AN EXAMINATION OF THE ROLE OF WOMEN LAWYERS AS AGENT OF JUSTICE AND SOCIAL-ECONOMIC CHANGE IN NIGERIA

By

Professor Idiat Fumilola Akande, Department of Public Law, Faculty of Law, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria/ 08059403594/queenethakande@yahoo.com

and

Falilat Oluwatoyin Orire Esq, Deputy Chief Registrar, Court of Appeal, Ilorin Division, Kwara State/07037196460, falilat@gmail.com

and

Rukayat Aminu, Legal Practitioner, 08097277759, aminurukayya90@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The primitive conception of the role of women which includes rearing children, cooking for the family, clearing farm land, sowing seeds as well as harvesting, pounding and grinding items are domestic activities which have changed over the time. Recent developments have shown that women's role goes beyond the preparation of food and consequently covers academic, political, economic, social and cultural recognition as it has been noted in western world that women perform excellently well in various fields this mentioned fields. Particularly, in academics, women engagement as lawyers, doctors, engineers, pilot, commercial drivers are roles which are completely at variance with the primitive conception of the role of women. Therefore, the objective of this paper is to clearly identify the role of women lawyers as agents of justice and social-economic change in Nigeria with a view to making reforms. The research methodology adopted for here is entirely doctrinal in nature and it includes the use of statutes, articles in journal publication, conference papers, judicial authorities and internet materials. This paper found (among others) that, women suffer greater poverty compared to men as a result of systemic inequality such as lower wages, disproportionate burden in unpaid labour, and vulnerability, particularly in rural areas, making poverty a significant woman issue across to continent. Consequently, it becomes very difficult to raise money for the purposes vying for offices in politics particularly the offices of the "President" and "Governors". Accordingly, the paper was concluded by recommending (among others) that government, non-governmental organisations and financial institutions should introduce targeted economic empowerment programmes for women through accessible loans, grants, entrepreneurship training and financial support. Political parties should also establish mechanisms for reducing the financial barriers that prevent women from contesting elective positions, particularly governorship and presidential elections.

Keywords: Women, Lawyers, Roles, Justice, Socio-Economic and Change

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1.1. Introduction

The role of women lawyers as agents of justice and social-economic change could not be over-emphasized. This is because in legal practice, both men and women are considered professionals, without the necessity of discrimination. For example, both men and women search for virile idea to prepare them to become judges as well as Senior Advocates of Nigeria (SAN) and; other opportunities which are standard based regardless of whether it is a man or a woman. In fact, in the popular parlance, there is no woman in the legal profession. Therefore, the primitive conception of the role of women which includes rearing children, cooking for the family, clearing farm land, sowing seeds as well as harvesting, pounding and grinding items are domestic activities which have changed over the time. Recent developments have shown that women's role goes beyond the preparation of food and consequently covers academic, political, economic, social and cultural recognition as it has been noted in western world that women perform excellently well in various fields this mentioned fields. Particularly, in academics, women engagement as lawyers, doctors, engineers, pilot, commercial drivers are roles which are completely at variance with the primitive conception of the role of women. Therefore, the objective of this paper is to clearly identify the role of women lawyers as agents of justice and social-economic change in Nigeria with a view to making reforms. Thus, in an attempt to achieve this objective, this paper discusses issues such as meaning and nature of a woman; the role of women lawyers as agents of justice and socio-economic change; challenges; and recommendations.

1.2.Women

A woman is a female human being. Generally, the word women mean any adult female person as contrasted with a girl who is below the age of 18 years. Women, from the Nigerian political arena, are adult female persons who have attained the age of franchise that is 18 years and above. Female has its origin in Latin and comes from the Latin word "*Femella*" or "*Femina*", which of course means "woman". Male, on the other hand, come from Old French "*masle*", or as we know it in modern French *"mâle*", that itself comes from the Latin word "Male human". Overtime, "*masle*" became Male and, around 14th Century, after a long use side by side with Male, "*femella*" morphed into Female, bringing both words in line with the modern usage.[1]

Ballington[2] confirmed women to be part of any major developmental process and the reason according to him is their numerical strength, they are industrious and enterprising and they are good managers. Therefore, any national development programme without women will not be meaningful. It should be stressed that the understanding of a woman in affirmative action to participation in governance could not be restricted only to women of the elite class. This is because a women whether educated or not, regardless of any class she may belong to, has the capacity to contribute in one way or the other to social, economic, political and cultural development of a society she finds herself.

