



The Role of Some Selected Notable Northern Nigerian First Ladies Towards Human Development and Woman Emancipation in Nigeria

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Abstract. This study analysed the activities of some selected prominent first ladies in northern Nigeria and how they impacted on the lives of the needy within the societies around them and beyond. The paper focused on the activities of their pet projects which served as a means of providing development projects through fund raising from public and private institutions. The funds realised was geared towards human development and capacity building to empower the communities and societies around them. The paper analysed both primary and secondary sources of data in order to extract reliable information for the purpose of this study. Through the exercise of their influence, First Ladies have been able to establish pet projects with funds raised from public institutions, corporate organisations and international donor agencies. In the light of this, the paper studies the efforts of first Ladies which have contributed significantly to human development index of the target group and has provided strategic platform for women mobilization and consciousness in public affairs.

1. Introduction

In Nigeria, the western styles or of American constitutional government was adopted at independence with Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, as the first indigenous president of the country, and since then, the tradition of referring to the wife of the President, Governor or Head of State as the First Lady started. Every Nigerian president or Governor's wife has contributed to the success of her husband while in the highly esteemed and exalted office. Nigeria feature prominently in UN programmes for women. This

was more so during and after the Beijing Conference. Furthermore, global blueprint toward women advancement in the UN documents, such as the covenant on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women (CEDAW), the covenant on the right of the child and the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) and many others challenged the Nigerian First Ladies and other women to action. The term First Lady is not an official title nor comparable, for example with any of the royal designations used in Europe, Asia, Africa or the Middle East. However, the genesis of the title remains a point of contention with competing items and arguments around its development. The fact is that there is no place in any of the Nigerian constitution where the role or functions of the wife or chief executive has been mentioned.

The oppression of women cuts across all fields of human endeavour. Women's fundamental rights and freedoms have been limited by several socio-economic and political factors. As a result, women play second fiddle to men and have been relegated to the background even in issues that directly affects them. Nigerian women did not fare better during civilian rule. The post-independence regimes have failed to jettison the gendered legacy inherited from the imperial powers. The overall development of Nigerian women had been hindered and frustrated by many years of military rule and dictatorship and the quest for gender equality became a global aspiration. These assertions are instrumental to the development programmes established by Nigerian First Ladies.

Historically, the term First Lady originated in the United States of America in 1789. The term was first used by United States President Zachary Taylor (1849 – 1850) when he called Dolley Masidon First Lady at her state funeral while reciting a eulogy written by him. Although the title of first lady started in the United States, it did not come into general use until much later towards the end of the 19th century. This has become a practice in many other nations and government all over the world including Nigeria. In a non political situation, the term first lady is bestowed as a term of endearment to women who have proved to be of exceptional talent. For example Ella Fitzgerald as first lady of song, Aretha Franklin as the first lady of American soul and Helen Hayes as the first lady of American state. Below is the biographical profile and influence of some selected notable Northern first ladies in Nigeria.

2. Lami Abubakar

Justice Fati Lami Abubakar was born on the 12th of April 1951 in Minna to the family of a District Officer, Alhaji Balarabe Umaru Audi, an Oxford trained aristocrat who for more than 20 years held the traditional title of Wazirin Minna. Her mother Nana Asmau is the second wife of her father. At the age of six she was taken to St. Anne's primary school, a boarding school in Kaduna where she obtain her primary school certificate in 1965. In the same year, she was given admission into Queen Elizabeth Secondary School, Ilorin where she took her school certificate Examination before proceeding in 1970, to the Federal Government College, Sokoto, for the higher school certificate between 1970 and 1971. She obtained her law degree in 1972 from the University of Ife and was called to the bar in 1976.

