



SOCIO-RELIGIOUS REFLECTION ON WOMEN IN POLITICAL ECONOMY IN NIGERIA: ISSUES AND REMEDIES

Prof. Clifford Meesua Sibani,

Department of Religious and Cultural Studies,
Faculty of Humanities, Rivers State University,
Nkpolu-Oroworukwo, Port Harcourt
08037948880 clifford.sibani@ust.edu.ng
and

Dearson, Dumo Sokari

Department of Religious and Cultural Studies,
Faculty of Humanities, Rivers State University,
Nkpolu-Oroworukwo, Port Harcourt
+2349032255988 dumo.sokari@yahoo.com

Abstract

Women constitute a significant proportion of Africa's population and contribute substantially to the continent's economic productivity and social development. Despite these contributions, women remain marginalized within the political and economic structures that shape national development. Nigeria exemplifies this paradox, where women actively participate in agricultural production, trade, and the informal sector but are underrepresented in political decision-making and formal economic institutions. This study examines the structural, socio-cultural, and religious factors influencing women's participation in political economy in Nigeria. Using a socio-religious analytical framework, the study explores how cultural traditions, religious interpretations, and institutional structures sustain gender inequalities. It also examines contemporary challenges such as political underrepresentation, limited economic opportunities, gender-based violence, educational disparities, and unequal property rights. Drawing on feminist political economy and sociological perspectives, the paper argues that socio-religious institutions can serve both as agents of marginalization and as transformative platforms for women's empowerment. The study concludes that progressive reinterpretations of religious teachings, gender-inclusive policies, and community-based advocacy are essential for improving women's participation in Nigeria's political economy. The paper contributes to ongoing academic debates about gender justice in Africa by demonstrating the potential of socio-religious frameworks to challenge patriarchal structures and promote inclusive development.

Keywords: Economy, Gender-inequality, Nigeria, Political, Religious, Women

Introduction

The political economy of Africa has long been shaped by historical, cultural, and institutional factors that influence the distribution of power and economic resources within society. One of the most persistent features of these structures is the marginalization of women from political authority and economic decision-making. Although African women play critical roles in sustaining households, communities, and national economies, their contributions remain undervalued and underrepresented in public policy and governance structures, (Mama, 2003). Nigeria provides a compelling context for examining the intersection between gender, politics, and



economic development. As the most populous country in Africa, Nigeria possesses vast human and natural resources that could support inclusive development. However, gender inequality continues to limit women's participation in both political leadership and economic production. Women constitute nearly half of Nigeria's population and contribute significantly to agricultural production, small-scale enterprises, and informal markets, yet they remain largely excluded from policy-making institutions and strategic economic sectors, (Aina, 2012).

The marginalization of women in Nigeria's political economy cannot be understood solely as a political or economic issue. Rather, it is deeply embedded in socio-cultural and religious structures that shape gender relations. Religion plays a central role in Nigerian society, influencing social norms, cultural values, and moral expectations. Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional Religion collectively shape the social environment within which gender roles are defined and maintained, (Olupona, 2014).

In many cases, patriarchal interpretations of religious teachings reinforce gender hierarchies that limit women's access to leadership positions and economic resources. At the same time, religious traditions also contain ethical principles that emphasize justice, equality, and human dignity. When interpreted progressively, these principles can serve as powerful tools for promoting gender equality. This study therefore examines the issues facing African women in political economy with particular focus on Nigeria. It also explores how socio-religious perspectives can contribute to addressing these challenges and promoting women's empowerment.

Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

Political Economy

Political economy refers to the relationship between political power, economic systems, and social institutions in shaping the distribution of resources within society. According to Gilpin (2011), political economy examines how political decisions influence economic outcomes and how economic structures affect political authority. In developing societies, political economy also involves examining inequalities based on gender, class, ethnicity, and religion. In the African context, political economy is particularly important because economic resources and political power are often closely intertwined. Control over political institutions frequently determines access to economic opportunities, while economic power can influence political decision-making, (Mkandawire, 2001).

