the movement and address transnational issues affecting women. Lastly, there should be fair and accurate representation of women activists in the media. Their achievements and struggles should be highlighted to inspire others and counteract stereotypes. By implementing these recommendations, societies can build on the progress made by women activists and continue to advance towards gender equality and social justice.

6. References

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