Religions and Development
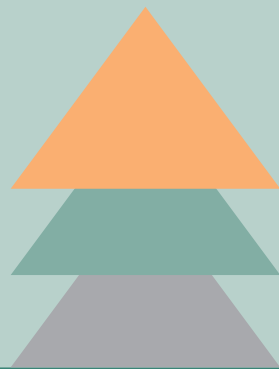## Research Programme

A Review of Literature on the Role of Religion in Women's Movements for Social Change in Nigeria

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Religions and Development

Research Programme

The Religions and Development Research Programme Consortium is an international research partnership that is exploring the relationships between several major world religions, development in low-income countries and poverty reduction. The programme is comprised of a series of comparative research projects that are addressing the following questions:

- How do religious values and beliefs drive the actions and interactions of individuals and faith-based organisations?
- How do religious values and beliefs and religious organisations influence the relationships between states and societies?
- In what ways do faith communities interact with development actors and what are the outcomes with respect to the achievement of development goals?

The research aims to provide knowledge and tools to enable dialogue between development partners and contribute to the achievement of development goals. We believe that our role as researchers is not to make judgements about the truth or desirability of particular values or beliefs, nor is it to urge a greater or lesser role for religion in achieving development objectives. Instead, our aim is to produce systematic and reliable knowledge and better understanding of the social world.

The research focuses on four countries (India, Pakistan, Nigeria and Tanzania), enabling the research team to study most of the major world religions: Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism, Buddhism and African traditional belief systems. The research projects will compare two or more of the focus countries, regions within the countries, different religious traditions and selected development activities and policies.

The consortium consists of six research partner organisations, each of which is working with other researchers in the four focus countries:

- University of Birmingham, UK: International Development Department, Department of Theology and Religion, Centre for West African Studies, Centre for the Study of Global Ethics.
- University of Bath, UK: Centre for Development Studies.
- Indian Institute of Dalit Studies, New Delhi.
- Nigerian Institute of Social and Economic Research, Ibadan.
- University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.
- Lahore University of Management Sciences, Pakistan.

In addition to the research partners, links have been forged with non-academic and non-government bodies, including Islamic Relief.

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Key words: women's rights, gender, women's organizations, Nigeria, women's movement, religion

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Summary

This review of literature examines the existence, nature and workings of women in movement for social change in Nigeria. It situates women's organizing for social change in a country context where religion and politics are deeply intertwined in public and private life. The right to religious freedom and practice are enshrined in the 1999 Constitution and the multi-religious, multi-ethnic character of Nigeria is vociferously upheld in all facets of public policy and administration. Consequently, religion and ethnicity are sites of intense contestation over political power and economic resources. In relation to social movements, religion serves as a framework for community identity, belonging and organizing, particularly for women who are regarded as the custodians of religion and culture. Thus, there exists in Nigeria a plethora of women's groups mobilizing around common interests for social change.

However, the review of literature reveals that women's organizing is splintered, multi-dimensional and conflicting; it is based on fragmented identities and competing interests mediated by ethnicity, religion and socioeconomic status. Because of the lack of a central, coherent, clear-cut feminist agenda for social change, some have argued that there is no women's movement in Nigeria. However, others point to the existence of common interests around which secular women and women of faith have united at both State and federal levels to promote specific change agendas. Two of these are highlighted in this literature review, namely the Anambra State campaign for legal reform of harmful traditional practices (widowhood rites) and affirmative action, and the national campaign for the domestication of CEDAW (the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women).

The review is based on secondary materials and documentary analysis, together with some primary data obtained from nine key informant interviews. Source materials and primary data were collected in Anambra, Kano, Oyo and Plateau States. The review traces the historical development of women's organizing in Nigeria, distinguishing between practical and strategic gender interests, highlighting regional distinctions with respect to both secular and faith-based contexts. The review suggests some ways in which religion has interacted with women's change agendas. It contends that religion has had an ambiguous and contradictory influence on social change processes: for example in a campaign in Anambra State for legal reform against harmful traditional practices, faith-based organizations were at the forefront, yet opposition from religious groups was important in thwarting the CEDAW domestication bill in 2007.

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Acronyms

AG	Action Group
AHIP	Adolescent Health and Information Projects
APPRRW	African Protocol on People's Rights and the Rights of Women
AU	African Union
BLP	Better Life Programme
CAN	Christian Association of Nigeria
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CEDPA	Centre for Development and Population Activities
CENGOS	Coalition of Eastern NGOs
CHRI	Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative
CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency
CIRDDOC	Civil Resource Development and Documentation Centre
CLO	Civil Liberties Organisation
COCIN	Church of Christ in Nigeria
COWAN	Country Women Association of Nigeria
CRA	Child Rights Act
CSWI	Centre for Women's Studies and Intervention
CWO	Catholic Women Organisation
DFID	Department for International Development
ECWA	Evangelical Church of West Africa
FEAP	Family Economic Advancement Programme
FOMWAN	Federation of Muslim Women's Associations
FSP	Family Support Programme
GADA	Gender and Development Action
GHON	Grassroot Health Organisation of Nigeria
GPI	Girl Power Initiatives
HEKAN	*Hadaddiyar Ikklisiyar Kiristi a Najiriya*[1]
HIV/AIDS	Human-Immuno deficiency Virus/ Acquired Immuno Deficiency Syndrome
HHCJ	Handmaids of the Holy Child Jesus
IDEA	Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance
IPPF	International Planned Parenthood Federation
K-SEEDS	Kano State Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy
MSO	Muslim Sisters Organisation
MU	Mothers Union

NAPEP	National Poverty Alleviation Programme
NACRDB	National Agricultural Cooperative Rural Development Bank
NBA	Nigerian Bar Association
NCNC	National Council of Nigerian Citizens
NCWS	National Council for Women Societies
NFF	Nigerian Feminists Forum
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NIPS	Nigerian Institute of Policy and Strategic Studies
NISER	Nigerian Institute of Social and Economic Research
NPC	Northern Peoples Congress
NPW	National Policy on Women
NWU	National Women's Union
RH	Reproductive Health
RVF	Recto-vaginal Fistula
SCIA	Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs
SES	Socio-economic status
SOGON	Society of Gynaecology and Obstetrics of Nigeria
SUDIC	Sustainable Development Initiative Centre
UN	United Nations
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNIFEM	United Nations Development Fund for Women
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VVF	Vesico-Vaginal Fistula
WACA	Women Action Committee
WACOL	Woman Aid Collective
WARDC	Women Advocate Research and Documentation Centre
WIN	Women in Nigeria
WOFEE	Women Fund for Economic Empowerment
WORDOC	Women Research and Documentation Centre
WRAPA	Women's Right Advancement and Protection Alternative
YEHDI	Youth Empowerment and Human Development Initiative
YWCA	Young Women's Christian Association

1   Introduction

A research project that intends to examine the engagement of women's movements for social change with religion must first of all review the literature that addresses conceptual and methodological issues, including questions of what and who constitute women's movements in Nigeria, before venturing into the literature that addresses the engagements between these movements and religion. The definition of a social movement in general and a women's movement in particular is contested by scholars and activists alike, and so the concept of a women's movement, as well as the nature and dynamics of such movements, needs to be considered. In this review, the ways in which issues such as the meaning, nature and history of women's movements or women's organizing in Nigeria are treated in the literature are discussed and the issues that mobilize women and their agendas identified. Equally important for the research is how, according to existing sources, women's movements have engaged with religion and faith communities in the pursuit of their agendas. To review what is known with respect to these questions, this review is divided into six sections. In order to identify the context within which women's movements and the issues they have addressed are analyzed by scholars, the second section provides background information first on religion and politics in Nigeria and second on the geographical areas in which most of the literature reviewed was identified and on which it focuses. The third section discusses the historical development of women's organizing, while in the fourth the nature of the conceptual discourse about the women's movement (or movements) in Nigeria is discussed and challenges to it identified. A review of the literature on women's organizations' change agendas is presented in the fifth section, while the sixth section of the report provides a brief conclusion.

The paper draws largely on a review of the available published literature and selected unpublished secondary sources. It mostly focuses on four states: Anambra, Oyo, Plateau and Kano.[2] These states were selected to provide representation from the north and south of the country and the two major religions - Islam and Christianity. Kano State, located in the north, and Anambra State, located in the south, are dominated by Muslim and Christian populations respectively, while Plateau State in the north and Oyo State in the south are religiously mixed. In order to identify the literature available and obtain other preliminary information, nine women scholar-activists were interviewed. In Oyo State two key informants were interviewed, a Christian woman scholar and a Muslim woman scholar, both based in Ibadan, the capital of Oyo State, and both also activists on women's issues at the State and national levels. The key informants interviewed in Anambra State were two Christian women scholars

and one Muslim woman scholar based in Awka, and all also deeply involving in organizing. In Plateau State, in-depth interviews were conducted with two female scholars and activists in Jos. Both women are practising Christians, one a convert from Islam. In Kano State, two Muslim women scholars and activists were interviewed, one based at Bayero University in Kano and the second a media person who has written extensively about the issues and is active in the women's movement in Kano State in particular and northern Nigeria in general.

The aim of this preliminary review is to explain the context in which women have attempted to improve their welfare, address inequality and seek empowerment; to identify the main organizations and alliances involved and some of the strategies they have adopted; and to examine the role of religion and the religious establishment in supporting or opposing women's quest for social change. In conjunction with a review of the international literature on social movements (Kirmani, 2008), it was intended to provide the basis for constructing an analytical framework for further research, and a basis for choosing issues and campaigns and geographical areas on which to focus the primary data collection. The specific aims and focus of the next stage of the research and its findings will be the subject of future working papers.

2 Background information

This section of the report provides background information on the country as a whole and the States where the first phase of the research was conducted, specifically literature on the role of religion in shaping political dynamics.

2.1 Politics and religion in Nigeria

Nigeria became an independent nation on the 1st of October, 1960, as a federation of three regions – the Northern, Eastern and Western Regions. Each was led by a premier, while a prime minister was in charge of the government at the centre. The regions were governed by three different political parties: the Northern People's Congress (NPC) ruled the Northern region, while the National Council of Nigerian Citizens[3] (NCNC) and Action Group (AG) ruled the Eastern and Western regions respectively. A fourth region – the Mid-western Region - was carved out of the old Western Region in 1963. The country started with a parliamentary system of governance, and became a republic in 1963. The first military coup, which occurred on the 15th of January, 1966, brought an end to civil rule. The military ruled for 13 years, through an era of coups and counter-coups. In 1979 there was a return to civilian rule, with a change to a presidential system of governance. Civilian rule was disrupted by another military coup d'état led by General Muhammadu Buhari on 31st December 1983. This was followed by another coup on August 27th, 1985, with General Ibrahim Babangida becoming the Head of Government.

Babangida was the first military leader to assume the title of President and Commander-In-Chief of the Nigerian armed forces (previously military heads of government had been called Head of State and Commander-in-Chief). He ruled the country for eight years, during which Nigeria became a member of the Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC) – a move that unleashed a spate of controversial religious debate and heightened religious tension. He also embarked on a transition programme, resulting in a presidential election held on the 12th June, 1993, the results of which were annulled and an interim government constituted led by a civilian, Chief Ernest Shonekan. This interim government was cut short by another military coup led by General Sani Abacha on the 17th November, 1993. The year 1998 was the only time in the military era when there was a change of government without a coup. There was a return to civilian rule on the 29th May, 1999 under the leadership of Chief Segun Obasanjo, a one-time military ruler (1978-79). Since then the country has been under civil rule.

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In the history of Nigeria, religion and ethnicity have been intricately woven into the fabric of politics (Kalu, 2003). This is partly manifested in the formation of political parties, which are influenced by ethnic and religious loyalties. The country's north-south division has provided the main context within which ethno-religious regional identities have been forged, with deeply divided ethno-religious identities acting as a significant structural constraint that has inhibited the full development of political and cultural rights (Edozie, 2006). Although the various Nigerian constitutions have all stated that there will not be any state religion, those in power are free to follow their own religion and to participate in any activity that promotes that religion. Consequently, religion has always played a key role in the politics of Nigeria. Centralization of power, persistent dependency on revenue from crude oil and competition for their share of federal revenue between State governments has given rise to a context in which the political elite manipulate religion for political gain (Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution, 2002). Thus the Nigerian political economy has been characterized by both ethno-religious and class-based cleavages, mostly revealed through struggles to gain access to state power and wealth. The dominance of ethno-religious politics peaked in the 1980s and 1990s, but has apparently waned since Nigeria's return to democratic governance in 1999.

Nigeria has frequently been referred to as the most religious nation on earth and religion remains an important reference point for individual identity and community belonging, cutting across ethnic and other categorizations such as region, State and socio-economic status. Nevertheless, some pressing social issues have served as rallying points for Nigerians of diverse religious persuasions, as evidenced during the pre-independence nationalist struggles and various campaigns for democracy. As a result, religious identity and identification are often fragmented and are not always coterminous with ethnicity or geographical or social location.

Religious diversity has impacted not only on the political economy of the country but also on its legal system. To accommodate the nation's multi-religious character and interests, the Constitution provides for a complex judicial system that embodies secular (some say Christian), African traditional and Islamic principles, with implications for gender relations and the position of women. The coexistence of statutory, customary and Islamic law generates a multiplicity of legal constraints that overall curtail women's access to social, economic and political resources and benefits and thus undermine their ability to act as fully-fledged citizens. To a lesser or greater degree, all three legal

systems contain provisions that undermine female autonomy by limiting women's freedom of movement, promoting their economic dependency on men and subordinating them in household/ marital relations. This is significant, given that autonomy is considered a fundamental requirement for the exercise of citizenship in a democratic society. As will be discussed in more detail below, the triple legal system in Nigeria has proven to be a political minefield for activists working to promote women's rights.