In 1999, Abdulsalami Abubakar assumed office after the demise of Gen. Sani Abacha, his wife Hon. Justice Fati Abubakar established a Non-Governmental organization known as Women's Right Advancement and Protection Alternative (WRAPA) in April 1999. The programme was established against the backdrop of several unequal provisions for women in educational and economic opportunities, discriminatory laws for men and women high prevalence practices of negative cultural practices, gender based violence and poor representation in decision making structures. In particular WRAPA has been protecting the human rights of women through legal channels as provided in national laws, policies, regional and international treaties and agreements. The programme was designed for the advocacy, mobilisation, promotion

and protection of women's rights. The services of WRAPA include:

- Education, enlightenment and advocacy on women's rights,
- Legal aid and counselling to women on civil rights, inheritance, assault, rape, divorce/separation, custody of children and legal instruments,
- Free vocational skills training to increase women's income and self-reliance,
- Free reconciliation and social counselling for families,
- Free adult literacy and civil education for women.

In general, the core objectives of WRAPA was geared towards the promotion of social justice and the mobilization, empowerment and sensitization of women about their plights, the elimination of all forms of repugnant practices as well as violence against women and the enhancement of their living standards. However, WRAPA was short lived as the regime handed over power to a democratic administration, soon after it was founded in 1999.

3. Hajiya Turai Yar'Adua

Hajiua Turai Umaru Musa Yar'Adua's early life began in Garama, a closely-knit community in Katsina state of Nigeria. She was born on 26th July, 1957. She had her primary education at Garama primary school in Katsina and spent her formative years at the Government Girls Secondary School, Kankiya. She later enrolled at the College of Arts, Science and Technology in Zaria, where she reportedly emerged as the best student in 1980. She obtained a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Hausa from Ahmadu Bello University Zaria, in 1983. Turai was the only Nigerian first lady to have served as a state First lady for eight years before becoming a Nigerian First Lady.

When former president Umaru Musa Yar'Adua assume power in 2007, his wife Hajiya Turai in 2008 founded the Women and Youth Empowerment Foundation, with a focus on health. WAYEF health interventions are in five broad categories:

- The vision project aimed at reducing cataract and childhood blindness,
- Maternal and New born Health improvement programme,
- Screening programme for breast and cervical cancer,
- HIV/AIDS and STDs intervention programme,

- Diabetes awareness and education programme.

Hajiya Turai also carried out projects that alleviate the sufferings of the needy and the underprivileged. Such projects include the rehabilitation of the Katsina Vesico Vaginal Fistula (VVF) centre, donation of grinding machines to the people of Sarkin pawa village in Bwari Area Council of Abuja to enable the women to begin petty businesses for self-reliance. In the pursuit of women emancipation and the development of the girl-child, Turai launched the National Coalition of Women Against HIV/AIDS. In association with UNICEF, she established the country's Girls' Education Initiative.

4. Hajiya Amina Ibrahim Shekarau

Hajiya Amina was born in Durumin Zungura Quarters, Kano on June 11, 1968. She displayed her educational ambition early enough. Consequently, between 1974 and 1980, she had completed the old Kurmawa primary school, between 1980 and 1985. She accomplished a Secondary School career successfully in the famous Government Girls Secondary School, Jogana, Kano between 1985 and 1989, she was an eligible student of midwifery school, Kano and between 2001 and 2003 she was a bonafide student of the School of Nursing Kano. Since the inception of the Shekarau administration in order to improve the lives of women, youths and children and make them self-reliant, and her subsequent appointment as the Ambassador gender, water, sanitation and sustainable agriculture, she has made a lot of interventions to assist women and make their lives better:

- Provision of complete motorized horehold with two overhead tanks and small extension of pipe for irrigation at demonstration farm at Malaki Kwanar Dawaki D/Kudu Local Government in order to assist women farmers.
- provision of soft loan to registered women rice par boilers cooperative societies for sustainable agriculture and self-reliance.
- championing the crusade of assisting women living with HIV/AIDS in Kano state by giving them empowerment equipment like sewing, knitting and grading machines, in order to make themselves reliant.
- organized workshop for women, youth and stake holders in the Gender and Water alliance projects.
- She has championed the course of girl-child education by returning and sponsoring many girls back to school.

- She has represented the state in and outside Nigeria on issues that affect women, youth and children.