Socio-Religious Transformation Framework

The Socio-Religious Transformation Framework provides an analytical lens for examining how religion and social institutions interact to shape societal values, structures, and patterns of participation in political and economic life. In this paper, this framework explains how religious beliefs, institutions, and moral teachings can either reinforce gender inequality or serve as mechanisms for the transformation and empowerment of women within society. Religion plays a significant role in African societies, particularly in Nigeria where social life is deeply intertwined with religious values and institutions. Scholars argue that religion functions not only as a spiritual system but also as a social institution that shapes norms, values, and power relations within society, (Durkheim, 1995). According to Durkheim, religion contributes to social cohesion by creating shared moral frameworks that guide social behavior. However, these same frameworks may also reinforce existing gender hierarchies when interpreted within patriarchal contexts.



In many African societies, socio-religious norms have historically influenced gender roles, often assigning women to domestic and supportive roles while reserving leadership and economic authority for men. These patterns are reinforced through cultural traditions and religious interpretations that shape expectations regarding women's participation in public life, (Oduyoye, 2001). As a result, women's participation in political and economic structures has often been limited despite their substantial contributions to household and community development. Nevertheless, the socio-religious framework also recognizes the transformative potential of religion. Religion is not a static system; rather, it evolves through reinterpretation, reform movements, and contextual theological reflections. Scholars within African theology and sociology of religion argue that religious teachings can be reinterpreted to promote social justice, gender equality, and inclusive development, (Mama, 1997). Through such reinterpretations, religious institutions can become powerful platforms for challenging patriarchal norms and advocating for women's empowerment in political and economic spheres.

One important strand within this framework is the concept of religion as an agent of social transformation. Religion has historically played a role in mobilizing communities and influencing political change in many societies. According to Max Weber (2002), religious ideas can shape economic behavior and social organization by influencing individuals' ethical orientation toward work, authority, and social responsibility. In the Nigerian context, religious organizations such as churches, mosques, and faith-based groups often function as spaces for community mobilization, education, and advocacy, thereby contributing to social and economic transformation.

Within the framework of socio-religious transformation, religious institutions are viewed as potential vehicles for women's empowerment. Faith-based organizations frequently provide women with opportunities for leadership, networking, and community participation. Women's fellowships, religious associations, and charitable groups often serve as platforms through which women acquire social capital, economic support, and leadership experience. These structures can indirectly strengthen women's participation in political and economic activities, (Nwachukwu, 2018).

Furthermore, the socio-religious framework emphasizes the importance of ethical teachings and moral values embedded in religious traditions. Many religious teachings promote principles such as justice, equality, compassion, and human dignity. When applied in inclusive ways, these values can challenge gender discrimination and support the recognition of women's rights and contributions in society. For example, African feminist theologians argue that religious texts and traditions should be interpreted in ways that affirm women's agency and leadership rather than restrict them, (Oduyoye, 2001).

In Nigeria, the socio-religious landscape is particularly significant because religion plays a central role in public life and social organization. Religious leaders often hold substantial influence over community attitudes and behaviors. Consequently, socio-religious transformation involves engaging religious leaders, institutions, and communities in dialogues that promote gender equity and social inclusion. By encouraging progressive interpretations of religious teachings and promoting gender-sensitive policies within religious institutions, religion can become a catalyst for improving women's access to political and economic opportunities.

The framework also recognizes that cultural and religious transformation must occur simultaneously. Many gender inequalities faced by African women are rooted in a combination of cultural traditions and religious interpretations. Therefore, addressing these challenges requires a holistic approach that engages both cultural norms and religious teachings. Through education,

advocacy, and community engagement, socio-religious transformation can gradually reshape societal attitudes toward women's roles in governance, leadership, and economic participation. Ultimately, the Socio-Religious Transformation Framework highlights the dual role of religion as both a source of social constraints and a potential instrument of liberation. When religious teachings are interpreted within patriarchal structures, they may reinforce gender inequality. However, when approached through critical reflection and inclusive interpretation, religion can promote social justice, gender equality, and the empowerment of women in political and economic life. For studies focusing on African women in political economy, this framework therefore provides a useful lens for examining how religious values, institutions, and social networks can contribute to addressing gender disparities and fostering inclusive development in Nigeria.

Historical Context of Women in Nigerian Political Economy

The history of women in Nigeria's political economy reveals a long tradition of economic productivity, political participation, and social influence. Contrary to the earlier colonial narratives that portrayed African women as passive actors, historical evidence demonstrates that women were central participants in agriculture, commerce, governance, and resistance movements. Scholars of African history increasingly emphasize that women were crucial agents in shaping economic and political structures in pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial Nigeria, (Mba, 1982; Chuku, 2005, p. xiii).