2.2   Background information on the research areas

As mentioned earlier, the initial investigation was conducted in four States: Oyo, Anambra, Plateau and Kano. In this section background information about these States is provided, with particular reference to women's rights issues and the women's movement. Oyo State used to be part of the old Western Region and remained a regional political and economic hub, second only to Lagos. The State consists of 33 Local Government Councils (Oyo State Government, 2004). According to the 2006 Census, the State population stood at 5.6 million, 50 per cent female. The State is largely ethnically homogeneous, comprised mainly of people of the Yoruba ethnic group who speak the Yoruba language. It is one of the most urbanized in the whole federation and enjoys relative religious peace and stability, with the three dominant religions being Islam, Christianity and traditional beliefs. In terms of the position of women, societies in Oyo, as in other States, are patriarchal and patrilineal, with a great deal of value placed on male children, who are seen as the means of lineage continuation. Widows are accused of being responsible for their husbands' deaths and practices related to widowhood are designed to protect traditional social structures, resulting in widows being treated in unpalatable ways. These practices persist despite the presence of statutory laws which provide widows with at least limited protection from inhuman and degrading treatment, as well as defining women's inheritance rights (Candide-Johnson, 2005).

At the same time, there have been many women activists in Ibadan and many women's organizations originated in the city. For example, agitation for 30 per cent representation of women in decision making was pursued by women as far back as 1976, when the State was created and during the days of the first State governor, Major General David Jemibewon. In addition, Oyo State is one of the 16 States in the federation that have passed a Child Rights Act (CRA) that specifically responds to the

situation of the girl child and her vulnerability to violence, sexual abuse, early/forced marriage and other forms of sexual exploitation (Nigeria CEDAW NGO Coalition, 2008).[4]

Anambra State is situated in the former Eastern Region of Nigeria where Igbo is the dominant language. According to the 2006 national population census, it has a population of 4.2 million, with females constituting 48 per cent. The State has a history of commercial leadership, with towns like Onitsha and Nnewi being major centres for entrepreneurial activities. The predominant religion in Anambra State is Christianity, with more than 70 per cent of the people identifying themselves as Christian, though some are Muslim and some remain adherents of traditional religion. Like in other parts of the country, children and women are among the principal victims of combined economic, social and political deprivation. For instance, infant mortality and under five mortality, which were 69/1000 and 126/1000 respectively in 1999, are believed to have worsened over the years (Anambra State, 2005). The State had a maternal mortality rate of 280 per 100,000 in 1999 (National Population Commission, 2000). Furthermore, the patriarchal nature of society in the State permits a man's absolute control over his family and the passing of power and possessions on to his sons. Consequently, among Igbos, the male child is regarded as being superior to the female child, especially in terms of inheritance.   For this reason, girls often grow up with the impression that they are inferior to boys. Women are disproportionately deprived of educational opportunities, denied the right to inheritance of their father's property, intimidated by harmful traditional and cultural practices, and denied access to land ownership and credit facilities. Some communities in the rural parts of the state also still practise early marriage (Anambra State, 2005). This ultimately limits the opportunities for women to advance in educational attainment or develop meaningful livelihood skills.

Kano State, which is located in the north western region, had, according to the 2006 census, a population of 9.4 million and a low average population density of 281 persons per square kilometre. Kano is seen as the home of political Islam, which is linked to protection of the identity of Hausa Muslims. It is also regarded as the commercial nerve centre of the north. The position of Kano as the commercial centre of the trans-Saharan trade route has attracted many other Nigerian ethnic groups to the city, which is the most cosmopolitan in the north-west, with a large population of Igbo, Yoruba and other ethnic groups. In terms of social movements, Kano has the reputation of being highly political because of the legacy of Malam Aminu Kano, a political and religious leader who championed

the cause of the *talakawa* (commoners). Over the years, Kano State has witnessed a proliferation of NGOs championing all sort of issues, ranging from education, health and human rights to peace and conflict resolution.

In terms of development indicators, the State has a literacy rate of 35 per cent and the majority of children are enrolled in Quranic and Islamiyya schools, which are slowly being integrated into the formal system. By 2005, out of the 9,466 Quranic and Islamic schools in the State, 123 and 741 respectively had been integrated into the State formal system of education. The overall enrolment figure provided in the Kano State Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (K-SEEDS) (Kano State Government, 2005) stood at 90 per cent for primary education, 80 per cent for secondary education and 60 per cent for tertiary education. However, the gender difference in education is striking, with 76.6 per cent of male children enrolled compared to 31.7 per cent of female children. On the health status of Kanawa (Kano people), only 37 per cent of the population had access to a potable water supply, and 75 per cent to health services. Life expectancy was 52.2 years for females and 51 years for males and mortality one of the highest in the country, with infant mortality standing at 110 per 1000 live births and maternal mortality at 170 per 1,000. Furthermore, for every 1000 deliveries, about 170 women are left with serious disabilities such as vesico-vaginal fistula (VVF), recto-vaginal fistula (RVF) or infertility. There are 2,000 VVF victims, with an average of ten new cases every week. Such conditions often result in divorce and social exclusion (Kano State Government, 2005).

Plateau State, which is in the north-central part of Nigeria, was created in 1976. It has a population of 2.1 million (50.1 per cent female and 49.1 per cent male), a land area of 26,899 km² and shares boundaries with Bauchi, Benue, Gombe, Kaduna and Nassarawa states.[5] Because of the terrain, the State has a relatively low population density. Jos, the State capital, has become a melting pot of ethnic groups from all over Nigeria. The State is predominantly Christian, although Christianity is often intermingled with traditional religious beliefs. It also has a sizeable Muslim population. Historically, the State was a refuge from Islamic domination for Christians and as a result, the headquarters of numerous Christian churches are located there. Since 2001 there have been intermittent ethno-religious and communal crises in different parts of the State.

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The situation of women in the State has been improving in recent years. In 1999 the Plateau State government was the first government ever (at federal or State level) to accord women 30 per cent representation in the State Executive Council. Along with Gombe State, it also has the second highest proportion (8.3 per cent) of female members of parliament in the north central geopolitical zone.[6] As well, there are numerous NGOs operating in different parts of the State, including civil liberties groups, professional bodies, cultural/ethnic associations, cooperative societies, faith-based organizations and other community-based organizations.

3   The historical development of women's organizing

Aina (1998) argues that the historical development of African women's movements can only be understood in relation to the complex interaction between traditional African and colonial patriarchy and modern industrial capitalist development. She demonstrates that gender domination and oppression are inherent in African culture and have also been imbibed through African women's experiences under slavery, colonialism and imperialism. She identifies four forms of female oppression: polygyny, discriminatory widowhood practices, arranged/girl-child marriages and male-biased inheritance rights. Through the interaction between tradition and capitalism, Aina (1998, p. 71) contends that women in Africa experience a double oppression. In her words,

> In colonial and post-colonial Africa, the subordination of women is seen at different levels – first, male dominance of the traditional patriarchal social structures; second, domination of women as members of the peripheral societies, subordinated to foreign capitalist males of the metropolitan states; and thirdly, subordination of women as members of the underpaid working class and impoverished peasantry.

Commenting on the struggle of African women against these oppressions, Aina compares the trajectories of Western and African feminism and claims that the women's movement in the West began with socio-political agitation and later adopted a more intellectual outlook. In Africa, and specifically in contemporary Nigeria, the reverse is now the case. Intellectual discourse by mainly women scholars constitutes the launch-pad for activism. She points to a disconnect between intellectually driven feminism and grassroots activism, arguing that "most women at the grassroots have yet to identify with the aims and caprices of modern-day feminism, they see feminism as elitist and illusory" (Aina, 1998, p. 66). Furthermore, she concurs with other scholars that the unique experiences of African women result in a dissonance between Western and African feminism which renders the ideological outlook and socio-political agendas of the former somewhat irrelevant to the latter. In view of all this, Aina (1998, p. 69) asserts that African feminism, and by implication women's movements in African countries, should be understood in terms of three historic epochs – pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial.[7]

Mba (1992) and Aina (1998) claim that during the pre-colonial period, there was no major or widespread feminist agitation to change the African traditional structure, which was overwhelmingly patriarchal even in ostensibly matriarchal (more accurately described as matrilineal) societies. Inherent contradictions in traditional African systems occasioned a paradoxical situation in which

women enjoyed a measure of political space due to the existence of dual-sex systems of authority.[8] Yet, as mentioned earlier, women also endured oppressive cultural practices during this time (Okonjo 1976, Amadiume, 1987). Female resistance to the patriarchal establishment was usually costly, resulting in social ridicule, ostracism, or even death. Amadiume (1995) records that on rare occasions gender tensions arising from the contradictions led women to migrate en masse from villages to form alternative communities such as Idemili, a riverine community centred on goddess worship.

IDEA (2000, p.110) demonstrates that during the colonial era (1914-1960) the women's movement was part of the movement for national independence, but made a distinct contribution by "questioning the implication of existing policies on the quality of life and status of women." Para-Mallam (2007, p.77) notes that "women waged a double war against specific aspects of colonial rule and against traditional and colonial patriarchy", while at the same time often evoking cultural traditions in support of female power and resistance to oppression. Furthermore, Okome (2000) argues that colonialism bred its own set of contradictions, as it produced both opportunities for women by providing education (and a measure of economic empowerment) to the daughters of the African/Nigerian elite, while at the same time breeding new forms of subjugation by restricting female learning to traditional subjects that prepared them for domestic roles and 'typically' feminine occupations like secretarial studies, teaching and nursing. Furthermore, the vast majority of rural and urban poor women continued to bear the brunt of socio-cultural, political and economic oppression. It was in this context that women's resistance to colonial oppression, such as the 1929 Aba women's riot and Egba women's protests against the flat tax rate, emerged (see also Johnson-Odim, 2000 and Nwankwo, 2003).[9] By 1947, the first national women's body was formed – the National Women's Union (NWU) — under the leadership of Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti. Its membership was comprised of women of different class, ethnic, religious and regional backgrounds. In 1953 the NWU became the Federation of Nigerian Women's Societies but remained an organization that was "political in character and content" (IDEA, 2000, p. 110).

In post-colonial Nigeria, writers who are of the opinion that there is a women's movement tend to associate it with the organizational structures and activities of government (i.e. ministries of women's affairs) and non-governmental bodies formed by or set up for women. For instance, Chukukere (1998) traces the genesis of the Nigerian women's movement to the inception of the Better Life Programme

(BLP) in 1987, the pet project of the then First Lady Maryam Babangida, and the subsequent proliferation of NGOs as initiatives of other first ladies at the State level. From the mid-1980s until the early 2000s, women's activism was dominated by 'First Lady' state-sponsored projects under various military regimes. These projects were inspired by international feminist advocacy efforts from the 1970s, and the attendant international women's conferences, declarations, treaties and discourses on human rights as women's rights, sustainable development, democracy and good governance. Consequently, at the end of the United Nations Decade for Women, the federal government of Nigeria ratified the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). In 1999, with the restoration of democracy, the new President Olusegun Obasanjo announced that the state would no longer sponsor the NGOs of First Ladies, and they were advised to seek funding elsewhere. This signalled the gradual decline in the predominance of 'femocracy' in women's mobilizing.

Mama (1997) contends that femocracy (or 'First Ladyism'), particularly under military regimes, did not challenge conservative anti-female ideologies nor did it have the effect of enhancing gender equality. However, Chukukere (1998) believes this assessment does not capture the whole picture. She points out that the Better Life Programme and other First Lady projects sensitized women about their rights to a better life. They provided a platform for women to make claims on the state and thereby served a catalytic role in promoting the formation of new NGOs and drawing national attention to the issue of women's empowerment. Usman (2008) attests to the veracity of this claim in her study of women's cooperatives in northwest Nigeria, in which she traces the growth of these societies to the BLP and Family Support Programme (FSP). However, Usman agrees that this foundation has led to a lack of sustainability of women's cooperative societies because they lacked grassroots support and encouraged dependency on state patronage.

In tracing the development of women's mobilizing since 1985, Para-Mallam (2006) observes that the spate of First Lady-led initiatives was paralleled by and often overlapped with the activities of women activists, development practitioners, scholars and NGOs formed and sustained primarily through international donor funding. These groups sometimes utilized the high profile of First Ladies in order to obtain access to male-dominated political power structures, particularly at the level of federal and State governments.[10] These activities were fruitful in bringing about the establishment of the National

Commission for Women in 1989, based on the 1985 Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies, and later, in 1993, fully-fledged women's ministries in both tiers of government.

Since the 1990s, the formation of loose networks of women's groups has gained momentum, as increasingly women's organizations have banded together around a variety of issues. For instance, in 1998 a coalition of women's groups staged a massive march on the capital, Abuja, to make a presentation to the Constitutional Review Committee arguing for affirmative action for women; and in 2004, led by the Women, Law and Development Centre, women's groups staged public demonstrations and instituted legal proceedings to protest the marginalization of women in the 400-member National Political Reform Committee, which initially had only seven women members. Ultimately women's coalitions working primarily for women's empowerment, legal reform and political representation succeeded in pushing for a National Policy on Women (NPW), which was approved by the Obasanjo administration in July 2000 and reviewed to become a National Gender Policy in 2007.[11]

4   The meaning and nature of women's movements

In order to understand whether the different forms of women's mobilizing that have taken place in Nigeria constitute 'a women's movement', it is vital to first consider how social movements are defined. According to Kirmani (2008, p.1), the term social movement encompasses:

> …a wide variety of groups with varying and often conflicting concerns. These groups come from a range of ideological positions, social locations and contexts and can take a number of organizational forms—from very loose and flexible to highly organized and bureaucratized.

Indeed, Giugni (1999) highlights the need for a flexible definition of a social movement as a relational concept that involves clusters of political practices by groups of challengers who make claims on power holders with a view to influencing their decisions and actions. The incoherence of many social movements, Kirmani argues, is often a function of their unstable, shifting and fragmented nature. However, despite the diversity of background and orientation inherent in any social movement, it is often formed around a common issue and has the intention of effecting social change. Similarly, Castells (1997) defines social movements as "purposive collective actions whose outcome, in victory as in defeat, transforms the values and institutions of society" (cited in Kirmani, 2008, p. 2).

If one of the distinguishing characteristics of social movements is championing a particular issue or concern, then around which common issues do women build alliances in Nigeria and what is the nature of the women's movement? To answer these questions, this section of the literature review is divided into two sub-sections. The first addresses the conceptual issue, focusing on whether the different women's groups and organizations in Nigeria can be regarded as 'a women's movement' or whether there are multiple women's movements championing different issues. The second section provides a review of literature on the types and basic characteristics of women's groupings/movements in Nigeria.