In *Corbett vs Corbett*[3] (otherwise known as Ashley case), the High Court of England and Wales held that legal gender is recognized purely on biological criteria, regardless of any psychological condition. This popular decision has been followed by English courts and tribunals

[1] 'Interesting Histories' (Medium, 2011) http://medium.com accessed 27 March 2019.
[2] J Ballington, R David, M Reith et al, *Empowering Women for Stronger Political Parties: A Guidebook to Promote Women's Political Participation* (United Nations Development Programme and National Democratic Institute, New York, 2012).
[3] (1970) 2 All ER 33. See also (1971) https://www.lawprof.com 83

on a number of occasions and for purposes other than marriage. Thus, in *Regina vs Tan and Others*[4] *which concerns* prostitution wherein a male-to-female transsexual, who had undergone both hormone and surgical treatment, was nevertheless treated as a male by the Court of Appeal for the purposes of section 30 of the Sexual Offences Act 1956 and Section 5 of the Sexual Offences Act 1967. Similarly, in *White vs British Sugar Corporation Ltd*[5] was a case before an Industrial Tribunal wherein a female-to-male transsexual, who had not undergone any sex-change treatment, was treated as a female by the Tribunal for the purposes of the Sex Discrimination Act 1975; the person in question sought and received employment in a position reserved for men under the Factories Act, but was dismissed after discovery of her biological sex. Indeed, the closest match to a court ruling explicitly separating biological women from trans women under the law occurred in the United Kingdom. On April 16, 2025, the UK Supreme Court ruled unanimously that the legal definitions of "woman" and "sex" under the Equality Act 2010 refer strictly to biological sex from birth. The litigation was brought by the campaign group For Women Scotland against the Scottish government. The court decided that transgender women, even if they hold a Gender Recognition Certificate (GRC), do not meet the definition of a "woman" for the purposes of sex-based protections in the Equality Act. Practically, the decision explicitly allows single-sex services—such as domestic abuse refuges, hospital wards, changing rooms, and sports competitions—to lawfully restrict access based strictly on biological sex. However, the court emphasized that transgender individuals remain legally protected against discrimination and harassment under a separate protected characteristic ("gender reassignme). Consequently, the 2025

[4] (1983) 2 All England Law Reports 12.
[5] (1977) *Industrial Relations Law Reports 121*

decision of the United Kingdom Supreme Court restated the biological definition of sex laid down in *Corbett vs Corbett (Supra)*.

1.3. Women Lawyers as Agent of Justice

Women lawyers are vital agents of justice because they help protect human rights, ensure equality before the law, defend vulnerable people, and promote accountability. Their contributions extend beyond courtrooms to communities, government institutions, educational settings, and civil society all of which are discussed below.

1.3.1. Promotion of Justice: Women lawyers who become judges and magistrates interpret and apply the law impartially, resolve disputes, and ensure that justice is administered fairly. The social order of the Nigerian nation is founded in the ideals of freedom, equality and justice[6]. The institutionalized machinery for the attainment of justice in any society is law, through the instrumentality of legal practitioners. In furtherance of the need to do justice in the Nigerian society, the Constitution of Federal Republic of Nigeria (CFRN) clearly states:[7]

(a) Every citizen shall have equality of rights, obligations and opportunities before the law;

(b) The sanctity of the human person shall be recognized and human dignity shall be maintained and enhanced;

(c) Governmental actions shall be humane;

(d) Exploitation of human or natural resources in any form whatsoever for reasons, other than the good of the community, shall be prevented; and

(e) The independence, impartiality and integrity of courts of law, and easy accessibility thereto shall be secured and maintained.

[6] Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999, s 17(1).
[7] Ibid, s 17(2).

It cannot be gainsaid that the duty of women lawyers is crucial towards the actualization of the above ideals of justice. Bearing that in mind, it is clear that the paramount importance of justice in the Nigerian society becomes much more pronounced when it is realized that justice is indispensably necessary to the substance of the nation's nascent democracy. Thus, Hon. Justice Fatai Williams, CJN (as he then was) in the case of senator *Adesanya vs President* of Nigeria[8] observed that, *"if we are to keep democracy, there must be one commandment thou shall not ration justice"*[9].

In sum a society that is denied justice cannot be democratic. This is because democracy connotes among other things, justice for all and sundry without an iota of discrimination. With regards to the commitment of legal practitioners to project justice in the society, the great judge Lord Dennying in the case of *Rondel vs Woisley,*[10] observed as follows:

> *He must accept the brief and do all he honorably can on behalf of his client. I say ALL THE HONORABLY CAN because his duty is paramount. It is a mistake to suppose that he is the mouth piece of his client to say what he wants, or his tool to do what he directs. He is none of these things, he owes allegiance to a higher cause. It is the consciously mistake facts. He must not unjustly make a charge of fraud that is without evidence to support it. He must produce all relevant authorities, even those that are fatal to his case he must disregard the most specific instructions of his client if they conflict with his duty to court. The code which requires a barrister to do all these is not a code of law. It is a code of honour. If he breaks it, he is offending against the rules of the profession and he is subject to its discipline. But he cannot be sued in a court of law. Such being his duty to the court, the barrister must be able to do it fearlessly. He has time and time again to choose between his duty to his client and his duty to the court. This is a conflict often difficult to resolve and he should not be under pressure to decide it wrongly. If a barrister is to do his duty fearlessly and independently, he must not be subject to the threat of an action for negligence*[11].