Nigeria's political economy has historically been shaped by gender relations. Women contributed substantially to local economies through farming, trade, craft production, and community governance. However, colonial economic policies and patriarchal institutions gradually reduced women's access to economic resources and political authority. As Gloria Chuku argues, colonial rule significantly transformed the "traditional economic production and political power of Igbo women," altering their position in society, (Chuku, 2005). Understanding the historical trajectory of women in Nigeria's political economy is therefore essential for explaining the contemporary challenges facing women in economic participation, political representation, and social empowerment.

Women in the Pre-Colonial Political Economy

Before colonial rule, women in many Nigerian societies held important economic and political positions. The pre-colonial economy was largely agrarian, and women were central to food production, processing, and distribution. In many communities, women cultivated food crops, engaged in livestock rearing, and participated in local crafts such as pottery and textile production. Their labour formed the foundation of household subsistence and local markets. Women were also highly influential in commercial activities. Markets were major economic institutions in pre-colonial Nigeria, and they were often dominated by female traders. Market women formed organized associations that regulated prices, settled disputes, and coordinated commercial activities. These institutions provided women with economic independence and social status. In some cases, successful traders accumulated significant wealth and political influence within their communities.

Political participation by women also existed in various traditional systems of governance. Among the Yoruba, for example, women could hold the title of Iyalode, a chieftaincy office that represented women's interests in political councils. Similarly, among the Igbo, women organized themselves through associations such as the Umuada and other women's assemblies, which played



important roles in conflict resolution and community decision-making. Scholars argue that these structures demonstrate that women were not completely excluded from political authority in pre-colonial societies. Instead, women's institutions operated alongside male political institutions, forming what some historians describe as a "dual-sex political system," in which men and women exercised authority in complementary ways, (Mba, 1982).

Religion also reinforced women's roles in society. Many indigenous religious traditions recognized female spiritual leaders such as priestesses and diviners. These positions enhanced women's prestige and influence in community governance and social life.

Women in Colonial Nigerian Political Economy

British colonial rule introduced a capitalist economic structure designed to integrate Nigeria into the global economy as a supplier of raw materials. The colonial state promoted the production of export crops such as cocoa, palm oil, cotton, and groundnuts. While both men and women had participated in agricultural production before colonial rule, colonial administrators increasingly recognized men as the primary producers of export crops, thereby restructuring gender relations in agriculture.

Colonial authorities "encouraged male farmers to concentrate on cash crops while women remained largely responsible for subsistence agriculture", (Falola & Heaton 2008, p. 95). This restructuring shifted economic power toward men, as cash crop production generated greater income and access to colonial markets. Similarly, colonial rule undermined earlier gender complementarities by privileging male authority within new economic and political institutions. She argues that colonial policies "imposed Western patriarchal assumptions on African societies, thereby eroding women's traditional economic autonomy" (Amadiume, 1987, p. 119).

The introduction of taxation and monetization further intensified these inequalities. Colonial governments required households to pay taxes in cash, which compelled men to engage more directly with the colonial economy through cash crop farming and wage labor. Meanwhile, women often continued to engage primarily in subsistence farming and petty trading, activities that were less valued within the colonial capitalist system. Despite these structural disadvantages, women remained vital actors in Nigeria's colonial economy. They played crucial roles in food production, local trade, and artisanal industries. In many regions, women cultivated food crops such as cassava, maize, and vegetables, which sustained both rural households and growing urban populations.

Historical studies emphasize that women's agricultural labor was essential to the functioning of colonial economies. "Women constituted the backbone of food production throughout the colonial period," ensuring the survival of rural communities while men increasingly devoted their labor to export crops, (Mba, 1982, p. 25). Women also dominated local and regional markets. Market systems in many Nigerian societies, particularly among the Yoruba and Igbo, were controlled largely by female traders who organized themselves into associations that regulated trade and resolved disputes. These market associations provided women with economic power and social influence. It is noted that market women were "major distributors of agricultural produce and imported goods," making them indispensable intermediaries within colonial trade networks, (Awe, 1992, p. 110). Their activities connected rural producers with urban consumers and contributed significantly to the circulation of goods within the colonial economy.