4.1   Is there a women's movement in Nigeria?

Whether the different women's groupings that exist in Nigeria can be regarded as 'a women's movement' has attracted intense debates among women activists and feminist scholars, particularly at conferences and meetings on women's and gender issues. These debates revolve around the defining features of a women's movement, the nature of women's change agendas and the strategies adopted to pursue such agendas. Three perspectives can be identified in the literature: the first

questions the existence of a women's movement in Nigeria, the second identifies women's movements but regards them as part of a broader quest for social change, while the third considers that unless mobilization on women's issues has a feminist emancipatory agenda, it cannot be regarded as a women's movement.

The first perspective posits that a women's movement exists as long as some form of women's organizing exists for collective action along gender lines and gender issues. Thus, for Adeleye-Fayemi (2007, p. 1):

> While several divisive issues still remain unresolved, there is a Nigerian women's movement....in so far as there has been a collective, if somewhat pocketed response to the needs of women in the country. There is usually consensus on issues which are considered to be priorities, [and] which affect the lives of Nigerian women such as poverty, illiteracy, health and reproductive rights, political participation and peace. However, there are clear ideological differences, which influence opinions and strategies within the movement. We can therefore talk more comfortably about different positions and strands within the movement [than]…about the existence of [a] women's movement.

Adeleye-Fayemi (2007, p. 1) recognizes that "trying to define what a women's movement is in Nigeria is still a work in progress", partly because of the fluidity of women's organizing and also because of a lack of consensus on the definition of a women's movement, although she nevertheless asserts that

> Through activities ranging from income generation, forming cooperatives, capacity building, consciousness raising, social and legislative advocacy and campaigns, to research and analysis, they [women's rights activists] have contributed to what is referred to here as a movement- a movement for social justice, equality and empowerment for the society in general, and for the rights and dignity of women in particular.

According to this view, women's NGOs that come together to form a coalition or activism aimed at bringing about incremental improvements to women's lives in any sphere qualify as a women's movement.

The second perspective, which is related to the first, argues that although women mobilize in Nigeria, these activities should be regarded as being part of wider movements for social change. This class of scholars often base their arguments on the involvement of women in wider socio-economic and political struggles in pre-colonial, colonial and postcolonial times. Aina (1998) and Chukukere (1998),

for example, assert that there are women's movements in Nigeria that emerge to champion certain women's issues . However, they argue that these struggles are not limited to women's issues but are broad-based, covering such issues as resistance to social, cultural, political and economic oppression under traditional patriarchy, colonialism and capitalism, partly because links are made between these broader issues and the concerns women face in their lives (Okonjo, 1976; Mba, 1982).

Similarly, with reference to the contemporary period, Chukukere (1998), Salihu (2007) and Ya'u (2007) assert that the engagement of women's organizations with the overall human rights and democratic movements in Nigeria that ended military rule has provided legitimacy to the women's movement. According to Ya'u (2007) and Ibrahim (2007), the collaboration between feminist activists and human rights/civil liberties groups in the 1990s has allowed them to argue that the issue of women's rights should be integrated within the overall human rights struggle and that it is only through such a strategy is it likely to be given the serious attention it deserves. The rationale for a human rights perspective in the quest for social change is explained succinctly in a survey of law and practice in Nigeria by the Centre for Housing Rights and Evictions (COHRE, 2004, p. 19):

> Human Rights, in general, rise above societal aspirations, political rhetoric, and empty promises [because] through their codification in international law human rights attain timeliness, absoluteness and universal validity.

For this reason, scholars have questioned attempts to conceptualize a social movement exclusively concerned with women's rights that is isolated from wider struggles for social change, such as the nationalist, pro-democracy, environmental, and peace movements (see also Okome, 2000).

Scholars and activists who subscribe to the third perspective are of the view that mobilization on women's issues should only be considered a movement if it has a feminist emancipatory agenda that is linked to broader processes of social change, including the promotion and realization of human rights for all citizens (Aina, 1998). Aina cites writers such as Mba (1982) and Ogundipe-Leslie (1995), who equate a women's movement with a feminist emancipatory project that is both political and ideological in nature and is aimed at bringing about freedom from oppression for women through the promotion of their human rights and the creation of an equitable and just socioeconomic order. Proponents of this third perspective argue that most of the existing women's groups, NGOs and associations have tended to be close to the state and other establishment bodies and have shown

little interest in challenging them or the existing patriarchal status quo, even though they are dominated by feminist activists. In their view, these groups cannot challenge the status quo partly because they depend on funding from the state and other establishment bodies and thus cannot be regarded as a 'women's movement.'

Those that hold this view often cite Women in Nigeria (WIN) as the only effort that can be considered a women's movement in this sense, at least since independence. WIN was established in 1982 as a revolutionary movement founded on a convergence of Marxist and feminist principles and aimed at a radical transformation of gender roles and relations (Ibrahim, 2007). Ibrahim (2007) and Salihu (2007) argue that WIN embodied the pluralistic nature of women's realities, which are rooted in both gender- and class-based oppression. However, by 1997 WIN had split into two factions owing to the class tensions between grassroots and elite female members, internal conflicts and cooptation into the NGO establishment through the lure of donor funding.[12]

Ibrahim (2007) and Igbuzor (2007) argue that it is important to distinguish between 'a women's movement' in this sense and the supposedly corrupting influence of 'NGO-ism.' They argue that the blurring of this distinction heralded the demise of WIN as a single, effective Marxist feminist movement, thereby threatening any future notion of a popular women's movement. For Ibrahim (2007), the sum of the majority of women's organizations cannot be called 'a movement', because these organizations simply aim at helping women improve their lives and do not necessarily envision a reversal in female subordination through the transformation of unjust societal structures. These authors argue that most of the people involved in such NGOs hold a conservative view of women's roles in society and, although many make sweeping claims in their rhetoric, they achieve little in terms of action. Pittin (1991, pp.38-39), for example, explains that:

> In relation to women, state policy at the level of federal text and tenor appears supportive and benign….This, however, must be related to other aspects of law, statute, and policy, associated with control over production and reproduction.… The overall direction of these policies is the maintenance of ideological assertion of women as mothers, housewives, helpmates to men, and peripheral workers. This justifies women's continuing to undertake the entire burden of domestic labour, withdraws women from competition for wage labour and justifies unequal access to education, information, technology, credit, training, and productive resources including land and landed property.

Similarly, two women interviewed for this review were emphatic in denying the existence of a women's movement in Nigeria. Comfort Davies (interview, 19 July, 2008) explained that in her view, women's change agendas have lacked coherence; unity of voice, purpose or background; and a cohesive organizational structure. However, as Tilly (1999, cited in Kirmani, 2008, p.2) points out, social movements do not necessarily have to have a coherent identity or history. Indeed, new social movements theorists argue that social movements often lack coherence and are unstable, shifting and fragmented (Mouffe, 1993).

Another reason Davies gives for the absence of a Nigerian women's movement is female dependency on intimate relations with men – what she refers to as 'the married women's lobby':

> *Women's desire [for] and dependency on relationships prevents them from committing to a women's movement. I learnt this from the women themselves. In women's groups they talk and shout, but at home they are like mice and they would rather protect that [marital] relationship and be totally subordinate...even if she has a PhD. Being married is more important to Nigerian women than the fight for women's rights; even if the marriage is a farce, a pretence and shadow; even if she's not being treated properly as a wife. She is concerned about the public image of being married.*

Dr. Fatima Sawa (interview, 19 July, 2008) made similar claims, but also introduced the role of religion in shaping women's attitudes towards gender equality. To justify their reticence towards gender issues, she says that women in the Northern Nigeria say things like, "*God created women to be submissive; men are the masters.*" This is also true of well-educated women who have been exposed to human rights discourses. In the words of Aina (1998, p.74), "The major dilemma of the elite women in most African countries is that they are so protective of the status quo which they believe marriage offers." According to Davies and Sawa, Nigerian women find it difficult to fully embrace feminist emancipation for fear of losing social respect as a result of being unmarried. This, Aina claims, is why legislation against bigamy is mainly on paper and the damaging effects of polygyny are underplayed.

Hence, it is clear that there is no consensus in the literature or amongst feminists as to whether the different forms of women's groups and coalitions that exist in Nigeria can be described as 'a women's movement' owing to the diverse and complex nature of their social context, religio-cultural affiliations and agendas. However, there is general agreement that such agendas have served an important function in mobilizing collective action and promoting desired change. In the next section we will look

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at the nature of the women's groups and coalitions and how they are organizing themselves to champion women's social change agendas.

4.2   The nature of women's organizing

Whatever the debate about the existence of a women's movement in Nigeria, it is indisputable that different forms of women's organizing have occurred. Hassim (2005, p. 4) defines the types of women's organizing as "a broad umbrella encompassing diverse organisations and occupying a variety of spaces". Using this broad definition, Hassim identifies three types of women's organizations operating in Africa. The first are those engaged with national policy advocacy. This group of organizations emerged in response to the need for NGOs to act as advocacy agents, particularly in relation to such issues as increasing the involvement of women in leadership positions and other women's empowerment schemes. These organizations have the expertise to act as technical advisers and are therefore actively engaged in public debate about governance systems, making them easily accessible to both state actors and the donor community. However, women's organizations operating at this level have been accused of being distant from their female constituencies and deploying tactics that do not rely on mass mobilization or confrontation with the state, sometimes with the result that "tactics, demand and rhetoric might be moderated to fit the discourses of the state in order to make incremental gains and retain hard won openings into the state" (Hassim, 2005, p.4).

The closeness of this category of women's organizations to the state has been a source of criticism by some women scholars. Such organizations are perceived to be vehicles for the mobilization of women for the sustenance of an undemocratic state structure, through their participation in state programmes, what is referred to as 'state feminism' or 'First Ladyism' (Adeleye-Fyemi, 2007; Mama, 1995). Consequently, they are accused of lacking a transformative agenda, instead pushing for an agenda that addresses the practical rather than strategic needs of women (Aina, 1998; Bagu, 2007; Imam, 1993; Pereira, 2002; Rafsanjani, 2007; Ya'u 2007). As Adeleye-Fayemi (2007) argues, although these organizations accept that state structures and policies are skewed against women, they often fall short of coming up with effective strategies to challenge the oppressive systems conclusively and bring about lasting social transformation. Thus, organizations like the National Council for Women Societies (NCWS) and the Federation of Muslim Women's Associations (FOMWAN), as well as umbrella associations of Nigerian organizations and Women Aid Collectives (WACOL), have been

accused of being more concerned with building alliances with government than building alliances for the promotion of women's strategic gender interests.

The second form of women's organizing is what Hassim (2005) terms "transformatory feminism", which is more likely to be conducted in alliance with other social movements aimed at structural transformation. Organizations in this category may contest state policies, because they are likely to demand that the state pays attention to issues that it has been reluctant to address, such as regulating and mitigating men's power in the private sphere (Hassim, 2005). As Aina notes, only organizations that operate with some detachment from the government can be resourceful in confronting patriarchy, because they are less likely to be financially dependent on the government and are therefore at liberty to take up issues that challenge the status quo.

Another characteristic of this form of women's organizations is they tend to be elitist and urban-based. Like the first category of women's organizations, this second type is attacked for having a membership dominated by the highly-educated few. Indeed, the agendas of both advocacy and transformatory types of women's organizing have often been championed by the female educated elite, the majority of whom are either in academia or involved in gender advocacy through participating in government affairs and/or the formation of women's NGOs. Hence, feminist scholars like Bolanle Awe, Molara Ogundipe-Leslie, Joy Ezeilo, Simi Afonja and Jadesola Akande have been involved in government, contributing to policy debates at the national level, while many more have served in various policy capacities at the State and local government levels. Bilkisu Yusuf, Ayesha Imam, Amina Mama, Saudatu Mahdi, Adeleye-Fayemi, Nkoyo Toyo and many other scholars who have not been at the helm of government affairs have demonstrated their activism through the establishment of women's organizations and involvement in advocacy on women's issues.

The third form is considered the most common category of women's groupings. Hassim (2005) refers to these as 'community-based organizations', implying that they are weakly tied to the state or national networks and that they are most likely to address women's practical needs and other welfare-related issues. Although the most vibrant and creative forms of collective solidarity emerge at this level of women's organizing, such organizations and their members do not have the time, expertise or

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resources to address decision-makers and nor do they yet appreciate the need for gender analysis in the conceptualization of their struggles (Hassim, 2005, p. 6).

It is evident from the existing literature and the preliminary interviews conducted for this research that women's organizations/groups deploy varying tactics and follow different routes to address their concerns and issues, facing many challenges in the process. The following section explores these challenges.

4.3   Challenges for women's organizing in Nigeria

The gap in terms of scope, focus and interest between the first two types of organizing around women's rights, which are dominated by a handful of educated elite women and the third, which is dominated by women at the grassroots level, has been identified as a major barrier to the formation of a politically active women's movement in pursuit of a common agenda that is supported by a mass of women. According to Aina (1998, p. 77), the failure of African feminist movements to emerge as political movements supported by broad categories of women is very much linked to the historical development of feminism in Africa. She argues that women's movements in Africa generally lack both political consciousness and a large political base, two ingredients needed for structural change in gender relations. The situation is aggravated by a general lack of trust between grassroots women and educated, elite women, with the former seeing the latter as privileged and opportunistic. The gap between the lived realities of elite women and the vast majority of women living in Nigeria aggravates the lack of trust between them. The implication of this division is a lack of cohesion and focus in the women's movement, as noted by Pereira (2002, p. 8):

> The gap between urban and rural women, between the 'formal' and 'informal' sectors, and between the 'elite' and the 'masses' is very wide. Urban, educated middle-class women have the national leadership potential but not the mass support needed for effective political action. Besides, the majority of such women insist on the depoliticisation of 'women's issues' and operate within the framework of voluntary associations which cannot enforce sanctions on their members. Urban market women and rural community-based women have the potential for mass mobilization and can enforce effective sanctions, but they lack the national leadership and political objectives.