5. Hajiya Saratu Mahmud Aliyu Shinkafi

Hajiya Saratu was born in Shinkafi, to Alhaji Nuhu Shinkafi and Hajiya Balkisu Nuhu. She started her education by attending Quranic school at the age of three and later on commenced her western education. Hajiya Saratu was the former fist lady of Zamfara state, a position she carries with humility. At the inception of the 5th Republic, on April 14th 2007, her husband, Alh. Mahmud Aliyu Shinkafi (Dallatun Zamfara) was elected the 2nd Executive Governor of Zamfara state, Hajiya Saratu assumed the office of the first lady of Zamfara state. She was chairperson of the female education board as well as the Senior Special Assistant to His Excellency on women and children Affairs in the state.

Hajiya Saratu became the founder and initiator of Smart Initiative of Women Empowerment Foundation (SIWEF). The foundation as meant to improve the advancement of the socio-economic and educational base of women and children in Zamfara state. She has focused on major key areas through her pet project (SIWEF):

- Women empowerment
- Combating HIV/AIDS/Malaria pandemic
- Improving maternal health.
- Youth Empowerment
- Initiating Global partnership for Development.

As First Lady of Zamfara state, she was able to achieve the following for the betterment of girls and women in her state:

- Commissioning of the newly constructed VVF rehabilitation centre in Farida General Hospital, Gusau in collaboration with USAID, ACQUIRE/FISTULA SYNGENTA on 19th February, 2008.
- VVF patients within and outside the state are treated free of charge.
- Distribution of maternity packages and drugs to pregnant and nursing mothers in order to reduce the maternal and child mortality in the state in June, 2008.
- Launching and distribution of free drugs service scheme to all health centres in the state to assist women and children on 3rd February 2009.
- Distribution of school clinic facilities to Senior Girls Secondary Schools in the state on 3rd July 2008.

- More girls secondary schools have been established increasing from 37 to 47. These include Girls local primary schools, Government Junior Girls Secondary Schools, Senior Secondary Schools for Girls and School for continuing Education for women inclusive.
- Disbursement of loans to women for economic empowerment, June 2008.
- Donated sewing machines to skills acquisition centre, Gada biyu.

Finally an office was opened for women politicians in the state, the first time in the history of the state on October, 2007. The office of the first lady in collaboration with the Ministry for women and children Affairs sponsored six women to an International workshop in Accra, Ghana in order to enlighten women to participate in politics.

6. Hajiya Amina Namadi Sambo

Hajiya Amina Namadi Sambo is yet another northern Nigerian First Lady who cannot be ignored because of her selfless service to the assistant and empowerment of women in her state. Hajiya Amina was born into the respectable and industrious family of Mallam Abdullahi Abubakar Lukat and Hajiya Huwaila in the ancient city of Kano.

Hajiya Amina was the founder/chairperson I Care Women and Youth Initiative, a Non-Governmental Organization which was aimed at improving the lives of women, youth and the less privileged members of the society.

Under I Care – Women and Youth Initiative and as the mother of the state, she has contributed immensely to the upliftment of lives of the target group through her empowerment programmes. Under her foundation about 500 women and youth have been trained in computer and vocational skills, with another 140 women and youth given grants and micro-credit facilities. Hajiya Amina has also contributed to healthcare service delivery of the state government by providing free medical care to pregnant women and children under 5 years old.

Hajiya Amina has also donated free drugs to 30 primary health clinics and hospitals across the state. About 100 persons, were also provided free acupuncture. Free cataract surgery for 576 persons, poverty alleviation items to 150 individuals and groups were also provided.

In the area of education, Hajiya Amina distributed free exercise books to selected primary schools. She has also built three primary schools in her quest to make education acceptable to the poor especially the girl child. Hajiya Amina is also a strong advocate of the fight against Gender Based Violence, as she has collaborated with the international federation of women lawyers FIDA, Kaduna state branch to ensure that offenders are properly prosecuted.