Urbanization during the colonial period also expanded opportunities for women traders. As colonial administrative centers such as Lagos, Ibadan, and Kano grew, the demand for food



and consumer goods increased, creating new commercial opportunities for women in urban markets. While women remained economically active, colonial governance structures significantly limited their political influence. The British system of indirect rule relied primarily on male chiefs and traditional authorities to administer colonial territories. This system ignored or weakened female political institutions that had previously existed in many Nigerian societies. Colonial administrators often misunderstood the dual-sex political systems that existed in many Nigerian societies. She explains that colonial authorities “recognized only male chiefs as political authorities and thereby marginalized women’s traditional institutions” (Mba, 1982, p. 37).

Among the Igbo, for instance, women historically participated in governance through assemblies and institutions such as the Umuada and women’s councils. However, colonial authorities replaced these structures with warrant chiefs, almost exclusively male leaders appointed by the colonial government. Educational policies further reinforced gender inequality. Missionary and colonial schools prioritized male education because men were perceived as future administrators and clerks within the colonial bureaucracy. Consequently, women had fewer opportunities to acquire the education necessary to participate in colonial administrative structures.

Colonial rule introduced Western gender ideologies that privileged men in public life. She contends that colonial administrators “reconstructed African societies through a gendered lens that elevated male authority and diminished women’s political power” (Oyewumi, 1997, p. 123). Despite political marginalization, Nigerian women actively resisted colonial policies that threatened their economic interests and social autonomy. Women’s protests and political movements became significant features of Nigeria’s colonial history.

One of the most notable examples is the Aba Women’s War of 1929, which involved thousands of women protesting colonial taxation policies and the authority of warrant chiefs. The movement began when colonial officials attempted to extend taxation to women in southeastern Nigeria. The protest was seen as a “mass political uprising that demonstrated the organizational capacity and political consciousness of Igbo women” (Chuku, 2005, p. 87). The protests spread across several communities and forced colonial authorities to reconsider aspects of their administrative policies.

Women also organized resistance movements in other regions. The Abeokuta Women’s Union, led by Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti, mobilized thousands of women in the 1940s against unfair taxation and authoritarian rule by the colonial Native Authority system. The Abeokuta protests “represented one of the most successful examples of women’s political mobilization in colonial Nigeria” (Johnson-Odim & Mba, 1997, p. 64). The protests eventually led to significant political reforms, including the temporary abdication of the Alake of Abeokuta. These resistance movements illustrate that women were not merely victims of colonial policies but active political actors who challenged colonial authority and defended their economic rights.

Women in Nigerian Post-Colonial Political Economy

The post-colonial era in Nigeria, beginning with independence in 1960, brought significant transformations in the country’s political and economic structures. However, these transformations did not automatically translate into equal opportunities for women. While women continued to play crucial roles in economic production and community development, their political influence and economic fortunes were shaped by persistent patriarchal institutions, uneven development policies, and structural inequalities inherited from colonial rule. Scholars of African gender history emphasize that women’s roles in Nigeria’s political economy must be examined through both

economic participation and political representation. Nigerian women have historically remained politically active even when formal political systems excluded them, noting that women “participated actively in political struggles and economic activities despite institutional barriers” (Mba, 1982, p. 3). This observation highlights the resilience of women in navigating post-colonial socio-economic systems.

Women have remained central to Nigeria’s economic development since independence. Their contributions are particularly visible in agriculture, informal commerce, and household production. In rural areas, women constitute a significant proportion of the agricultural labour force, engaging in farming, food processing, and the marketing of agricultural produce. Women’s labour forms a critical foundation for Nigeria’s local economies. Women historically “occupied a pivotal place in the local and state economy, organizing household industries and operating market systems”, (Denzer, 1994, p. 3).

Similarly, Aina (1993) emphasizes that women’s economic activities extend beyond subsistence production, noting that the household functions as an important economic unit in which women play central roles in production and consumption. In urban centres, Nigerian women have also been prominent in trade and small-scale entrepreneurship. Market systems across cities such as Lagos, Ibadan, Kano, and Onitsha have traditionally been dominated by women traders who facilitate the distribution of goods and agricultural produce. These trading networks have allowed women to maintain a degree of economic independence and influence within their communities.