The second factor that is affecting the development of a strong women's movement is the influence of women's multiple social identities. According to Adeleye-Fayemi (2007) and Ogundipe-Leslie (1995),

the women's movement in Nigeria is politically and ideologically diverse, demonstrating serious divisions and competition for resources that reflect those in the Nigerian state. Women, as a heterogeneous group, are subject to the manipulation of identities based on ethnicity, language, ideology, age, class, marital status, religion and geographical differences for self or group interest, which can prevent them uniting in the pursuit of gender-related interests. Omololu (1997) notes also that religious considerations have often prevented the emergence of a coherent ideological framework for women's groups in Nigeria.[13] Furthermore, Awe (1989) argues that Nigerian women's associations have been so fragmented and divided that they do not constitute an effective force for demanding improvements in the female condition. Because of the heterogeneity amongst women, attempts to build alliances around common issues have been fraught with difficulties and contradictions.[14] It is this backdrop of compromise, consensus and heterogeneity that explains the diffuse, disjointed and seemingly uncoordinated nature of the Nigerian women's movement.

The question of whether the particular forms of social organizing that exist in Nigeria constitute 'a women's movement' remains contested. While some claim that a feminist emancipatory agenda is the defining feature of a women's movement (Aina, 1998; Ogundipe-Leslie, 1995), others believe that activism aimed at bringing incremental improvements to women's lives in whatever form qualifies as a women's movement (Ya'u, 2007). Despite contestation over what constitutes a women's movement, no one doubts the existence of various agendas and issues around which women mobilize and organize themselves. The following section explores these diverse agendas.

5 The agendas of the women's movements for social change in Nigeria

Discussion about the agendas of women's movements in the literature has pointed to the variety of factors that can act as motivations for mobilization among women, including gender, motherhood and citizenship. However, the question of how gender-related interests mobilize women's movements has been a longstanding issue in discussions of women's movements. Molyneux (1985) differentiates between practical and strategic women's gender interests. Citing her work, Ray and Korteweg (1999, p. 49) argue that practical gender interests arise "from women's position in the sexual division of labour and tend to involve struggles not for liberation but for the ability to fulfil their roles as wives and mothers. These interests, which stem from women's lived experiences, are inductively derived". In contrast, strategic gender interests "are derived deductively, [and] seek to change the rules under which women live, [they] can be arrived at only after practical interests have been taken into account". This distinction reflects the diversity of women's interests and, it is suggested, allows them to identify which strategies are likely to lead to radical change (Hassim, 2005). Most women's organizations in Nigeria are concerned with practical rather than strategic interests, partly due to the level of poverty, which leads women to prioritize their roles as wives and mothers in order to meet the basic needs of their families. The fulfilment of practical gender interests is prioritized even when the achievement of strategic gender interests might be more likely to achieve the fulfilment of practical gender interests in the long term.

In analysis of women's movements in Africa, identity as a mobilizing force has recently been gaining prominence because, as already noted, multiple and shifting identities influence women's identification of their interests (Hale, 1994). In practice, ethnic, religious and regional identities have hindered the pursuit of women's gender interests (especially strategic interests). Even WIN, arguably the only feminist movement in Nigeria, was not immune to these divisive factors. For example, Bagu, commenting on the disintegration of WIN, notes that, "by the late 1990s, the disputes had lost even logic, and ethnicity and religion became a standard tool for mobilization" (Bagu, 2007, p. 128); issues were fought in particular on a platform of the north/south dichotomy. Nevertheless, despite such divisive factors within women's movements, some analysts believe that women's common gender interests constitute a sufficient mobilizing force.

In order to understand the issues around which women have mobilized for social change, the following sections explore the agendas pursued by women's organizations in Nigeria at the national and local levels.

5.1   National agendas

The Nigerian women's organizations, networks and coalitions that operate at the national level tend to address such issues as economic empowerment, reproductive rights, political rights, women's citizenship rights and legal reform, as well as campaigning against harmful traditional practices. While such associations as the Federation of Muslim Women Association of Nigeria (FOMWAN), the National Council of Women's Societies (NCWS) and Gender and Development Action (GADA) are seen to be addressing practical gender interests, Women in Nigeria (WIN), the Nigerian Feminists' Forum (NFF), Women's Rights Advancement and Protection Alternative (WRAPA), BAOBAB for Women's Human Rights and, to some extent, the Women's Aid Collective (WACOL) are seen as addressing strategic gender interests.

The NCWS seeks, among other things, to promote the welfare and economic and social progress of women and to encourage them to fulfil their responsibilities to their communities, as well as creating opportunities for women to fulfil these roles (Yusuf, 1991, p. 96). The NCWS's tendency to maintain the status quo with regard to gender roles, characterized by its emphasis on women's roles as mothers and wives, has earned the organization a reputation as a right-wing body.

Similar to Pittin's (1991) explanation of the NCWS, Pereira (2002, p. 10) identifies the ways in which hegemonic discourses of womanhood have been constructed and deployed at the national level. She argues that

> Whilst the NCWS has effectively reified women as wives and mothers within the existing social order, this has been done primarily to legitimize women's incursion into masculinist, formal public spheres. The actual construction of motherhood evident in NCWS pronouncements and actions reflects different currents underlying its ideology and organization.

She argues that its emphasis on motherhood has the effect of naturalizing and universalizing conceptions of appropriate ways of being for women, thereby obscuring the heterogeneity amongst

women in their social positioning, their experiences of motherhood (for those who are mothers), and their interests.[15]

In making reference to the quality of the various women's NGOs and associations that emerged out of the disintegration of WIN, Onoja (2007, p. 168) remarks that

> …come to think of it, how much impact can a thousand GADA, GPI, Reproductive Rights etc, make on the Nigerian State on just about any issue? What distinction can anyone make now between these and the NCWS for instance? None.

As noted above, WIN was seen to be different from other women's organizations because of its autonomy and explicitly feminist stance. WIN, argues Abdu (2007, p. 197), was the "only organization in Nigeria organized round a political position aimed at democratically transforming class and gender relations and which is also autonomous, voluntary, non-religious, nationally based and open to all who accept its aims and objectives."

In reviewing the national agenda of various coalitions of women's NGOs in Nigeria, an attempt is made below to identify the nature of change sought and the positive and negative roles of religion in the struggle for change. In particular, existing evidence on the nature of women's groups' engagements with religion in the course of their struggle for social change is identified.

Bilkisu Yusuf, for example, considers the various women's coalitions to be the best examples of groups pushing for women's change agendas, including the coalition against the exclusion of women in the last National Political Reform Conference, the coalition of women's organizations pressing for the passage of CEDAW and the African Protocol on Women's Rights, as well as other legal reform initiatives against gender violence and other harmful traditional practices. Thus national coalitions have tended to focus on campaigns to reform discriminatory laws and legal systems, perhaps because, as women's groups move away from regional and ethnic/religious boundaries to form coalitions at the national level, their focus tends to shift to reforming the wider legal system. In her view, therefore, coalition building at the national level provides the best platform for promoting social change, because most of the relevant legal and constitutional issues are national in scope and, more importantly, the impact of changes in national laws would be countrywide.

Pereira (2007) notes that it is only recently that women's autonomous organizations have started to address women's rights as citizens of Nigeria. Previously, struggles for women's rights tended to concentrate on reproductive rights, economic rights and the right to non-discriminatory traditional practices. She describes some of the discriminatory aspects of the law:

> The law on domestic violence is clearly inadequate….Domestic violence is currently classified under common assault, which downplays the seriousness of this crime. In Section 55 of the Penal Code, wife beating is allowed as long as it does not amount to 'grievous hurt'. …..This means that a man who beats his wife, short of exercising the injuries above is acting within the law. One may very well ask how women's fundamental right to dignity is protected under such circumstances (Pereira, 2007, p. 2).

Pereira goes on to outline some of the discriminatory aspects of the law with reference to sexual assault and rape, sexual harassment, employment, citizenship, taxation and harmful traditional practices.

With this focus in mind, a number of NGOs formed coalitions to engage with the state on the need for legal reform. In addition, the coalitions pursue the need to domesticate the international and regional conventions on the rights of women. Thus, the Women's Coalition for Affirmative Action, the Nigerian NGO CEDAW Coalition and the Coalition on Domestic Violence emerged to champion the cause of women's citizens' rights. Based on their literature and the campaigns in which they have been involved, it is clear that the main issues of concern to these coalitions include:

- The need to review customary law, under which women are subjected to harmful traditional practices and denial of property rights.
- Women's citizenship in the wake of the introduction of Shariah and discrimination against women in its implementation.
- Violence against women, which resulted in the formation of two coalitions.[16]
- Women's participation in party politics, particularly calling for affirmative action through the provision of a 30 per cent quota for women in all decision-making positions.
- Social and economic rights.

As the attempt to force the Nigerian government to ensure that national law reflects the provisions of CEDAW is particularly important, this is discussed further below.

5.1.1 The struggle to domesticate CEDAW

Women's organizations in Nigeria regard international and regional legal instruments such as CEDAW and the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (hereinafter referred to as the AU Protocol on Women's Rights) as a means of promoting women's civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. The Nigerian government ratified CEDAW in 1985 and the AU Protocol on Women's Rights was adopted by the Ordinary Session of the Assembly of the African Union at Maputo, Mozambique on July 11, 2003 and ratified by the Nigerian government the following year. While CEDAW is the first international instrument on women's rights, the AU Protocol is the first comprehensive regional legal instrument that addresses women's civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. Despite some differences between the two instruments, particularly in their jurisdictional coverage, they are similar in terms of their philosophy and purpose and both are explicit in their prohibition of discrimination against women. Thus Akiyode-Afolabi (2008, p.19) posits that the two instruments stress "the elimination of every form of discrimination against women in all spheres of life…[and imply] obligations for state parties to examine and review all existing discriminatory legislations… [and] to embark on affirmative policies that would correct the embedded structures of gender discrimination."

The two instruments challenge the pervasive nature of discrimination against women in Nigeria and the gender blindness of its constitution[17], as well as other gender discriminatory customary and religious laws. Women's groups argue that it is necessary to domesticate these instruments, especially CEDAW, because, according to the provisions of Section 12 of the constitution, women cannot take advantage of the two legal instruments in the Nigerian courts (BAOBAB, 2003). The section states that:

> No treaty between the Federation and any other country shall have the force of law except to the extent to which any such treaty has been enacted into law by the National Assembly.

Consequently, since the return of democracy in 1999, Nigerian women's organizations/groups have formed coalitions and, sometimes in collaboration with the Federal Ministry of Women's Affairs and the

Committees on Women's Affairs of the two National Assemblies (the executive and legislative arms of government respectively), have struggled to get CEDAW domesticated. Foremost in the struggle is the Nigerian NGO CEDAW Coalition, which was formed in May 1998 as a national network of over fifty registered Nigerian NGOs and whose secretariat is currently hosted by BAOBAB for Women's Human Rights (Nigeria NGO CEDAW Coalition, 2008). The coalition was formed to lobby for legislative reform and in response to the omissions in the Nigerian government's second and third periodic country reports to the UN CEDAW Committee for the period 1986-1994, which emphasized its programmes and activities but did not assess their actual impact on women. In response, in 1998 the coalition produced its first Shadow Report, which was used as an advocacy tool during the UN CEDAW Committee's consideration of the fourth country report by the Nigerian government.

This coalition has made two attempts to secure the domestication of CEDAW. The first started in 2005 but culminated in the dismissal of the relevant bill by the House of Assembly in 2007. The second started in 2008 and is ongoing. The review of this struggle in this section is largely drawn from Odinkalu (2008). According to him, to appreciate the fate that befell the 2007 CEDAW attempt, it is necessary to review a similar attempt made with respect to the Reproductive Health (RH) Bill, which set the stage for what happened to the stalled attempt to domesticate CEDAW in 2007. Odinkalu reports that the RH Bill was the brainchild of the Society of Gynaecology and Obstetrics of Nigeria (SOGON). It was introduced into the Senate in 2005 as a Private Member's Bill through the Senate Committee on Women Affairs. At its first public hearing in February 2006, there was stiff opposition to the bill from the public, particularly the religious establishment, which stalled its passage. According to him,

> …prior to the hearing, organized segments of the Catholic Church, especially the Catholic Women's Organisation (CWO) and vocal members of the only personal prelature in the Catholic Church, the *Opus Dei* order, denounced the Bill as an 'Abortion Bill'. In *Thisday* Newspaper, a member of the *Opus Dei* Sonnie Ekwowusi led opposition to the bill as follows:

> *Members of the National Assembly are too intelligent to be deceived in this matter. They know why the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF), United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Ford Foundation, MacArthur Foundation etc. are bent on getting abortion legalized in Nigeria. They know that the abortion business is a multi-national business for reaping huge financial profit. …They prefer to use the euphemism 'reproductive health' because they know the phrase 'abortion bill' will attract public condemnation.[18] …. Senator Danjuma and other abortionists are simply*

misreading the present state of the nation and present mood of Nigerians. They forget that Nigeria is a very conservative society with strong cultural and religious values. They forget that past attempts to legalize abortion in Nigeria failed woefully. ….Nigerian Muslims and Christians are united in vehemently opposing the moves to legalize abortion in Nigeria. This is because aside from being a political issue, abortion is also a moral and religious issue. Abortion is offensive to the tenets of Muslim and Christians [sic] religions….Now, how can Daisy Danjuma smuggle an abortion Bill through the backdoor of the National Assembly without consultation with prominent stakeholders like Alhaji Adegbite[19] and Cardinal Okogie? Aside from the duo, other stakeholders like Pastor E.O. Adeboye, Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), Catholic Women Organization (CWO), Islamic Propagation Committee, Nigerian Bar Association (NBA), Civil Liberties Organization (CLO),[20] should have been consulted as well.[21]

Similar media attacks by others[22] cemented the fate of the bill. As Odinkalu (2008, p. 7) observes,

Against such determined and skilful opposition, SOGON's response through Professor Okonofua's article of 15 March 2007 was much too little, too late. Facing both determined opposition from a constituency that had successfully framed the RH bill as an 'Abortion Bill' and lack of support from her peers in the Senate, Senator Danjuma appeared to have decided to withdraw the Bill from further consideration in the Senate. The supporters of the RH Bill, fearing a similar backlash in the House of Representatives, declined to introduce any similar measure in the House.

In the first quarter of 2007, the CEDAW bill was finally introduced into the National Assembly as an executive bill through the Federal Ministry for Women Affairs. In 2005, prior to its introduction, in order to brief legislators, a retreat was organized in Obudu, Cross River State, by the Federal House of Representatives' Committee on Women Affairs and the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs, in collaboration with some non-governmental organizations. Support was provided by organizations such as UNIFEM, UNICEF, the UNFPA and some leading Nigerian NGOs, such as the Women's Rights Advancement and Protection Alternative (WRAPA), Women Advocate Research and Documentation Centre (WARDC) and Civil Resource Development and Documentation Centre (CIRDDOC), as well as academics.