[8] (1980) 2, NCLR part 358.
[9] Ibid,p.373.
[10] (1967) 1 QB 443
[11] Ibid, p.502.

In effect, it must be said that the administration of justice is made possible by the efforts of women lawyers in promoting access to justice for vulnerable groups which includes widows, persons with disabilities, refugees, prisoners, and other marginalised people who may face difficulties accessing the justice system. Women lawyers defend workers against unlawful dismissal, workplace discrimination, harassment, unsafe working conditions, and denial of lawful entitlements.

1.3.2. Promotion of Rule of Law

The engagement in the promotion and protection of rule of law is fundamental to women lawyers in Nigeria in order to sustain women's rights. Women lawyers have the task of putting forth virile ideals to facilitate and promote the rule of law as a good ground for meaningful governance through their researches and application of law. Succinctly, legal lawyers from their matured and practical experience of judicial decisions evaluate how far the constitution in operation has worked efficiently or otherwise and what factors constitute challenges to the application of rule of law in Nigeria. These are necessary because the rule of law postulates that the affairs of the government and the country must be conducted according to the law which in turn should have uniform application and that, disputes amongst members of a political entity or between one of them and the government are adjudicated upon in an impartial manner by tribunals which are independent. In this regards, Nwabueze observes as follows:

> *The mere existence of the rules is of course, not enough to secure the rule of law if they are in fact observed in actual practice. The rule of law only becomes a living reality to the extent that these rules curb the arbitrariness of discretion and are in fact observed by the wielders of political power*[12].

[12] A Olarewaju, *The Bar and the Bench in the Defence of the Rule of Law in Nigeria* (Nigeria Law Publications Ltd, Lagos, 1992) 2

Similarly, Hon. Justice Andrews Otutu Obaseki, J.S.C. in the case of *Government of Lagos State vs Ojukwu*[13] in relation to the rule of law observed:

> *The Nigerian constitution is founded on the rule of law, the primary meaning of which is that everything must be done according to law. It means also that the government should be conducted within a framework of recognized rules and principles which restrict discretionary power which Coke colorfully spoke of as golden and straight application of law as opposed to the uncertain and crooked cord of discretion. More relevant to case in hand, the rule of law means that, disputes as to the legality of acts of government are to be decided by judges who are wholly independent of the executive….The judiciary cannot shirk its sacred responsibility to the nation to maintain the rule of law. It is both in interest of the government and all person in Nigeria. The law should be even handed between the government and citizens*[14].

However, on the same ground, Elias T.O. (former Chief Justice of Nigeria and the President of the International Court of Justice), added that in developing society such as Nigeria, the concept of rule of law encompasses[15]:

(a) That law should be a conscious means of economic development of the community and that it should accordingly ensure that orderly advance and social progress of the community;

(b) That it should aim at consciously improving the moral as well as the cultural tone of the community;

(c) That it should above all promoting the unity of the various ethnic groups…. Though deliberate discouragement of ethnic particularisms and ethnocentric prejudices and

(d) That it should foster the growth of uniformity of law.

[13] (1986), NWLR (PT. 18), P.621
[14] Ibid, p.638.
[15] (n 12) 14.

1.3.3. Promotion of Democracy and Political Participation

Democratic principles entails equal representations at all levels of governance without any discrimination whatsoever; therefore, women lawyers ensure participation of women in governance through political advocacy by encouraging women to take up responsibilities without fear. Women lawyers defend constitutional principles, promote fair elections, protect civil liberties, and challenge unlawful actions through appropriate legal channels. Women lawyers encourage women's participation in politics, governance, public administration, and decision-making, helping to ensure that women's socio-economic needs are represented in public policy. However, in the Nigerian political clime, women have remained largely disempowered with less than 30% political representation and 22% unemployed rates despite the fact that, women out-numbered men in Nigeria. Importantly, women participation in educational sector[16], peace building reforms, high profile positions[17] and politics[18] are also commendable but not to the extent that it can be compared with practices of developed countries. To sum up the foregoing, the Nigerian 2006 National Policy on Women which aimed at the achievement of 30% representation of women in all fields of endeavor was to last till 2010 indicating that it was time bound. It was hoped that the Courts will make pronouncement on them thereby legalizing the provisions of the National Policy on women as seen in *Muoekwu vs Ejikeme*[19].