Despite these contributions, women’s economic fortunes in post-colonial Nigeria have been constrained by structural inequalities. Many women lack access to land ownership, formal credit systems, and large-scale business opportunities. Economic policies often prioritize male-dominated sectors, leaving women concentrated in informal economic activities that generate relatively low income. Amadiume highlights this contradiction by noting that although women exercise considerable economic influence through trade and family production, they are often denied control over key economic resources such as land and political authority, (Amadiume, 2000).

Consequently, women’s economic participation has remained extensive but undervalued within the formal structures of Nigeria’s political economy. While Nigerian women have historically played important roles in economic production, their political representation has remained relatively limited in the post-colonial state. Political institutions established after independence largely inherited patriarchal structures that restricted women’s access to formal political power. The exclusion of women from political institutions can be traced partly to colonial governance systems that privileged male leadership structures. Following independence, Nigerian women continued to participate actively in political mobilization through women’s organizations, social movements, and political parties. However, their presence in elected political offices remained minimal. According to Amina Mama, gender inequality in political institutions persists because access to political power is shaped by “entrenched patriarchal norms and structural barriers”, (Mama, 1997, p. 50).

Financial constraints also constitute a major obstacle to women’s political participation. Nigerian electoral politics often requires significant financial resources and patronage networks, which many women lack due to broader economic inequalities. Contemporary analyses of Nigerian politics similarly highlight the gender bias embedded within electoral systems. For example, gender discrimination and patronage politics make it extremely difficult for women to



compete effectively in Nigerian elections, (Osori, 2017). As a result, women remain underrepresented in Nigeria's legislative and executive institutions despite their active involvement in grassroots political mobilization.

Socio-Religious Remedies to the Challenges Facing Women in the Nigerian Political Economy

Women were not given access to economic opportunities, such as employment or entrepreneurship. Women were financially dependent on their husbands or male relatives, limiting their autonomy and independence, (Sibani, & Maduagwu, 2025). Women in Nigeria continue to face significant challenges in the political economy, including economic marginalization, limited access to political power, and social inequalities rooted in historical, cultural, and structural factors, (Amadiume, 2000; Mba, 1982). These challenges are exacerbated by patriarchal norms, limited educational and financial opportunities, and gender-based institutional structures. Scholars have increasingly recognized the potential of socio-religious frameworks as mechanisms for addressing these inequalities. Socio-religious remedies leverage moral teachings, religious institutions, and community networks to promote social justice, empower women economically, and facilitate political participation, (Olupona, 2000).

Economic Empowerment through Socio-Religious Institutions

Religious institutions in Nigeria, including churches, mosques, and traditional religious organizations, play a significant role in shaping social values and influencing community behaviors. These institutions can serve as vehicles for women's economic empowerment by providing networks for financial support, skill acquisition, and entrepreneurial development. Religiously affiliated women's groups have historically facilitated economic empowerment: "Women's religious associations in Nigeria often function as microcosms of economic organization, providing mutual aid, savings schemes, and market access", (Chuku, 2005, p. 92). For example, women in Christian women's guilds and Muslim women's associations often pool resources to support small businesses, fund education, and provide microcredit to members.

Socio-religious teachings that emphasize social justice and community solidarity can also challenge economic marginalization. The Christian concept of stewardship and mutual aid encourages members to support the vulnerable, while Islamic principles of zakat (almsgiving) and qard al-hasan (benevolent loans) provide mechanisms for financial assistance to women, (Olupona, 2000). By integrating these religious principles into community programs, women gain access to economic resources that may otherwise be denied due to gender biases in the broader political economy.

Political Participation Facilitated by Socio-Religious Networks

Women's political marginalization in Nigeria often stems from patriarchal social norms, limited educational opportunities, and male-dominated political structures, (Mama, 1997). Socio-religious frameworks offer avenues for enhancing political participation by creating spaces for leadership training, advocacy, and community mobilization. Religious organizations often empower women to take leadership roles within congregations, councils, and associations. These leadership experiences can translate into broader political engagement. "Leadership roles in religious and community organizations provide Nigerian women with the confidence, networks, and skills necessary for political mobilization" (Amadiume, 2000, p. 131). In Yoruba and Igbo



communities, women's religious guilds have historically organized advocacy campaigns on social issues, from healthcare to education, and have sometimes lobbied local governments for policy reforms, (Chuku, 2005). By embedding political activism within socio-religious structures, women can circumvent some of the barriers imposed by patriarchal political institutions.