With advocacy targeted at Assembly Members, the Bill successfully sailed through the committee stage, as well the first and second readings in the House. However, during the second reading, opposition to certain articles of the convention, in particular, articles 12[23] and 16[24][24] Article 16 states:

1. States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in all matters relating to marriage and family relations and in particular shall ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women:

surfaced, some said as a result of public pressure. The opposition centred around the allegations that the CEDAW provides for abortion on demand, endangers marital rights by conceptualizing and criminalizing marital rape, raises the age of marriage for girls and criminalizes child marriage. During the debate in the National Assembly, for example, one member opposed the inclusion of article 16 in any Act for the domestication of CEDAW. He said "*If you look at clause 16, it is talking about marriage and equal rights. Islamically, it is not done like that; this is because in Islam the husband can terminate the marriage. Of course the wife can: but they do not have equal rights. So, we need to be very careful*" (Sada, Adamu and Yusuf, 2008, p. 29). Similarly, another member said,

> *I would add a caveat to be part of the whole Bill to take care of each and every section of this Bill that contravenes Islam and Christianity: that is, the laws inherent in these religions and there is no way we can push away our religious belief simply because something is coming from the United Nations. Religion is far above that* (Sada et al, 2008, p. 29).

The opposition during the later stages of the debate was fuelled by vocal public opposition that deployed language similar to that used in the campaign against the RH Bill. Writing in *Thisday* on 23rd February 2007, for instance, one Muyiwa Enuaye claimed that: "CEDAW is a product of radical feminists at the United Nations. It aims to legalize abortion and abolish the celebration of Mothers' Day."[25] On 10th May 2007, Idang Alibi wrote in the *Daily Trust*:

> For those who may not know what the CEDAW Treaty is all about, we are told in the March-April edition of the Population Research institute Review that 'it is a totalitarian piece of social engineering that aims to do everything from legalizing abortion on demand to abolishing Mothers' Day. Many readers may have difficulty believing that CEDAW means abortion–on-demand since the treaty never mentions abortion and how can anyone believe CEDAW means abolition of Mother's Day?[26]

As opposition mounted, the sponsor of the bill, the chairperson of House Committee for Women Affairs, opted to withdraw it rather than have it voted down on the floor of the House. With the return of both houses after the 2007 elections, the campaign for the domestication of CEDAW picked up again.

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This time round, the coalition re-strategized in order to draw from the lessons of previous experience. The first steps were to conduct research on the current situation of CEDAW through conducting a stakeholder analysis, identify challenges to the proposed legislation by the Islamic and Christian communities and learn from the experiences of other African countries that have domesticated CEDAW. The remaining part of this section is drawn from four of the reports.[27]

As observed by Imam (2008), most of the opposition to the failed CEDAW Bill of 2007 was represented as being based on religion, thus particular attention is paid to the views of faith communities. Although she cautions that this should not be read to imply that the only "important terrain of debate on women's rights is religious" (Imam, 2008), it is important to examine the key debates or points of controversy among the faith communities.

Despite a majority of the members of faith communities interviewed for the reports lacking any knowledge of CEDAW, their first concern was that CEDAW is considered to be a foreign imposition containing provisons that are anti-Islamic and anti-Christian (Akinrimisi, 2008; Imam, 2008; Sada et al, 2008). This sentiment was strongest among Muslim communities. However, as Odinkalu (2008) notes, although such views are often personal and are not shared by all members of a faith community, they are represented as the authentic position of the faith community as a whole. For example, while one Islamic legal scholar asserted that, "*anytime I hear that the Bill is before the house I will rise against it. The Islamic community will not support it. Some people may need it but we don't need it*", another Islamic scholar gave his full support to the Convention.

Similarly, individuals distinguished between support for the provisions of the Convention in general and objections to particular items. For example, a Catholic Archbishop expressed his broad support for the Convention because it is based on reverence for the dignity of the human person, but objected to its provisions on discrimination, equality, family planning and the right of women to an independent identity, arguing that these are likely to lead to revolutionary changes that will result in struggles between men and women. In addition, the vocal anti-CEDAW position of Catholic groups like the *Opus Dei* Prelature contrasts with the position of the Centre for Women's Studies and Intervention (CSWI), a project of the Congregation of the Handmaids of the Holy Child Jesus (HHCJ), which "envisions women empowered, liberated and active in the creation of a better world" and undertakes advocacy

and awareness-raising in support of the elimination of sex discrimination and equal rights for men and women based on major international human rights instruments such as CEDAW. For its community awareness raising projects, the Reverend Sisters who run the CSWI have printed and distributed simplified versions of major international human rights documents such as the CEDAW, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action (Odinkalu, 2008).

The second area of debate among faith communities was over the concept of equality. While there was general consensus that women and men are equal before God, there was strong resistance to the idea that women and men are equal in relation to each other. In the Muslim debates, this centred on the notion of equality as sameness. While citing the Quran on spiritual equality (3:195 and 41:13), and women and men being the protectors of each other (33:35-36 and 9:71-72), most of the respondents argued that in Islam, women and men have different roles and responsibilities in the family. They focused on the *Shariah* provision that men are responsible for family maintenance, arguing that equal responsibility for a family would be a loss for women, as it would lead to men evading their responsibility to provide for their wives and children. All the Muslims in the discussions preferred to use the terms equity, fairness or justice rather than equality implying sameness (Imam, 2008; Sada et al, 2008).

Odinkalu (2008) found a similar issue amongst Christian groups. For example, an Archbishop felt that "it is nearly impossible to say that we attain equality between men and women in the strict sense of it…. due to the fact of their biological and physiological differences. …What I think we should be talking about is equity."[28] Similarly, the responsibility of men as breadwinners dominated discussions within these groups. Those arguing for male superiority relied on the Old Testament hierarchies (Jew over non-Jew, men over women, free over slave), on Genesis 3:16 ('thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee'*)*, on the view that none of Jesus' disciples were women, and on particularly St. Paul (e.g. 1 Timothy 2:11-14). Amongst Christians, both women and men agreed that men are the heads of families (despite Ephesians 5:21 where husbands and wives are instructed to submit to each other), although there were discussions about the nature of submission vis-à-vis servitude. Those arguing for equality also cited both the Old and New Testaments, including alternative verses and interpretations of St. Paul (for example, Genesis 1: 26 – 27 and 2:24, Ephesians 5:21, Corinthians 4:7) (Akinrimisi, 2008; Imam, 2008).

The third area of contention related to issues surrounding marriage. Objections were raised by Muslim groups to the prohibition of marriage under the age of 18 and to the provisions on divorce. While some insisted on the right of parents to give their daughters in marriage, the majority held that consent is important. Christian discussants were divided on whether or not women have any right to divorce. Some argued that it is acceptable in some situations, especially where the husband is violent. However, the majority of the Christian religious leaders[29] held that wives have no right to divorce – even in the case of adultery or violence by the husband. Some held that neither men nor women may divorce (Catholic), or that men (only) may divorce on the grounds of the wife's fornication (cited in Imam, 2008 and sourced from Akinrimisi, 2008). The issue of divorce also attracted debate among Muslim respondents, with the majority questioning the CEDAW's position over the equal right to divorce. The most common position was that, although both men and women have the right to end a marriage, men have the right to unilateral repudiation, while women are required to seek court arbitration.

The fourth area of contention, especially among the Muslims, centred on diverse legal matters such as equality before the law, inheritance rights, adoption and the concept of degrading punishment, particularly *hudud* punishments (whipping, stoning, amputation, death in the same mode as the person murdered). Fostering was preferred to adoption and equality before the law was contentious with respect to women's capacity to enter a marriage without a guardian and women acting as witnesses.

Fifthly, access to reproductive rights and services was also found to be controversial among the Christian participants. Some groups, in particular the Catholic Church, equated access to reproductive services, including family planning, with advocating abortion. However, representatives of other Christian Churches regarded family planning as acceptable and abortion as permissible in certain circumstances, such as pregnancy resulting from rape, incest or with health consequences to the mother. Amongst the Muslim community, access to reproductive health information and services was not a contentious issue, with the proviso that family planning should not be for fear of poverty.[30]

In relation to women's participation in public life, there was acceptance in both faith communities over the representation and leadership of women and equal rights to acquire, retain and pass on nationality.

However, some Muslim men felt that this did not apply to certain positions (the presidency and judiciary in *Shariah* courts), while others opposed this view on the grounds that Nigeria is a multi-religious country. Furthermore, both faith communities supported the eradication of violence against women (aside from marital rape) and the suppression of trafficking and exploitation through prostitution, as well as the elimination of harmful traditional practices. They also supported the equal rights of husband and wife to education, employment, and the ownership, acquisition, management, administration, enjoyment and disposition of property.

It is clear from the studies (Akinrimisi, 2008; Imam, 2008; Odinkalu, 2008; Sada et al, 2008) that there are many provisions of CEDAW for which there is support both within and amongst the faith communities, but that some provisions lack such support. This underscores the need to examine how women's groups in the coalition engage with faith communities over such areas of support and opposition. This issue is dealt with in Section 5.2, which offers an overiew of women's organizations' regional agendas.

5.2   Regional agendas

As noted earlier in this section, regional and religious differences in the country often influence the type of change agendas women's groups champion. This might be connected to the tendency for women's change agendas to reflect their perceptions about the causes of their low social status and what conditions and privileges are considered desirable for women in society, as influenced by their religious beliefs and ethnic affiliation. This section is divided into two parts. The first presents the change agendas of women's groups operating in the four States studied and the second examines their engagement with religion in the process of pursuing such change agendas, beginning with Oyo State.

In the south west of the country, where Oyo State is located, the focus of women's groups is on the provision of practical services for market women, such as crèches to care for their children and craft centres for skills acquisition. Another concern is violence against women, particularly wife battery, which is pervasive, although only a few studies document the magnitude of the problem, especially among the working class (Fawole et al, 2005). In addition, the practice of female circumcision, which

is believed to deter women from becoming promiscuous, continues in some parts of the State, as evidenced by Aderinto (2001).

Widow inheritance is also a major issue for women's groups in this region. Under this practice, a woman who loses her husband is passed on to any of the deceased's younger brothers. If she refuses, she faces the risk of being banished from her community (Aderinto, 2001). Generally, under Yoruba customary law, a wife does not have the right to inherit a deceased husband's estate, which under native law and custom follows the male blood line. Instead, the children of a deceased father, whether male or female, are entitled to inherit his property. Thus "it is also taken under the native law and custom of the Yoruba people that a wife could not inherit her husband's property since she herself is, like a chattel, to be inherited by a relative of her husband" (Ondo State Government, 1980, p. 119).

Women in the south east of Nigeria, where Anambra State is located, have a history of mobilization, exemplified in the 1929 Aba riots that women themselves call a 'women's war'. The riots were primarily a movement of women to protect their economic and political interests, which were endangered by taxation, the economic crisis and the warrant chiefs[31] (Mba, 1992, p.86). Typically in Igboland, of which Anambra State forms a part, community-based groups, like local town unions and village meetings, age-grades,[32] and men's and women's groups,[33] are strong platforms for initiating self-help development activities, instilling discipline, maintaining law and order and ensuring the transmission of culture. Several women's organizations operate within the State. They are located both in the State capital and in urban and rural communities in the local government areas. Many of these women's organizations function as age grades and cultural organizations (*Umuada/ Umuokpu*[34]*)*, some are faith-based organizations (e.g. the Catholic Women Organization (CWO), the Mothers' Union (MU) and the Women's Guild), while others are secular and function as Women's Cooperative Societies. Each has specific areas of interest, usually geared towards the welfare and economic empowerment of women and their families, but also community development. Their activities include thrift (savings) and credit, marketing, arts and crafts, industry, and processing foods such as cassava, palm oil, rice and flour. Other activity areas include women's political emancipation, widowhood rights, campaigning against harmful traditional and cultural practices, women's economic empowerment (including the acquisition of vocational skills) and providing counselling services on

social, legal and health matters. Many of these women`s organizations are affiliated to the National Council of Women Societies (NCWS), which is an umbrella body for different women`s associations.

The engagement of women's NGOs in the struggle for the realization of the rights of women in the State has taken the form of legal reform against harmful traditional practices that discriminate against women. At the forefront of this struggle is the Coalition of Eastern NGOs (CENGOS), which is an umbrella organization of over 100 NGOs in the nine States of the old Eastern Region (Anambra, Abia, Akwa-Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross-River, Ebonyi, Enugu, Imo and Rivers), with a mandate to promote and protect the human rights of Nigerian citizens and build the capacity of civil society. In 2003, it organized a workshop on Human Rights and Gender for the traditional leaders in its area of jurisdiction, who are regarded as the custodians of culture and tradition.[35] Other NGOs involved are the Civil Resource Development and Documentation Centre (CIRDDOC) and the Women Action Committee (WACA).

CENGOS sought to reform inheritance laws that prohibit women not only from inheriting from their husband's descent group but also, if a woman has no children, not even having the rights of usufruct of land after the death of her husband (Mba, 1992, pp. 75-77). In addition, women are not entitled to a share of their fathers' estates. Thus in Ugboma v. Ibineme (1967) FNLR 251, the court held that, in accordance with general Igbo custom, which is also the custom of Awkuzu (Anambra State), women are not entitled to inherit land from their fathers (Candide-Johnson, 2005). However, in Ukeje v. Ukeje (2001)27 WRN 14, the Court of Appeal held that Igbo Native Law and Custom, which disentitles a female (regardless of the circumstances of her birth) to a share of her deceased father's estate is void, as it conflicts with Section 42(1) & (2) of the 1999 Constitution of Nigeria, which states that:

> (1) A citizen of Nigeria of a particular community, ethnic group, place of origin, sex, religion or political opinion shall not, by reason only that he is such a person:- (a) be subjected either expressly by, or in the practical application of, any law in force in Nigeria or any executive or administrative action of the government, to disabilities or restrictions to which citizens of Nigeria of other communities, ethnic groups, places of origin, sex, religions or political opinions are not made subject; or (b) be accorded either expressly by, or in the practical application of, any law in force in Nigeria or any such executive or administrative action, any privilege or advantage that is not accorded to citizens of Nigeria of other communities, ethnic groups, places of origin, sex, religions or political opinions.