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[16] In this category, we have the likes of Professor Allele Williams (First Women Vice Chancellor of a Nigerian University Named University Of Benin); Mrs Chnwe Nora Obaji (An Education Administrator who was appointed to head Nigeria's Federal Ministry of Education; Mrs Obiageli Ezekwesili (A Nigerian Chartered Accountant who became the pioneer head of the Budget Monitoring and Price Intelligent Unit in Nigeria); Professor Ruqayatu Ahmed Rufai (A Former Commissioner in Jigawa State and Later Minister of Education in 2006); Professor Oluyemisi Bambose (First Female Senior Advocate of Nigeria); and Professor Idiat. F. Akande (First Female Professor Law in Kwara State); and many others

[17] Examples in this category include wives of presidents such as Maryam Babangida and Dr Patience Goodluck Jonathan

[18] Examples here include Madam Funmilayo, Ransome Kuti, Dr. (Alhaja) Habibatu Magaji, Dame Margret Ekpo, Hajia Gambo Sawaba, Dr Sara Jibril, Senator Oluremi Tinubu And Honourable Justice Fatima Abubakar Abdulsalam

[19] (2000) 7 NWLR (pt. 657) 413

1.3.4. The Nigerian Context

Nigeria as a member of the United Nations signed and ratified the various relevant international instruments, treaties and conventions without reservation. These instruments have always emphasized that member nations put in place all the necessary mechanisms needed to eliminate gender discriminations, ensure equality and human dignity to all, men and women. Available statistics reveal that out of the 109 senators in the National Assembly, only four (4) are women (that is, 2.7%) while only sixteen (16) out of the 360 members of the House of Representatives are women (that is, 4.7%)[20]. The picture clearly depicts a lopsided membership of the House in favor of the men. Women are still under-represented and obviously marginalized in democratization in legislative and executive arms of government. This trend flows from the national level, to state down to local levels where few women take the lead in local government chairman and councilors.

Record has it that no woman has ever become a president or a vice president. The only first female governor in Nigeria, Dame Virgy Etiaba, only functioned as Anambra State's governor for six months, following the impeachment of her boss, Gov. Peter Obi, on November 2, 2006. Ever since then, the closest a woman has come in governance is deputy governor as we have the First Female Deputy Governor of Rivers State, South-South Nigeria, Her Excellency, Dr. Mrs. Ipalibo Banigo.

In Nigeria, despite the formulation of National Gender Policy (2006), the country has been unable to promote a 35 percent affirmative action for women – a policy that demands 35 percent involvement of women in all governance processes in Nigeria since 2006. The NGP is recognized but is not practiced as the structures and processes to use are not in place. Similarly, in 2022 United

[20] Whitney Igariwey, 'Meet the Women of the 10th Assembly' (National Assembly Library Trust Fund, 2025) https://www.naltf.gov.ng accessed 10 December 2025..

Nations Women sought for one additional seat in all the 36 States of Nigeria including the Federal Capital Territory which resulted in 37 reserved seats for women in the senate but such bill failed[21]. In addition, Amnesty International also demanded Nigeria to pass bills promoting gender equality[22] but this bill was also rejected. As far as Nigeria is concerned, while various versions of gender equality and equal opportunity bill has been advanced to different stages in the National Assembly (NASS) over the years. The bills have faced repeated setbacks and have not been enacted[23]

1.3.5. Promotion of Human Rights: Women lawyers function are tools for the promotion, protection and ensuring the enjoyment of human rights guaranteed by the state to all persons within its jurisdiction. The promotion and protection of human rights is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace. As such, it becomes the bedrock of a state. In this regard, the Charter of Paris for a new Europe adopted later in 1990 reaffirmed that:

> *Human rights and fundamental freedom are the birthright of all human beings, are inalienable and are guaranteed by law. Their protection and promotion is the first responsibility of government. Respect for them is an essential safeguard against an over-mighty state. Their observance and full exercise are the foundation of freedom, justice and peace*[24].

It is important to reiterate here that lawyers are the vital cogs in the administration of justice and the bar must be ready and willing to defend the rights that are guaranteed by the states in statue books. Lord Macmillan, a distinguished law lord describe this function in its context as follows:

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[21] Vanguard, 'Pass Reserved Seats Bill for Women, UN Women Tells National Assembly' https://www.vanguardngr.com/5/12/2025/pass-reserved-seats-bill-for-women-un-women-tells-national-assembly/ accessed 9 December 2025.
[22] Amnesty International Nigeria, [Title of publication or article required] https://www.amnesty.org.ng accessed 6 November 2025.
[23] Examples of such bills include special seats for women; Affirmative Action for Women in Political Party Administration; and Gender Equality Act which was rejected on Tuesday March, 1st 2022.
[24] U O Umozuirike, Introduction to International Law (3rd edn, Spectrum Books Ltd, 2005) 153.