Social and Moral Advocacy through Religion

Religion in Nigeria wields considerable influence over cultural norms and moral values, making it a powerful tool for addressing gender inequalities. Religious teachings can be mobilized to challenge patriarchal attitudes and promote social inclusion. Nnaemeka (2004) notes that African socio-religious frameworks often combine moral exhortation with collective action, enabling women to negotiate social change in culturally resonant ways: "Socio-religious structures allow women to assert rights and demand justice without entirely contravening local cultural expectations" (p. 364). In practice, religious leaders and organizations can champion gender equity by encouraging communities to support women's education, advocate against discriminatory practices, and promote fair access to resources. Churches, mosques, and interfaith councils have organized workshops on women's rights, entrepreneurship training, and civic engagement, often reaching populations that are difficult to access through formal state institutions.

Furthermore, socio-religious mechanisms can address harmful traditional practices, such as discriminatory inheritance laws and exclusion from leadership positions. By invoking religious doctrines of justice, equity, and the dignity of women, faith-based programs have helped reshape societal attitudes toward women's roles in economic and political spheres, (Oyediran, 2010).

Examples of Socio-Religious Interventions

Microfinance Initiatives: Many women's religious associations provide savings and loan programs that enable members to establish small businesses, pay school fees, or invest in agriculture. These initiatives improve women's economic autonomy and reduce dependency on male relatives or exploitative financial structures, (Chuku, 2005).

Leadership Training and Advocacy: Churches and mosques often sponsor leadership programs for women, equipping them with skills in public speaking, negotiation, and community organizing. These skills facilitate political engagement at the local and national levels, (Amadiume, 2000).

Social Justice Campaigns: Interfaith coalitions and women's religious guilds have mobilized to advocate for women's education, healthcare access, and legislative reforms that promote gender equity, (Nnaemeka, 2004).

Mediation and Conflict Resolution: Religious leaders often serve as mediators in disputes involving women's economic or social rights, using moral authority to ensure fairness and promote peaceful resolution, (Olupona, 2000). These interventions illustrate the capacity of socio-religious frameworks to complement formal state mechanisms and provide culturally resonant remedies to gendered economic and political challenges.

Challenges and Limitations

While socio-religious remedies offer important avenues for empowering women, they are not without limitations. Some religious interpretations reinforce patriarchal norms, restricting women's participation in leadership and decision-making. Additionally, the reach of socio-religious interventions may be limited to urban areas or particular denominations, leaving rural or minority communities underserved. Therefore, socio-religious strategies are most effective when



integrated with broader policy measures, such as gender-sensitive legislation, educational reform, and financial inclusion programs. Combined approaches can address structural inequalities while leveraging the social capital and moral authority of religious institutions.

Integration of Socio-Religious Principles in Policy Implementation

Socio-religious principles can guide policy formulation and implementation in ways that respect cultural contexts while promoting women's rights. Key strategies include:

Faith-Based Advocacy for Gender Equality: Religious leaders and women's religious associations can advocate for women's participation in economic, social, and political spheres. This advocacy can reinforce government policies and legal protections.

Capacity Building and Leadership Training: Policy frameworks can collaborate with religious organizations to train women in leadership, negotiation, and civic engagement. According to Amadiume (2000), "Participation in religious leadership provides women with skills and networks that can be transferred to political and economic domains" (p. 131).

Monitoring and Accountability through Religious Networks: Religious institutions can participate in monitoring compliance with gender-sensitive policies and reporting abuses, leveraging moral authority to ensure enforcement.

Community Sensitization Programs: Policies on women's economic and political rights can be disseminated through religious gatherings, sermons, and workshops, thereby ensuring that grassroots communities understand and support women's empowerment initiatives, (Oyediran, 2010).

Conclusion

The study of African women in Nigeria's political economy, analyzed through a socio-religious lens, underscores the complex interplay of historical, cultural, economic, and political factors that shape women's experiences. Despite their indispensable contributions to agriculture, trade, entrepreneurship, and community development, Nigerian women have historically faced systemic marginalization in both economic and political spheres. Patriarchal norms, colonial legacies, and structural inequalities have consistently limited their access to resources, leadership positions, and decision-making platforms, (Mba, 1982; Amadiume, 2000).