(2) No citizen of Nigeria shall be subjected to any disability or deprivation merely by reason of the circumstances of his [sic] birth.

Candide-Johnson (2005) argues that this particular court ruling provides hope for future judgements in favour of women, especially in a context in which the law is rarely interpreted in support of women's rights.

At one of the rallies conducted by CIRDDOC, the issue of inheritance and the myths surrounding it was raised when one of the male opinion leaders said that "denial of inheritance rights to girls and women arose from the fact that it would be unfair for women to inherit twice - at their maiden family and their marital family - while men will only inherit once" (CIRDDOC, 2005). Women's groups quickly responded that "women do not have inheritance rights in their marital homes unless they have male children. They were made to understand that even at that, giving a male child a share in the inheritance does not translate to a share to his mother. The point was also made that a woman who does not have a male issue does not have any part of the estate and this amounted to injustice" (CIRDDOC, 2005). At the end of the rally there were commitments from both the women themselves and traditional rulers and opinion leaders to put a stop to some of the practices that amount to violence against women.

Harmful traditional practices such as widowhood rites are prevalent in Anambra State. According to Candide-Johnson (2005), "most Nigerian tribal/cultural groupings still practice (and actively protect as inviolable tradition) what can best be described as barbaric attitudes and treatment towards widows who ordinarily should be treated with sympathy, care and tender affection in their most vulnerable moments of loss, grief and despair….The atrocities of widowhood rites in traditional Igbo society seem to be unrivalled in Nigeria." BAOBAB (2003, p. 44) reported some of these practices:

> The Igbo widow must sit confined to either a part of the husband's house or just a corner of it till the mourning period is over. She must not go out at all. She must not have any physical contact with anybody. Any gifts or money brought for her must be dropped in front of her. Nobody must touch her (as if she is the plague itself). ….. In Igbo culture, she is expected to be mostly naked. The widow sits holding a knife (*mma ekwu*), which she must not drop. In other words, sleeping would be rather difficult. Shaving of hair of some parts of the body especially the head is also required. Her female in-laws called '*umuada*' surround her….. They may beat her up for not wailing loudly enough since loud and continuous wailing is seen as a sign of respect for her late husband. Depending on their

temperament, they may drag her out during the funeral ceremony to be beaten by masquerades that usually carry deadly charms and poison. In some instances, the widow is not even allowed to pay her husband the last respects.

BAOBAB (2003, pp. 44-45) further reported that,

In a community like Nanka in Anambra State, the widow must not see her husband's corpse. She must leave home as soon as he dies. She may only come back for the funeral and mourning rites. Before she gets back, the man's relations would have taken everything they want. The widow can keep whatever she finds on return, which is usually very little. ….Despite these degrading treatments, women still opt for it for fear of their sons being disinherited. These widowhood rites do not hold for widowers.

As reported by BAOBAB (2003, p. 45), "in September 1993, *The Champion* newspaper carried the story of a protest by women from Enugu-Agidi in Njikoka LGA of Anambra State. They numbered about 2000. They protested against the traditions that humiliate women in the area. Some of the placards they carried read, *'*don't debase womanhood in the name of culture: let's have freedom of worship: and don't drag us into idol worship.' Among other things, they protested the practice of taking widows to a shrine for purification." Candide-Johnson (2005) points out that these practices persist despite the presence of statutory laws that provide at least limited protection from inhuman and degrading treatment, as well as women's right to inherit.

As a result of the protests and advocacy, the Anambra State government signed into law two progressive pieces of legislation: the *Anambra State Malpractices against Widows and Widowers (Prohibition) Law No. 2005* and the *Anambra State Gender and Equal Opportunities Commission Law, 2007 (s.8).* The latter prescribes that a mandatory minimum of 30 per cent of all offices, positions and appointments be reserved for women in the political and public sphere. It further guarantees that a minimum of 50 per cent will be reserved for women in the case of school enrolment, scholarship awards and bursaries (s8(2)). The law, in line with Para. 2 of Art. 4 of CEDAW, also mandates that appropriate steps be taken to protect maternal rights (see section 8(3)).

The Anambra State law on Malpractices against Widows and Widowers prohibits and penalizes the maltreatment of widows and widowers in order to uphold and preserve the dignity of the human person as entrenched in the Constitution. Section 3 provides that the fundamental human rights as enshrined

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in the Constitution are inalienable and accrue to every widow or widower. Section 4 (1) provides that no person shall compel a widow or widower:

a) to vacate his or her matrimonial home on the ground that she or he has no male child or no child at all;

b) to drink the water used in washing the corpse of the late spouse or to perform any type of ritual in order to establish innocence of causing the death of the late spouse;

c) to sleep either alone or on the same bed or to be locked in the same room with the corpse of the late spouse;

d) to remain in compulsory confinement after the death of the spouse for any give period;

e) to compulsorily wear mourning clothes of any make or otherwise, adopt any lifestyle indicative of being in mourning for any given period from the date of the death of the late spouse;

f) to compulsorily sit on the bare floor or be naked during any period of the spouse's burial rites;

g) to be remarried to a relative of the late spouse;

h) to shave the hairs on the head or any other part of the body;

i) to desist from receiving condolence visits from sympathizers during the period of mourning;

j) to weep and wail loudly at intervals at any time after the death of the late spouse;

k) to put ashes on the head;

l) not to see the corpse of the late spouse;

m) to perform any act which contravenes the fundamental human rights provisions as entrenched in the Constitution;

n) to visit any shrine and or to perform any other rituals.

In Plateau State, women's change agendas span primarily practical but also strategic gender interests. The literature surveyed points to three predominant issue-areas around which women have tended to organize for social change:

- poverty alleviation (through income generation/micro-credit for rural dwellers and low-income urban women or welfare, especially for widows)
- reproductive health (especially maternal health and teenage pregnancy)
- education.

Consequently, NGOs, particularly cultural/ethnic associations, cooperative societies, faith-based organizations and other community-based organizations, are engaged in income generation projects, welfare, adult literacy and reproductive health issues. Dariye (2006) and Kwardem (2007) allude to the

high level of female poverty in both rural and urban areas, resulting from the traditional structures of male dominance that create additional domestic and socioeconomic burdens for women and limit their access to productive resources. Although there is no gender disaggregated data to prove the assertion of feminized poverty, both writers refer to the commonly stated view that women in Plateau State comprise the bulk of the agricultural and informal sectors, working in the latter as petty traders and artisans. Despite their important economic roles, Baklit (2001) and Dariye (2006) claim that women farmers on the Plateau are generally excluded from agricultural inputs that would enhance their productivity and output, such as the distribution of fertilizer subsidies and extension services. Since women are customarily debarred from land ownership, government agencies tend to favour male farmers, titled landowners and heads of families. This situation is pervasive and not peculiar to Plateau State. It led to the National Council for Women Societies lobbying the Federal Government for funds from the National Poverty Alleviation Programme (NAPEP)[36] to be allocated specifically to women. Consequently, in 2003 the Obasanjo administration approved the sum of N400 million (US$3,076,923) to be administered nationally through the NCWS.[37]

Plateau women have not relied solely on government initiatives to alleviate poverty. One of the most successful efforts in female poverty reduction has been through the activities of the Country Women Association of Nigeria (COWAN), which has branches all over Nigeria, including Plateau State. Studies on COWAN demonstrate that the provision of micro-credit has served both practical and strategic gender interests, leading to improvements in material conditions and empowering women to acquire greater control over their lives and more voice in their communities (Para-Mallam, 2006; Kwardem, 2007). The following claim by COWAN (Para-Mallam, 2006, p. 243) demonstrates this clearly:

> [In] *one of our remotest areas this woman is right now economically empowered. She doesn't know English or Hausa but she is always invited for meetings at the community level and she has even been invited to the local government. So she came up and she came specifically to thank COWAN. And so many of them have come like that to just come and thank COWAN that they can now speak even in the rural areas and be heard. It's something. That in the past who is she? Or who was she to even speak and be heard? But now she said they even come to ask for advices from her. So she was so proud…* (Obadiah: Interview, 18/06/03)

COWAN is also involved in a wide range of projects including skills acquisition training, political education, gender awareness campaigns, water supply and sanitation, and health service delivery.

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Kwardem's study provides concrete data in the form of figures and detailed project summaries showing evidence of the impact of COWAN in reducing poverty among women in Plateau State. In addition, the organization works tacitly yet strategically to transform gender roles and relations by involving men as associate members and soliciting the support of community leaders for its goals and objectives.[38]

Plateau State has one of the highest HIV/AIDS prevalence rates in Nigeria[39] (Nigeria CEDAW NGO Coalition, 2008), as well as a high rate of teenage pregnancy and maternal mortality, which several studies have linked to the high incidence of poverty (see Jimeta, 2007; Masalla, 2004). However, a study conducted by Hunduh (2004) of the Women Health and Economic Empowerment Initiative Project in Jos found evidence to support the claim that poverty reduction strategies have had a significant impact on women's sexual and reproductive health.

In addition to the efforts of secular groups like the NCWS and COWAN, there are also a number of faith-based initiatives, such as the COCIN[40] Enable Project on Reproductive Health and FOMWAN CEDPA-sponsored initiatives on reproductive health, both of which were reviewed positively in a 2003 CEDPA Report (see Section 5.3). An increasing number of faith-based organizations (e.g. Help for Widows and the New Hope for Widows Ministry) are also being set up to attend to the practical needs of widows, who are often victims of discriminatory customary practices.

Many secular and faith-based groups have also initiated projects (independently or as part of a collaborative effort) to promote female participation/representation in politics and decision-making and to increase female access to education through girl-child bursary schemes and adult literacy programmes. For instance, in 1999 an informal network of secular and faith-based women's groups staged advocacy campaigns to press for 30 per cent affirmative action in the State Executive Council and other positions. The effort bore fruit, as the then Governor Joshua Dariye promised that at least 30 per cent of his cabinet would be female – a promise he fulfilled through the appointment of four female commissioners.[41] However, as Section 5.3 indicates, women's change agendas often take place in resistance to religious and cultural values and practices or as part of an effort to promote faith and religious ethics and morality.

In the north west of the country, where Kano State is located, the focus of the women's movements, as our informant Zainab Kabir pointed out, tends to be on such practical gender issues as reproductive rights, the right of women to education and democratic rights, as well as agitating for the rights of women as enshrined in the *Shariah*. Popular issues among women's NGOs are the campaigns for the reduction of maternal death and girl-child education. For instance, Women in the Media, the Federation of Muslim Women's Associations in Nigeria (FOMWAN), the Muslim Sister's Organization (MSO), the Adolescent Health And Information Project (AHIP), the Sustainable Development Initiative Centre (SUDIC), the Grassroots Health Organization of Nigeria (GHON), the Youth Empowerment and Human Development Initiative (YEHDI) and the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI) have formed a coalition and are engaged in a series of activities through dialogue with both the government and the traditional and religious authorities to improve maternal care under safe motherhood initiatives funded by the UK Department for International Development.

One issue that has taken centre stage in the struggle of women's associations and groups since the introduction of *Shariah* in the region is agitation for the protection and promotion of women's rights under *Shariah*. In response to women's demand that a distinction is made between certain traditional practices and *Shariah*, the Centre for Islamic Legal Studies of Ahmadu Bello University commissioned a study[42] on the rights of women under *Shariah.* This study identified common practices and provided *Shariah* positions on them, with a view to providing information that could be used by women's groups in their agitation for women's rights.

5.3   Women's groups' engagement with religion

Having identified some of the issues women in the four States considered in the preliminary stages of this research have championed, it is important to consider whether they have faced challenges from the faith communities in the pursuit of their activities, because, as Dennis (1986) notes, religious values have a profound impact on the process and nature of social change. Sometimes, attempts to live out religious faith themselves lead to social change. However, faith communities often denounce social change in the wider society, stressing that such change must not be allowed to affect the essentials of religion. Yet history has documented that periods of rapid social change are usually accompanied by considerable creativity in religion, as religious traditions change in response to the new conditions (Dennis, 1986). Thus, changes in support of women's rights and against gender

inequality may attract either positive or negative attention from the religious establishment. This section examines the existing evidence on how women's groups have engaged with religion during their struggles for social change.

The tendency for religion to serve as either a help or a hindrance to women's change agendas depends on how religious injunctions are interpreted and applied. Conservative interpretations of sacred texts may pose a serious challenge to human rights and gender equality agendas, which are widely perceived in Nigeria not only to be impositions from the West and alien to African culture but also to be non-compliant with sound religious doctrine. Women activists have challenged the latter assumption, using religious premises and terminology to evoke messages of empowerment and social justice. In so doing, many make a distinction between secular and religious value systems. For instance, Fawehinmi (2003 in Para-Mallam, 2007, p. 226), who founded the Christian Resource Centre for Women in Lagos, asserts that Christian women:

> ...have freedom in Christ not to do whatever we like. This is not American- style liberation. They claim to be free but are in bondage. This is a paradox. So we believe in liberation but not secular activism that is, just being vocal. We believe in being vocal and free but have different values. It's about being free in our hearts to become who we really are in the spirit (Interview, 17th June, 2003).

By '*who we are in the spirit*,' Fawehinmi was stressing both the positional and functional equality of male and female believers.

Similarly, Gyarta Pofi (2003 in Para-Mallam, 2007, pp. 256-7) describes how the COCIN Women Fellowship Unit uses bible studies to present an emancipated, non-conventional self-concept for women and girls, based on the teachings and attitudes of Jesus Christ to women. However, while the positional equality of men and women, implying intrinsic human worth, is generally accepted by Christian scholars, the notion of functional equality, implying interchangeable roles, remains highly contested (see for example, Piper and Grudem, 1991). Those who argue against functional equality base their position on the biblical narrative of the creation order in Genesis 2 which, as discussed earlier, they claim presupposes female subordination and submission and male headship. Akinrimisi's (2008) study of the compatibilities and divergences between CEDAW and Christian tenets in Nigeria argues that the inability to distinguish between patriarchal Jewish cultural practices and the

progressive approach to women exemplified by Christ has been largely responsible for an insistence on female subordination and exclusion from leadership roles in the home, church and society.