> *Ever since the state decreed that men must cease to settle their disputes with arguments of fist and club, the administration of justice has been the prime concern of the state in order to enable this primary function of government to be efficiently discharged. The experience of every civilized community has shown that it is indispensable to have a class of men skilled in advising and aiding the citizen in the vindication of rights before the courts to which state delegates the test of dispensing justice in accordance with the law of the land*[25]

In view of the above, women lawyers protect the fundamental rights of individuals, including the rights to life, dignity, freedom, equality, and fair hearing.

1.3.6. Promotion of *Pro Bono* Practices and Opportunities in Nigeria: The promotion of pro bono legal practices across Africa is an essential component of strengthening access to justice, deepening the rule of law, and advancing human rights. "Pro bono" (short for *pro bono publico*, meaning "for the public good") refers to the voluntary provision of professional legal services without charge or at reduced fees to individuals and communities that cannot afford representation. In many African societies, where socio-economic inequality and weak legal aid systems persist, expanding pro bono culture is not a moral obligation for AWLA but a pathway towards inclusive justice. Indeed, women lawyers offer *pro bono* legal assistance to poor and disadvantaged people who cannot afford the cost of legal representation. Through *pro bono* services and legal aid initiatives, women lawyers help disadvantaged people resolve legal problems that might otherwise prevent them from accessing employment, housing, property, or social benefits.

1.3.7. Advocating for Legal Reforms and Policy Formulation: Women lawyers contribute legal expertise to the development of policies and legislation that improve governance, social welfare, and public protection. Women lawyers campaign for the amendment or introduction of

[25] A I Obe and T F Yerima (eds), Law, Justice and Good Governance (Faculty of Law, University of Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria, 2003) 9.

laws that promote justice, equality, and the protection of vulnerable groups. This is achieved through organized seminars, workshops, community outreaches, and awareness campaigns to educate people about their legal rights and obligations. Consequently, women lawyers provide legal advice to government agencies, businesses, non-governmental organisations, and public institutions to ensure compliance with the law on the following matters:

i. Women lawyers participate in reviewing and reforming laws that affect economic development, social welfare, family relations, labour rights, and gender equality.

ii. Women lawyers advocate for legal and policy measures that improve access to maternal healthcare, reproductive health services, and protection against harmful practices affecting women and children.

iii. Women lawyers contribute professional expertise to policies concerning poverty reduction, social protection, education, housing, employment, and economic development.

iv. They advocate against child labour, child trafficking, early marriage, and other harmful practices that undermine children's education and future economic opportunities.

1.3.8. Mediating Disputes: Women lawyers help resolve disputes through negotiation, mediation, and other alternative dispute-resolution methods, thereby reducing unnecessary litigation. By so doing, women lawyers represent individuals and organisations in civil and criminal cases, ensuring that their clients receive fair treatment through mediation. Women lawyers help victims of unlawful detention, wrongful dismissal, discrimination, and other violations seek compensation, remedies, and justice. Women lawyers encourage lawful behaviour, peaceful settlement of disputes, tolerance, and respect for the rights of others. Thus, women lawyers use negotiation, mediation, and arbitration to resolve family, commercial, community, and workplace disputes, thereby reducing conflict and supporting productive relationships.

1.3.9. **Promoting Gender Equality:** Women lawyers advocate for equal opportunities and protection against discrimination in education, employment, politics, marriage, and other aspects of life. By so doing, they provide legal assistance to victims of domestic violence, rape, sexual harassment, forced marriage, and other forms of abuse. Also, women lawyers defend children's rights against child labour, trafficking, neglect, exploitation, and abuse. They also advocate for access to education and appropriate child protection services. Further, women lawyers assist victims of human trafficking and exploitation in seeking justice, obtaining legal protection, and accessing available support services. Cumulatively, performing the above roles with professionalism, impartiality, and integrity, women lawyers contribute significantly to building a just and equitable society in Nigeria and beyond.

1.4. Women Lawyers as Agent of Socio-economic Change

Women lawyers play significant roles in promoting socio-economic change in Nigeria through legal advocacy, economic empowerment, policy development, and social reforms. Their continued participation in legal practice and public affairs is essential for building a more inclusive, equitable, and economically prosperous Nigeria as discussed below.