A socio-religious perspective reveals both challenges and opportunities in addressing these inequalities. Religious institutions churches, mosques, and traditional faith organizations play a crucial role in shaping societal values, providing moral guidance, and facilitating community networks that empower women. Socio-religious mechanisms, such as women's guilds, faith-based microfinance initiatives, leadership training programs, and advocacy platforms, have proven effective in promoting economic empowerment, political participation, and social justice for women, (Chuku, 2005; Nnaemeka, 2004; Olupona, 2000). These interventions demonstrate that leveraging moral authority, communal solidarity, and culturally resonant teachings can complement state policies and legal frameworks to achieve sustainable gender equality.

This research highlights the importance of integrated approaches combining formal policies, legal protections, and socio-religious interventions. Policy instruments such as the National Gender Policy and laws like the Violence Against Persons Prohibition Act are critical but often insufficient in isolation. Their effectiveness is enhanced when implemented in partnership with socio-religious organizations that can mobilize communities, reinforce gender-sensitive norms, and ensure local compliance, (Mama, 1997; Oyediran, 2010).



The challenges faced by Nigerian women in the political economy requires multi-dimensional strategies that recognize women as key actors in national development. Socio-religious frameworks provide culturally grounded remedies that empower women economically, enhance political participation, and foster social justice. By combining policy, law, and socio-religious strategies, Nigeria can create an inclusive political economy that acknowledges women's contributions, mitigates structural inequalities, and ensures sustainable empowerment.

References

- Achebe, N. (2011). *The Female King of Colonial Nigeria: Ahebi Ugbabe*. Indiana University Press.
- Aina, T. A. (2012). *Women, Culture and Society: A Nigerian Perspective*. Malthouse Press.
- Amadiume, I. (1987). *Male Daughters, Female Husbands: Gender and Sex in an African Society*. Zed Books.
- Amadiume, I. (2000). *Daughters of the goddess, daughters of imperialism: African Women Struggle for Culture, Power and Democracy*. Zed Books.
- Awe, B. (1992). *Nigerian women in historical perspective*. Sankore Publishers.
- Chuku, G. (2005). *Igbo women and economic transformation in southeastern Nigeria, 1900–1960*. Routledge.
- Denzer, L. (1994). *Yoruba Women: A historiographical study*.
- Durkheim, É. (1995). *The elementary forms of religious life* (K. Fields, Trans.). Free Press.
- Falola, T., & Heaton, M. (2008). *A History of Nigeria*. Cambridge University Press.
- Gilpin, R. (2011). *Global political economy: Understanding the international economic order* (2nd ed.). Princeton University Press.
- Johnson-Odim, C., & Mba, N. E. (1997). *For women and the nation: Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti of Nigeria*. University of Illinois Press.
- Mama, A. (1997). *Engendering African Social Sciences*. CODESRIA.
- Mama, A. (2003). *Beyond the Masks: Race, Gender, and Subjectivity*. Routledge.
- Mba, N. E. (1982). *Nigerian women mobilized: Women's political activity in southern Nigeria, 1900–1965*. University of California Press.
- Mkandawire, T. (2001). Thinking about Developmental States in Africa. *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, 25(3), 289–313. <https://doi.org/10.1093/cje/25.3.289>
- Nnaemeka, O. (2004). Nego-feminism: theorizing, practicing, and pruning Africa's way. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 29(2), 357–385.
- Nwachukwu, C. (2018). Religion and Gender Empowerment in Nigeria. *Journal of African Social Studies*, 10(2), 45–60.
- Oduyoye, M. A. (2001). *Introducing african women's theology*. Sheffield Academic Press.
- Olupona, J. K. (2000). *African Women in Religion: Essays in honor of Mercy Amba Ewudziwa Oduyoye*. SUNY Press.
- Olupona, J. K. (2014). *African religions: A Very Short Introduction* (2nd ed.). Oxford University Press.
- Osori, A. (2017). *Love does not Win Elections*. Narrative Landscape Press.
- Oyediran, O. (2010). Women, religion and social justice in Nigeria. *African Journal of Social Sciences*, 3(2), 45–59.
- Oyewumi, O. (1997). *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Sibani, C. M. and Maduagwu, O. F. (2025). Women and Socio-Cultural Discrimination in Africa: A Focus on Some Ethnic Groups in Rivers State, Nigeria. *Niger Delta Journal of Gender, Peace & Conflict Studies*, 5(2), 369-383
- Weber, M. (2002). *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (S. Kalberg, Trans.). Roxbury Publishing.