7. Hajiya Zahra’u Ibrahim Saminu Turaki

Hajiya Zahra’u Ibrahim Saminu Turaki was born on Friday 28th April, 1972 in the ancient city of Kano to the late Alhaji Umar Nayawale Idris one of the first chartered accountants in Northern Nigeria, son of Mallam Idris Saudamu, a well-known Islamic teacher in Daura and Hajiya Ummul Bashiri Imam, daughter of the renowned scholar, late Dr. Abubakar Imam.

Hajiya Zahra’u attended Adrao International School Lagos from 1979 to 1982 and proceeded to the Federal Government Girls’ College Bakori, Katsina state in 1983. She gained admission into the Ahmadu Bello University (ABU) Zaria and graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree in 1997. During the course of her study, she got married to Alhaji Ibrahim Saminu Turaki.

She became the first lady of Jigawa state when her husband Alhaji Ibrahim Saminu won the gubernatorial election in 1999 and was sworn into office as the Second civilian Governor of Jigawa state. As the wife of the Executive Governor of Jigawa state, she has dedicated her time fully to the service of humanity, in particular to women and children. Her Excellency’s special interest in education gave birth to her project called the Rural Education Foundation (REF). The foundation focuses mainly on providing western and Islamic education to the rural women and children. No doubt her Excellency through her philanthropic services has been a pillar and the light at the end of the tunnel to the rural populace, which earned her the name “MUJAHIDA” meaning one who strives for a particular cause, in this instance for the less privileged. The services of her foundation include:

- Educating women and children.
- Skill acquisition for women.
- Rehabilitation of orphans.
- Medical and health assistance to women and children.
- Humanitarian services to women and children.
- General assistance to communities where the need arises.

8. Hajiya Asmau Ahmed Makarfi

Hajiya Asmau was born on the 13th of September, 1972 in Kaduna. She was born into the family of Ambassador Magaji Mohammed, a seasoned civil servant, administrator, politician and one time minister of Industries. She began her primary education in 1977 at the outstanding capital school Kaduna. In 1983, she gained admission into Queen Amina College Kaduna, the imperial northern version of Queen's College. In 1989 she proceeded to the Premier Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria where she undertook a Diploma course in Banking and Finance and subsequently a Bachelor of Science Degree in Accounting and Finance in 1997.

Even before Hajiya Asmau could complete her degree programme, she got married to Alhaji Ahmed Makarfi, the Executive Governor of Kaduna state. Her status as a wife of a state Governor provided a springboard for the manifestation of inner most qualities of Mrs Asmau and for the assumption of the role of a chosen one. The opportunity led to the formation of a project entitled "The Millennium Hope Programme".

The Millennium Hope Programme is the personal philosophies, vision and aspirations of Mrs Asmau who seeks to protect the fundamental rights of children in need of special protection measures and other less privileged children and rural women. The first of its kind in scope and magnitude in northern Nigeria. The Millennium Hope Programme has ten established educational and educational centres across Kaduna state. The project has enrolled a total of over 5,000 children for absolutely free training and feeding.

The programme's cardinal objective was improving the living standard of the less privileged in Kanuna state. Its central focus is children, youths, widows, school dropouts and a category of street children commonly known in Northern Nigeria as the Almajirai. The programme also embraces women as a category of its target group. The whole aim is to address the millennial challenges affecting children, women and the less privileged as vulnerable categories in the society. Mrs Asmau had for many years been disturbed by the spectacle of street children who infested Kaduna city and other towns of the state. On account of its persistence, the menace of street children became glaring and permanent eyesore, particularly in Kaduna metropolis and environs.

The nature and peculiarity of Kaduna state necessitated the mapping out of the millennium Hope into three major components, which include:

- Functional education for the teenage and adolescent girl-child.
- Women empowerment.
- Children in need of special protection measures particularly the Almajirai and others in similar circumstances.

9. Conclusion

Conclusively, the role of some selected notable northern first ladies towards development and women emancipation in Nigeria evaluates the various means and categories of activities which encapsulates all aspects of development in enhancing the lives of the underdeveloped society within the northern hemisphere and how it gave succour to the those in need.

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