1.4.1 Women Lawyers as Tools for Economic Emancipation: Women lawyers play vital role in economic progress and development, especially now in Nigeria where investors need to be attracted. Women lawyers help women understand and exercise their legal rights to own property, establish businesses, access employment, and participate in economic activities. Thus, the existence of a stable body of women lawyers give investors rest of mind in cases of conflict which may arise from time to time in the course of transactions. In this regard, Lord Alexander, while addressing the Malaysia Bar in 1991 observes as follows:

> *The ability to conduct trade within the boundaries for law and to know that a settled system of law is available to resolve*

> *differences is crucial to economic progress. The economic progress made within your country within recent years with improved opportunities for employment ad higher standard of living is most good to see. Your system of law and your professional work, are not just an adjunct grated on to the commerce of society, but an essential element in its development, legal rights do not impede economic progress, they buttress*[26].

In line with the above observation, it could be submitted that the role of women lawyers in economic emancipation is to educate and protect the citizens on the legal rationale of transactions and the resultant consequence of breaching the agreements of legal transactions, on the wrong or misuse of the power of trade associations, who manipulate the market in order to create artificial scarcity and other related matters including:

i. Providing legal assistance to women who are unlawfully denied land, houses, family property, or inheritance, helping to strengthen women's economic security.

ii. Advising women entrepreneurs on business registration, contracts, taxation, intellectual property, and regulatory compliance, helping businesses operate lawfully and sustainably.

iii. Helping employees challenge unlawful dismissal, exploitation, unpaid wages, and other unfair labour practices that contribute to poverty and economic insecurity.

iv. Educating women and disadvantaged groups about their legal rights in banking, lending, contracts, and financial transactions, helping them participate more confidently in economic activities.

In Nigeria, women participation in economic sector over the years, have bridged the gap between women and men particularly in agricultural sector where there are women farmers as well as their male counterparts. Agricultural entrepreneurship in Nigeria has resulted in the emergence

[26] Ibid, p.8.

of various women groups and organizations. Consequently, women have been able to contribute immensely to the gains recorded in the agricultural and rural development.[27] The United Nations International Decade for women, which was marked in 1985, has helped to stimulate official awareness of the increasing Impoverishment of women and of the central role they play in the agricultural economies of the Third World countries[28]. In Nigeria women play are prominent role in the food chain development which cuts across production, processing and marketing.

In June 2016, the Agricultural Policy was launched and has continued to guide the development initiatives in the sector. It strives to consolidate the success of the Agricultural Transformation Agenda (ATA), close the policy gaps and reposition the sector for greater investment and increased diversification in order to accelerate economic recovery, reduce poverty and enhance food security. The involvement of women in agriculture has attracted greater attention in recent years. The need to develop a suitable extension service that is gender specific cannot be overemphasized. This is in recognition that women play significant roles in Nigeria's agricultural production, processing and utilization.[29] On average, women contribute 43% of the agricultural labor force in developing countries, ranging from 20% in Latin America to almost 50% in East and South-East Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa.

The World Bank provided data for Nigerian women participation in the labor force from 1990-2018. The average value for Nigeria during that period was 48.36 percent with a minimum

[27] A Adegbidi, 'Linking Small-Scale Farmers to Markets in Benin: A Failure of ICT-Based Initiatives? Evidence from Case Studies' (2012) 2(2) *Journal of Research in International Business and Management* 261–272 <online ISSN; 2251-0028, 2012> accessed 27 July 2019

[28] T G Apata, Analysis of Cassava Value Chain in Nigeria, from a Pro-Poor and Gender Perspective of Farming Households in Southwest Nigeria (2013) <https://www.pdf> accessed 12 February 2020.

[29] B Nnadozie and I Ibe, 'Women in Agriculture: Problems and Prospects' in A C Nwosu, C U and J A Mbanasor (eds), Agricultural Transformation in Nigeria (Novelty Industrial Enterprises, Owerri, 1996) < https://www.pdf > accessed 15 February 2020.

of 47.11 percent in 1991 and a maximum of 50.55 percent in 2018.[30] Nigeria-Female Labor Participation, the female labor force participation rate is the percent of the female population age 15 and older that are economically active. That includes the employed people as well as the unemployed people.

1.4.2. Protection of the Environment: Section 20 of the Constitution of Federal Republic of Nigeria places the obligation of protecting the environment on the State. Thus, in an attempt to fulfill the requirements of this provision, women lawyers engage on researches that are based on sustainable development patterns and participate in environmental protection programs. Their involvement in natural resource management leads to better conservation outcomes. Environmental protection aims at ensuring that the environmental and natural resources are sued as to ensure the maximum benefit for the present and future generation. (i.e., sustainable development) conservation should be treated, as an integral aspect of planning and the implication of developing the environment should be carefully studied and taken account of. There is need to notify concerning activities that might affect the environment and due process should be retained for damages suffered. Strict liabilities should be imposed on individuals for activities that cause serious damage to the environment.