Similarly Owanikin (1992), speaking on the ordination of women to the priesthood, asserts that the notion of female subordination derives from Jewish cultural norms and values. Religion is an aspect of culture, just as religious ideologies often infuse cultural norms and practices. Consequently, it is not always possible to discuss religion without reference to cultural norms, symbols and taboos, which tend to have religious undertones. Nweze and Takaya (2001) state that Nigerian women suffer from gender discrimination due to Africa's triple cultural heritage: the synthesis of Eastern (Arab Islamic), Western (Judeo-Christian) and African customs and traditions. The various forms of discrimination, many already identified in this paper, have been documented extensively. Agbaje et al (2002, p. 12) state that:

> Nigerian women, like other women, have long been discriminated against in social, economic, cultural, educational, and political life, among others. Gender inequity has been the hallmark of the polity, strengthened by the unfortunate application and interpretation of cultural, social and religious tenets, often skewed against women.

Responding to this, some female Christian theologians in Nigeria argue that biblical texts have been taken out of their historical, cultural and literary contexts to perpetuate the derogatory treatment of women, which is in their view inconsistent with the gospel message of equality and justice for all. Je'adayibe (2000), for example, identifies a biblical feminist perspective founded on Christ's redemptive work for all humankind, as expressed in Galatians 3:28: "Faith in Christ Jesus is what makes each of you equal with each other, whether you are a Jew or a Greek, a slave or a free person, a man or a woman" (*Contemporary English Version*). Biblical feminists regard the equality of men and women in creation (Genesis 1:26-28) and salvation (1 Peter 3:7) as premises for an egalitarian society:

> God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the sky, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.' God created man in his own image. In God's image he created him; male and female he created them. God blessed them. God said to them, 'Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it. Have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the sky, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.' (Genesis 1:26-28, World English Bible version)

1 Peter 1:7 enjoins, "You husbands, in like manner, live with your wives according to knowledge, giving honour to the woman, as to the weaker vessel, as being also joint heirs of the grace of life; that your prayers may not be hindered."

Je'adayibe (2000) also recalls the prominent role of women as the first propagators of the Christian faith and prominent leaders in the early Church. She notes that some churches, notably Pentecostal denominations, have embraced this progressive message to some extent by giving women leadership roles. Importantly, women of faith are using religious discourse and prayer as sources of strength and an incentive to fight for women's rights (Para-Mallam, 2006). For example, the Daughters of Sarah International and the Women Fellowship Unit of the Church of Christ in Nigeria (COCIN) both operate from a biblical premise that assumes the equality and dignity of women. A CEDPA report *(The Enable Project, 2003)* on the 'Democracy and Governance' activities of COCIN's Women Fellowship Unit stated how the group had been involved in educating the church membership and leadership on women's socioeconomic contributions and rights, raising gender awareness and mobilizing women to participate in politics.

However, as the CEDPA report infers, most of the activities of Christian women's organizations that seek to expand women's roles are directed inward to women's fellowships and other church departments or events. Those seeking wider societal reach on matters relating to advocacy for women's rights, legal reform and political representation are more likely to pursue their objectives through secular civil society organizations. In practice, Christian women's engagement with religion appears to have been concerned more with female participation in Church leadership than with women's rights in general. First, this has to do with the fact that in principle Nigerian statutory law accords men and women equal status before the law and is largely a heritage of English common law which has deep roots in Judaeo-Christian values and principles. However, in practice, the entire law and justice system in Nigeria has been shown to contain provisions and procedures that violate women's rights (BAOBAB, 2003). Second, Christian women have generally not been placed under any formal or explicit restrictions regarding the extent or level of public participation, either in the labour force or in governance. Nevertheless, as Dipo-Salami's (2002) study on women and religion shows, the portrayal of wife and mother roles as the ultimate biblical ideal places a double burden on women and serves as a *psychological* barrier limiting their ability to avail themselves of socioeconomic and

political opportunities, particularly as Bible expositors tend not to domesticate fatherhood. The result of the association of statutory law with a seemingly gender-balanced Judaeo-Christian value system and the non-formal yet internalized nature of gender asymmetries is that there is scant literature on women's human rights from the perspective of Christian women (or men). Moreover, most of the literature on women and religion deals with topics like spiritual development, marriage and family life, parenting and church ministry.

Faith-based organizations see social activism as part of the gospel mandate to share God's love with the world, beyond the traditional domain of saving the lost and promoting spiritual development. Where Christian women's organizations have ventured outside these traditional areas, they have been active in meeting the practical gender needs of women and girls.   Groups such as the New Hope for Widows Ministry, Jos; Help for Widows, Jos; Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), (nationwide); St. Andrews Women's Organization, Okigwe; Save the Lost Women Adult Education Programme, Nnewi, and several denominational fellowships continue to engage in the provision of welfare, educational services, health education and skills acquisition training to members and non-members alike. For instance, The New Hope Ministry was established in response to the preponderance of widows who were left destitute as a result of cultural discrimination, and in fulfilment of the command in 1Timothy 5:3 to "[Always] treat with great consideration and give aid to those who are truly widowed (solitary and without support)" (*Amplified Version*). Similarly, numerous women's groups adopt practical agendas for social change under the rubric of Christian women's ministries, either as part of Church denominations (i.e. as women's/sisters' fellowship groups) or as separate efforts that seek to improve the material condition of women and girls. In particular, most Christian organizations (both mainstream and women's groups) pay particular attention to poverty alleviation, due to the numerous biblical injunctions to take care of the poor. However, such efforts are usually outside the mainstream of ecclesiastical activities and also, most Christian women pursue agendas for social change through their involvement in secular organizations, potentially bringing Christian values to bear on the process. A case in point is the Network of Caring Women in Jos, an organization that provides welfare and other services to poor people, particularly widows, orphans, single mothers and the destitute.

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Nevertheless, Christian women's groups are beginning to reach beyond their comfort zone of church ministry and basic needs provisioning into a broader domain of social engagement, notably political participation and representation. For instance, the COCIN Women's Fellowship Unit launched a programme titled: 'Women in Democracy' and linked up with other women's groups in Plateau State to conduct advocacy campaigns for affirmative action. Some groups are also involved in campaigns against discriminatory cultural practices. These sorts of efforts are sometimes met by resistance from laymen and male leaders within the church, who hold to a conservative interpretation of scripture (Para-Mallam, 2007). Men are often opposed to the idea of women's empowerment because they perceive it as a threat to male privilege, power and authority. The antagonism is displayed through the lack of church support for empowerment projects, verbal denunciation or even refusal by husbands to allow their wives to participate in activities.

Male fear of female empowerment is particularly evident with respect to issues relating to marriage and reproductive rights. In this regard, Christian and Muslim interests often converge. Akinrimisi (2008, p.15) cites the example of how an Owerri-based coalition called the African Anti-Abortion Coalition, consisting of Christian and Muslim FBOs and coordinated by the Heritage Network, opposed the bid to domesticate CEDAW. The coalition presented a paper to the Senate in which it raised the several objections to Articles 10, 12 and 16 of the Convention (those relating to family planning, female bodily integrity and reproductive rights respectively). According to the coalition the provisions constitute a negation of 'African values'.

Although Akinrimisi (2008) cites diverse opinions of lay Christians and church leaders as well as biblical texts to refute the foregoing arguments, she also contends that the prevalent attitude in the churches supports some level of gender role differentiation, particularly where it concerns the exercise of power and authority. Similarly, Owanikin (1992, p. 206) asserts that liberating messages remain on the periphery of religious discourse and practice, as "the general phenomenon still reveals a resistance to change" and conservative understandings about the position of women in the home and larger society prevail. As a result, women's NGOs, particularly those promoting women's human rights, have had an uneasy relationship with the religious and traditional establishments, which have opposed bills presented to the National Assembly on child rights, gender violence and CEDAW (Effah-Chukuma in Para-Mallam, 2007) and in practice, in order to avoid confrontation with the religious

establishment, most Christian women's groups focus on less controversial issues related to practical gender interests.

Yet Pofi (2003 in Para-Mallam, 2007, pp 256-7), for example, is optimistic about male involvement on the basis of her experience. Through the exemplary leadership of women leaders and a conciliatory as opposed to confrontational approach, she noted, men have often become supporters and collaborators in women's empowerment efforts. In addition, in recent years the increased numbers of faith-based NGOs established by faith communities, religious organizations and women's blocs within the Christian tradition have brought the issue of religion in relation to gender equality agendas into sharper focus. The current challenge for such agendas is how women's organizations can find points of commonality with faith-based organizations in the search for a more just and humane society for all.

The experience of Muslims differs from that of Christians because of historical circumstances. The 19th century *Jihad* movement, which culminated in the establishment of the Sokoto caliphate and an Islamic form of governance, had far-reaching consequences for women's rights issues and the way in which women's groups operating in the Muslim-dominated States engage with Islam. For instance, some matters of concern to women, such as inheritance, divorce, marriage and child custody, can be resolved within the Islamic legal system. Nevertheless, any movement that aims to effect change in Nigeria, especially in the predominantly Muslim States and ethnic groups, has to strategically confront and engage with Islam.

Projects of WACOL, BAOBAB, and WRAPA show that women's rights can be promoted using *Shariah* principles, although there are often tensions between universal rights, religious teachings and the restrictions of particular cultures. For example, in a global campaign to improve women's inheritance rights, a compromise had to be reached because some Muslim women from Africa and Asia disapproved of the use of the term 'equality' as in, for example, 'women's rights to equal inheritance' (Ezeilo, 2006). Activists need to address the need for such compromises, because pragmatic approaches in advocating for women's rights have both merits and demerits:

> It sometimes leaves us open to accusations of settling for too little. Others have suggested that such pragmatism drives a wedge between theory and practice and between the legal code and its implementation. In reality, it may be the only option for feminists working in societies that live under Islamic law or Shariah, where the challenges are increasingly insurmountable (Ezeilo, 2006, p. 42).[43]

Similarly, in a focus group discussion with Muslim women activists in Kaduna in April 2008 as part of a DFID-funded *Study on Compatibility and Divergence of CEDAW and Shariah in Nigeria*, referred to above, the concept of 'equality' was debated extensively and rejected in favour of 'equity'.

Ezeilo (2006, 2007) argues that in a conservative society like Hausa society, feminists must be extremely creative and innovative in their efforts to promote the human rights of women and gender equity. Similarly, with respect to her experience of WIN activities in Kano, Imam (1993), contends that WIN suffered from the allegation of being Western, too radical and non-Muslim, "despite the fact that WIN has been careful not to attack religious sentiments directly" (Imam, 1993), focusing instead on fighting for the economic and political conditions for women's autonomy, as well as arguing for the implementation of the rights women have in Islam.

This appears to be the approach of many secular women's movements operating in Kano. For example, a Women Aid Collective (WACOL) project on the promotion of women's rights had to deploy *Shariah* to counter similar attacks on its programmes such as the legal aid, women's rights and access to justice project in eight largely Muslim states: Katsina, Kano, Kebbi, Sokoto, Gombe, Niger, Bauchi and Jigawa. The project activities consisted of the creation of a legal literacy series in Hausa and English covering such issues as the position of *Shariah* on women's rights*,* female circumcision, divorce, the custody of children*,* inheritance and will making, and child abuse and neglect. Ezeilo reports that the books examine these issues from an Islamic perspective, providing correct information on the provisions of Islamic law. She concludes that, "in developing these texts, we discovered that some of the provisions in the Quran provide greater protection of women's rights than various customary laws applicable in Southern Nigeria" (Ezeilo, 2006, p. 44). The strategy adopted by WACOL was to disseminate the information along with international conventions such as CEDAW, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the African Protocol on the Rights of Women and other relevant provisions of the Nigerian Constitution. Community workshops were organized to sensitize

community members on women's rights. Para-legal and community advocates were put in place to work at the grassroots in order help women whose rights have been violated to seek formal redress in the courts. After 9/11, however, the project was accused of being anti-Islamic and the organization an agent of America, endangering its efforts.

Another approach women's groups and activists in Kano State have adopted is the deployment of Islamic language and references to Islamic history to debate issues over women's rights. This strategy is mostly associated with faith-based associations such as the Muslim Sisters Organization (MSO) and FOMWAN. In order to gain legitimacy, the Muslim women groups' "strategy has been to draw on selected statements from accepted religious authorities and try to weld these into a coherent interpretation of Islam" (Imam, 1993, p. 136). Furthermore, in her interview with a Muslim woman activist and scholar, Zainab S. Kabir, Imam reported the often cited argument that Muslim women's discrimination and subordination is related to the adulteration of Islam with Arab and Hausa cultures, citing many verses of the Quran to buttress her point that Islam has given women rights. Kabir also claimed that most of the authority used to subordinate women is based on the *Hadith* and the *Shariah*, not verses of the Quran, which are sacrosanct. She pointed out that almost all interpreters of the Holy Quran are men, who have interpreted Quranic verses without regard for women's interests. Kabir followed the same line of argument in our interview with her in Kano[44], calling on Muslim women to become Islamic scholars in order to make their own interpretations.[45]

Islam has also been used by FOMWAN to gain legitimacy

> … to support the liberal interpretation of [the] Islamic position on women. More importantly the movement seeks for the redefinition of gender relations and discourse in Islam as practised in Nigeria. Consequently they were able to occupy a legitimate position and voice in the advocacy for shariah reform on matters of concern to Muslim women such as marriage, inheritance, divorce and other forms of women's rights to education and political participation (Adamu, 1999, p. 11).

The campaign by FOMWAN over women's education and women's right to work is an important development, as it amounts to a challenge to the dominant Islamic practice of seclusion and the claim that the place of women is in the home. However, as Imam (1993) and Adamu (1999, p. 12) note, this strategy limits the issues on which FOMWAN and other organizations can campaign without losing their authority to speak on the basis of Islam:

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> There is [a] limit to the extent to which FOMWAN could challenge the present version of Islam that is entrenched with male biases. It will be difficult for the movement to directly attack practices and issues that are defined within the current version of Islam. Its alliance with the Islamic scholars and government has rendered the movement dependent on the men for legitimacy. As a result, the extent of their criticism towards the Islamist and the political class is limited (Adamu, 1999, p. 11).