1.4.3. Vanguard in the Anti-Corruption Crüsade: Section 15 (5) of the Constitution Federal Republic of Nigeria (CFRN) provides that, *"the State shall abolish all corrupt practices".* This is because where there is corruption, there cannot be progress, therefore women lawyers assist the government at all levels in combating corruption. This is achieved by holding public officials, institutions, and individuals accountable for unlawful conduct through lawful procedures and litigation. In its totality, women lawyers challenge unlawful conduct, support transparency, and

[30] The Global Economy, https://www.theglobaleconomy.com accessed 8 May 2019.

promote accountability in public institutions, contributing to better governance and economic development.

1.4.4. **Mentoring Future Legal Professionals:** Women lawyer's train, guide, and mentor young lawyers and law students to uphold professional ethics, integrity, fairness, and respect for the rule of law. Such mentoring is achieved through professional organizations such as African Women Lawyers Association (AWLA); Federation of Women Lawyers. Closely association with this is the fact that women lawyers campaign for laws and policies that eliminate discrimination against women in education, employment, inheritance, business, political participation, encouraging girls to pursue legal education and other professional careers which help to develop future leaders and improve women's participation in national development.

1.4.5. **Combating Gender-Based Violence:** They defend victims of domestic violence, sexual harassment, rape, and other forms of abuse. This contributes to social stability and helps survivors regain their independence and economic productivity. Women lawyers advocate for girls' education and challenge practices such as child marriage and gender discrimination that prevent girls from completing their education and other related matters as follows:

i. Women lawyers advocate for fair recruitment, equal pay for equal work, maternity protection, safe working environments, and freedom from workplace discrimination.
ii. Women lawyers support efforts to prosecute traffickers, protect survivors, and promote rehabilitation and reintegration into society.
iii. Women lawyers challenge discriminatory widowhood practices and help widows retain their property, inheritance, dignity, and means of livelihood.

iv. Women lawyers provide legal education and assistance to rural women concerning land ownership, agricultural activities, cooperative societies, and access to available development opportunities.

v. They defend the rights of people who experience social and economic exclusion and advocate for accessible education, employment, public facilities, and social services.

1.4.6. **Promoting Digital Rights and Economic Opportunities:** Women lawyers advocate for privacy, cybersecurity, protection against online harassment, fair access to digital opportunities, and helping women participate in the digital economy as follows:

i. Protecting consumers against fraudulent business practices, defective products, unfair contractual terms, and other abuses that can cause financial hardship.

ii. Collaborating with civil society organisations, community groups, and government agencies to support initiatives addressing poverty, social exclusion, environmental justice, and community welfare.

1.5. Challenges to the Role of Women Lawyers as Agent of Justice and Social Change

1.5.1. Poverty

Nigerian women are more identified with poverty. Women suffer greater poverty compared to men as a result of systemic inequality such as lower wages, disproportionate burden in unpaid labour, and vulnerability, particularly in rural areas, making poverty a significant woman issue across to continent. Consequently, it becomes very difficult to raise money for the purposes vying for offices in politics particularly the offices of the “President” and “Governors”.

Thus, poverty is a phenomenon which leads to other things such as, strikes, protests and demonstration, terrorism, campaigns of civil disobedience etcetera, which no doubt, today, are lumped together in Nigeria as a growing threat to women lawyers participation in political,

economic, social and cultural fields. Consequently, the polity is stagnated, and progress could only be achieved at a snail moving pace.

1.5.2. Gender Marginalization: Generally, traditional belief impede women's maximum participation in development process thereby providing a breeding ground for gender inequality.

1.5.3. Corruption: Corruption constitutes a significant challenge to the role of women lawyers as agents of justice and social change in Nigeria. It manifests through bribery, embezzlement of public funds, nepotism, favouritism, abuse of power and manipulation of judicial and political processes. These practices undermine the rule of law, weaken public institutions and prevent the fair administration of justice. Women lawyers, who are expected to promote accountability, defend human rights and ensure justice for vulnerable members of society, often encounter difficulties in performing these responsibilities within a system where corruption influences decision-making and institutional operations.

Furthermore, corruption limits women's access to leadership positions and opportunities within the legal profession, politics and other public institutions. In some instances, appointments and promotions are influenced by personal connections, financial influence and political interests rather than competence, merit and professional qualifications. This situation places women lawyers, particularly those without strong political or financial connections, at a disadvantage. Corruption may also discourage women lawyers from challenging powerful individuals or institutions for fear of intimidation, professional victimisation or other forms of retaliation. Consequently, corruption weakens the capacity of women lawyers to contribute effectively to justice delivery, good governance, gender equality and sustainable social change in Nigeria.

1.5.4. Insecurity: Insecurity is another major challenge affecting the role of women lawyers as agents of justice and social change in Nigeria. The persistent occurrence of kidnapping, terrorism,

banditry, communal conflicts, armed robbery, sexual violence and other forms of criminal activities creates an unfavourable environment for women's participation in legal, political, economic and social activities. Women lawyers working in conflict-affected communities or handling cases involving powerful individuals and criminal organisations may face threats, harassment, intimidation and physical attacks. Such circumstances can discourage them from performing their professional responsibilities effectively, particularly when defending victims of human rights violations, gender-based violence and other forms of injustice.

Moreover, insecurity disproportionately affects women and girls, who are often exposed to sexual exploitation, rape, forced displacement, domestic violence and other human rights abuses during periods of conflict and social unrest. Women lawyers play important roles in providing legal representation, advocating for victims, promoting human rights and demanding accountability from relevant authorities. However, inadequate security protection, limited access to conflict-affected communities and fear of personal attacks can restrict their ability to carry out these responsibilities. In addition, insecurity discourages women's participation in political activities, public demonstrations, community advocacy and leadership positions. Consequently, the persistent security challenges in Nigeria undermine the efforts of women lawyers to promote justice, protect fundamental human rights and contribute meaningfully to social transformation and national development.

1.6. Conclusion

Women lawyers play important roles as agent of justice and social change in Nigeria by promoting human rights, defending the vulnerable, legal advocacy, economic empowerment, policy development, social reforms and ensuring equality before the law. As agents of justice, they contribute to the development of a fair, peaceful, and democratic society by providing legal

services, representing clients in court, advocating for legal reforms, and educating the public about their rights and responsibilities. In Nigeria and other countries, women lawyers help address discrimination, gender-based violence, child abuse, and other forms of injustice. They use their legal knowledge and professional influence to challenge discriminatory practices, protect vulnerable groups, promote access to economic opportunities, and support national development. Their contributions help create a society where women, men, children, and disadvantaged groups can participate more effectively in economic and social activities.

Therefore, the significance of this paper cannot be overemphasized especially, in the contemporary era where there is a need to enhance women development politically, economically, culturally and socially. In general, scholars, policy makers, judges, legal practitioners, legislatures, executives, judiciary, governmental and non-governmental organizations and other relevant stakeholders are bound to benefit from the discourse of this paper because it recognizes the modern stage of transition of women from the traditional family raising to position holders in the area of education, political and social development in Nigeria in particular and across the globe. Thus, in view of the issues discussed in this paper, the following findings are identified:

i. Societal ignorance fear of female domination against men. No doubt, there are misconceptions that women's political empowerment threatens men's positions or dominance in society; this is very unfair to national development.

ii. Nigerian women are more identified with poverty. Women suffer greater poverty compared to men as a result of systemic inequality such as lower wages, disproportionate burden in unpaid labour, and vulnerability, particularly in rural areas, making poverty a significant woman issue across to continent. Consequently, it becomes very difficult to raise money

for the purposes vying for offices in politics particularly the offices of the "President" and "Governors".

iii. There is a wide gap between the level of female and male education particularly in Northern Nigeria. For examples, in the Nigerian political clime, women have remained largely disempowered with less than 30% political representation and 22% unemployed rates despite the fact that, women out-numbered men in Nigeria.

In view of the findings made above, the following recommendations are proffered:

i. There is a need for sustained public enlightenment and sensitisation programmes to address societal misconceptions and fears surrounding female political leadership. Traditional rulers, religious leaders, community organisations, civil society groups and the media should promote gender equality and educate the public on the importance of women's participation in leadership and decision-making. Such efforts will help eliminate the misconception that women's political empowerment threatens men's positions or dominance in society.

ii. Government, non-governmental organisations and financial institutions should introduce targeted economic empowerment programmes for women through accessible loans, grants, entrepreneurship training and financial support. Political parties should also establish mechanisms for reducing the financial barriers that prevent women from contesting elective positions, particularly governorship and presidential elections. Furthermore, policies that promote equal pay, access to employment opportunities and the fair distribution of unpaid domestic responsibilities should be strengthened to reduce women's economic vulnerability.

iii. Government should intensify efforts to bridge the gender gap in education, particularly in Northern Nigeria, through the provision of scholarships, girl-child education programmes, adult literacy initiatives and improved access to educational facilities in rural communities.

Furthermore, political parties and relevant government institutions should introduce deliberate measures, including affirmative action and gender inclusion policies, to increase women's representation in political offices and decision-making processes. These measures will enhance women's educational and political empowerment and promote inclusive national development.