Furthermore, the assumption that an increase in women Islamic scholars will translate into the production of women-friendly Islamic literature has not been borne out in reality. Women have been enrolling in Islamiyya schools since the 1980s Islamic reform activities of the Izala movement, yet these institutions have yet to produce a body of women Islamic scholars who are capable of presenting a liberal interpretation of the Quran. Commenting on the quality and nature of the Islamic education available to Muslim women, Bugaje (1997, p. 9) writes:

> Even where women had the benefit of Islamic education, the kind of education they received, far from developing a critical faculty, tended to inculcate meekness and render them prisoners to interpretations which at the end of the day tend to serve the interest of their male teachers more than the collective interest of the *ummah*.

As a result, the Islamic education received by most women has tended to reinforce the ideology that views them as subservient to men.

6   Conclusions

Interviews with key informants and a review of existing literature and research point to the fact that there is no agreement among scholars on what constitutes a women's movement in Nigeria or indeed whether the different women's groups, organizations and alliances that exist in the country can be referred to as a 'women's movement'. Central to the debate is the contention that the characteristics of some of these organizations, which may be urban and elitist, rural and grassroots-based, or fragmented along ethno-religious lines, do not permit the formation of a cohesive and coherent approach to gender issues and change agendas. Most importantly, women's organizations have tended to be unwilling to challenge the existing patriarchal structures that perpetuate and sustain women's oppression and domination in all spheres of Nigerian society. Women's organizations and associations are accused of preferring to work within and around the structures rather than change them. Moreover, the diverse nature of the organizations and groups concerned with women's practical and strategic gender interests has led some to argue that the existence of different sets of change agendas for development that are championed by women's groups either singly or collectively calls into question any claim that 'a women's movement' exists in Nigeria. In contrast, some argue that the diversity of agendas and coalitions constitutes the very evidence of the existence of such a movement, albeit at various levels.

There is no doubt that the struggle for legal reform, as exemplified by the formation of a coalition to struggle for the domestication of CEDAW, is very much connected to the desire of Nigerian women to have a country that is free of gender discrimination and oppression. Getting the convention domesticated into the legal framework would be significant, but even if this is not achieved, the ongoing attempts to lobby for it demonstrate that women are able to stand together on a common national women's agenda despite religious, ethnic, class and other sectarian differences. However, as this review demonstrates, amongst the factors determining the success or failure of their efforts, the positive or negative response of the faith communities and the ability of the women's coalition to engage and negotiate with them are significant. It is clear in the literature that the faith communities themselves are not unified in their approach to women's rights but are inclined in different directions depending largely on whether they adopt liberal or conservative interpretations of the sacred texts. While those adopting the former interpretations tend to support women's demands for legal reform, the latter normally oppose most, if not all, agendas for the promotion and protection of Nigerian women's human rights. It is, however, noteworthy that some women's organizations, whether

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committed to a reformist or a transformative agenda, are increasingly adopting an emancipatory theology that is women-friendly in its interpretations and responsive to the complex realities of gender roles and relations in Nigerian society today. The issues raised in this review will be followed up in further study of the national attempts to domesticate CEDAW and the adoption of progressive legal reforms in Anambra State.

Notes

1 An acronym in the Hausa language for the United Church of Christ in Nigeria
2 The literature search was largely conducted in libraries and research institutions located in each state. Searches were also conducted on the internet for relevant materials. In the case of Oyo State, the libraries visited were the Women Research and Documentation Centre (WORDOC); theInstitute of African Studies, the University of Ibadan; the Kenneth Dike Library, University of Ibadan; and the Library at the Nigerian Institute of Social and Economic Research (NISER), Ibadan. In Anambra State the following libraries were visited: the Main Library at the Nnamdi Azikwe University, Awka and the library at the Women Development Centre, Awka. In Plateau State, literature was obtained from the University of Jos; the National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies, Kuru; and the ECWA Theological Seminary. Literature was sourced from the library and staff of Bayero University Kano as well as Centre for Democratic Studies, Mumbaya House for Kano State.
3 Before 1959, the NCNC was the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons. However, when the people of Southern Cameroon opted for unification with French Cameroon, the name was changed.
4 However, implementation and enforcement of the law has remained a challenge, with the result that the girl child in the State is still vulnerable to rights violations, in the form of betrothal, early marriage and sexual harassment and abuse. 5 Source: **http://www.plateaustategov.org/history/geo-info.html** (accessed on November 19, 2009).
6 Kwara State has the highest at 12.5 per cent.
7 However, it is important to note that in the general context of scarce historical records of pre-colonial African history, particularly from the perspectives of Africans themselves, the documentation of women's lives and concerns is not comprehensive for this period.
8 A dual-sex system of authority refers to a situation where women have parallel social and political power structures and where gender roles tend to be fluid and, in certain circumstances, interchangeable (see Amadiume, 1987).
9 It is interesting to note that while the former was instigated purely by grassroots market women, the latter included both traders and educated women.
10 In the 1980s most donor funding for women's initiatives in developing countries such as Nigeria was channelled through government or quasi-government agencies such as the Better Life Programme and the Family Support Programme/Family Economic Advancement Programme. However, in the 1990s, as the Nigerian state slipped into pariah status, development assistance was increasingly channelled through civil society and women's organizations, which donors felt were in a better position to articulate and meet the needs of the people (Para-Mallam, 2006).
11 The Federal Ministry of Women Affairs was charged with the responsibility of overseeing the implementation of the National Policy on Women. In December 2007 the Ministry, in collaboration with women's groups and gender experts, produced a reviewed National Gender Policy.
12 To Salihu (2007), the decline of WIN did not necessarily represent its death; it only signalled a potential for rejuvenation based on clearly worked out priorities and constitutional guidelines. Indeed, several members of WIN went on to set up their own organizations and there are still a few State chapters in existence.
13 Effah (1995) and Dipo-Salami (2002) make the important point that the character of women's collective resistance to undesirable conditions does not depend solely on class or gender, but is also closely associated with the nature and degree of their cultural and religious identity.
14 Para-Mallam's (2007) survey of 45 NGOs reveals that women's organizing in Nigeria is characterized by internal antagonisms due to conflicts of interest between elite and grassroots women, and between the conservative, 'womanist' and liberal/radical feminist agendas.

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[15] Similarly, referring to FOMWAN, Yusuf (1991) and Imam (2008) highlight the strength of the Association in the provision of health, education and other support services to women. However, they also point to its limited ability to challenge gender roles amongst Nigerian Muslims, which also frame women primarily as mothers and wives who see the home as their primary responsibility.

[16] The National Coalition on Violence against Women was formed in 2001 and consisted of 12 NGOs. The goals of the coalition were to increase awareness and campaign for the eradication of all forms of violence against women. In the same year, another alliance of 55 women's and non-women's NGOs was formed called the Legislative Advocacy Coalition on Violence Against Women. The group aimed to start a process that would result in the enactment of a national bill on Violence against Women. A bill called the Violence against Women (Prevention, Protection and Prohibition) Act 2002 was sent to the Chairperson of the Senate Committee on Women Affairs for onward submission to the two legislative houses. However, the bill was not passed.

[17] Even though the constitution prohibits discrimination in general terms, for example on the basis of sex, ethnicity or religion, nowhere in the constitution is discrimination defined.

[18] Sonnie Ekwowusi (2006) Danjuma's Abortion Bill, Thisday, 8 February, p. 10

[19] Secretary-General of the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (SCIA)

[20] Mr. Ekwowusi unsuccessfully tried to recruit Olisa Agbakoba, founder and former president of the CLO, to initiate legal proceedings to stop legislative action on the Bill.

[21] Sonnie Ekwowusi (2006) Danjuma's Abortion Bill, Thisday, 8 February, p. 10

[22] See, for instance, W.O. Chukudebelu (2006) Don't legalize abortion, Thisday, 17 February, p. 15; Sonnie Ekwowusi (2006) Clarifications on the Abortion Bill, Thisday, 22 February; Martin Agbo (2006) Yes it is an Abortion Bill, Thisday, 22 March, p. 15; Sonnie Ekwowusi (2006) Yes, it's Abortion Bill, Thisday, 31 March; Marie Steve (2006) Facts behind the Abortion Bill, Thisday, 31 March; Josephine Duze (2006) The Reproductive Health Bill, The Guardian, 2 May, p. 77.

[23] Article 12 states:

(a) States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the field of health care in order to ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women, access to health care services, including those related to family planning. (b) Notwithstanding the provisions of paragraph I of this article, States Parties shall ensure to women appropriate services in connection with pregnancy, confinement and the post-natal period, granting free services where necessary, as well as adequate nutrition during pregnancy and lactation. (a) The same right to enter into marriage; (b) The same right freely to choose a spouse and to enter into marriage only with their free and full consent; (c) The same rights and responsibilities during marriage and at its dissolution; (d) The same rights and responsibilities as parents, irrespective of their marital status, in matters relating to their children; in all cases the interests of the children shall be paramount; (e) The same rights to decide freely and responsibly on the number and spacing of their children and to have access to the information, education and means to enable them to exercise these rights; (f) The same rights and responsibilities with regard to guardianship, wardship, trusteeship and adoption of children, or similar institutions where these concepts exist in national legislation; in all cases the interests of the children shall be paramount; (g) The same personal rights as husband and wife, including the right to choose a family name, a profession and an occupation; (h) The same rights for both spouses in respect of the ownership, acquisition, management, administration, enjoyment and disposition of property, whether free of charge or for a valuable consideration.

2. The betrothal and the marriage of a child shall have no legal effect, and all necessary action, including legislation, shall be taken to specify a minimum age for marriage and to make the registration of marriages in an official registry compulsory.

[25] Muyiwa Enuaye (2007) Let's reconsider the CEDAW Bill, Thisday, 23 February.

[26] Idang Alibi (2007) Before the Senate passes the CEDAW Bill, Daily Trust, 10 May, p. 18

[27] Akinrimisi, Banke (2008) Study on Compatibility and Divergence of the Provisions of CEDAW and APPRRW with Christian Beliefs and Tenets in Nigeria, funded by CIDA; Imam M. Ayesha (2008) Strategies for Successfully Ensuring Legal Coverage for Women's Human Rights in Nigeria, funded by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) under the Security, Justice and Growth Programme; Odinkalu, Chidi Anselm (2008) Domesticating CEDAW in Nigeria: A Stakeholder Analysis and Report, funded by UNIFEM; Sada, Na'iya, Fatima L Adamu and Bilkisu Yusuf (2008) Report on the Compatibility and Divergence of CEDAW and Protocol to African Protocol on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women with Sharia in Nigeria, funded by DFID under the Security, Justice and Growth Programme.

[28] Written Response of the Most Reverend Ignatius Kaigama, Catholic Archbishop of Jos, to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (March 2008), cited in Odinkalu (2008).

[29] i.e. Christ Apostolic Church, Redeemed Christian Church of God, African Church of Christ, Glorious Assembly Ministry, Celestial Church of Christ, Catholic, Apostolic Faith, ECWA, HEKAN, Baptist and Assembly of Faithfuls.

[30] This is because it is believed that children are given by God and that God will always provide for the means of caring for them.

[31] Warrant chiefs were men appointed by the colonial administrators and are given warrants to act as representatives of the colonial masters in their areas.

[32] These are members of a community who are in the same age group and discuss general issues of communal development.

[33] Some of the women's groups include wives of the village and women's little societies.

[34] Daughters of a common male ancestor or daughters of the soil

[35] Briefs about CENGOS retrieved on July 23 2008 from **http://www.cengos.org/about_us.htm**

[36] NAPEP was established in 2002 as part of the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) to alleviate abject poverty.

[37] In addition, in March 2006 the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs in collaboration with the National Agricultural Cooperative Rural Development Bank (NACRDB) launched the Women Fund for Economic Empowerment (WOFEE) to provide micro-credit to women in 22 states, including Plateau.

[38] To preserve COWAN's identity as a women's organisation, associate members do not have full membership rights and may not be elected President , Vice-President., Finance Secretary or Treasurer.

[39] HALT AIDS, 2002. 58 per cent of people living with HIV/AIDS in Nigeria are female (UNDP, Human Development Report, 2008). However, it also has more anti-retroviral provision centres (three) than any other state.

[40] Church of Christ in Nigeria, the majority of adherents of which are from Plateau State and which has its headquarters in Jos.

[41] This included traditionally male portfolios such as Commissioner of Works.

[42] DFID, under its Security, Justice and Growth Programme supported a research project in 2004 and 2005 on the promotion of women's rights under Shariah by Ibrahim Sada, Fatima Adamu and Ali Ahmad (2008). The report detailed current practices relating to Muslim women's rights in Northern Nigeria and the position of Shariah law on such practices has been published and a series of activities have been implemented.

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43 Similarly, in neighbouring Senegal, Muslim women's movements have tended to draw on discourses on the rights of women in Islam rather than the concept of equality (Sieveking, 2007).

44 Kano, 22nd July 2008.

45 A similar argument was made by Sule and Starratt (1991), who noted how Nigerian Muslim women activists such as Aisha Lemu, the then president of the Federation of Muslim Women's Associations in Nigeria (FOMWAN), argued for women's rights in her contributions to the production of literature drawn from Islamic sources.

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Appendix 1

List of interviews

Anagbogu, Mercy (27/07/08) University lecturer and a women activist. Held in Awka, Anambra State.

Awe, Bolanle (31/07/08) Retired university lecturer and seasoned women activist. Held in Ibadan, Oyo State

Badmus, Musliiah (04/08/08) University Lecturer and human rights activist. Held in Ibadan, Oyo State

Davies, Comfort (19/07/08) Missionary, development practitioner and scholar. Held in Jos, Plateau State

Egbue, Ngozi (29/07/08) University lecturer and a Social activist. Held in Awka, Anambra State.

Kabir, Zainab (22/7/2008), University lecturer in sociology, Bayero University, Kano, also one of the Founders of Muslim Sisters Organisations, held in Kano.

Olahan, Khadijat (03/08/08) Secretary of FOMWAN – Awka. Held in Awka, Anambra State

Sawa, Fatima (19/07/08) University lecturer and development consultant. Held in Jos, Plateau State.

Yusuf, Bilkisu (6/8/2008) Former President of FOMWAN, seasoned editor and women activist, held in Abuja

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