

Mothers of Faith, Builders of Nations: The Legacy of Southern Nigerian Christian Women

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Globally, religion permeates every aspect of human existence. Strangely, it is within one's own group that one finds God. Nigerians were enlightened by various religions' teachings regarding environmental development. This study explores the contribution of Christian women to nation-building in southern Nigeria since its independence in 1960. In the southern region of the country, ladies were inspired by Christian missionaries. They came to spread the gospel and win people over to Christianity. The ladies found freedom and empowerment via their evangelistic work from the patriarchal system and traditional institutions, where women are expected to be seen but not heard. Religious issues appeal to women emotionally because they call for adoration and devotion to the Supreme Being, the absolute truth, and the transcendent and omnipotent God. Both environmental structural modifications and contemporary lifestyles that they had learned from the missionaries were put into practice. Because the research is exploratory, the paper gathers information from both primary and secondary sources, including an oral interview, firsthand experience, and relevant literature. The findings encourage women to do more to foster the nation. Christian women ought to be honoured and praised for how they have helped their ecosystems grow, and they ought to be inspired to make use of their abilities.

Keywords: religion, Christian women, southern Nigeria, independence, nation building

Introduction

Women in some parts of Nigeria are relegated to the low ebb due to a patriarchal framework. More especially true when it comes to their contributions to civilisation's expansion and advancement. Usually, phrases like "man the hunter", "man the toolmaker", and "man the king of creation" are used to praise men in stories about the history of the human race (Adjepong, 2015, p. 17). But evidence from different places and times shows that women have always played an important role in all parts of society. Opara (2025) has demonstrated in the spirituality of African women and development that women have over time significantly contributed to the survival and advancement of society. The majority of these economic and social works highlight the fact that women were frequently involved in and essentially experts in activities such as food gathering, cooking, caring for children, pottery, leatherwork, making clothing, slings, and containers out of animal skins, weaving grasses, reeds, and bark strips for baskets, fashioning beads and ornaments out of teeth or bones, and using plants and herbs as medicine for everything (Adjepong, 2015, p. 17).

Similar occurrences have taken place in the religious world, where men have traditionally been praised for their work as missionaries, cardinals, bishops, pastors, and church leaders, while Christian women have either

been left out of or treated as an afterthought when discussing the expansion of their churches or their contributions to societal advancement. Before the 19th century, missionary activity was dominated by male chauvinistic tendencies, since many people thought that only men were physically able to carry out such pioneering efforts. The bias against women raises the question of whether or not Christianity is repressive to women, as some orthodox religious men even believe that women were not allowed to serve on missions (Mepaiyeda, 2015, p. 294). Women's involvement in church ministries, such as visiting families, caring for the sick, the poor, and outcasts, working in refugee camps, managing homes for the elderly, and running jails, has increased significantly in recent years in an effort to be a witness for God (Mepaiyeda, 2015, p. 295). At the beginning of the 21st century, women's organisations had firmly established themselves in many churches in Nigeria. The ladies' praying union in the Church of the Lord *Aladura*, the Methodist women's fellowship in the Methodist Church, the league in the African Church, the Catholic Women Organization of Nigeria, the Good Women's Association in the Christ Apostolic Church, the Women's Missionary Union in the Nigerian Baptist Convention, and the ladies' praying union in the Church of the Lord *Aladura* come to mind (p. 295). Over the years, Christian women have actively contributed to the building of beautiful structures such as churches, guest homes, schools, hospitals, and markets. More importantly, they have developed centres for skill development, granted scholarships to children from low-income families, and bought automobiles for use in business. In order to better understand how Christian women's initiative has aided national development in southern Nigeria over the course of Nigeria's independence from Britain, this article will look at how it has done so. The exploratory research methodology is applied. Data collection methods include conducting interviews and reading relevant literature. Women's hidden abilities are emerging to aid in nation-building. Women should not be treated as a given; rather, their potential should be unlocked and used.

Methodology

Conducting semi-structured interviews with some women, such as prominent Christian women leaders, community activists, academics specialising in gender studies and religion, and ordinary women from various socioeconomic backgrounds, provided rich narratives. In-depth case studies and observation of specific organisations or initiatives led by Christian women analyse their impacts on communities in some parts of southern Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

The study uses Feminist Theory to analyse gender roles, power dynamics, and social inequalities that shape women's experiences and opportunities. It helps to understand how patriarchal structures have historically marginalised women and how they continue to limit their potential. Religious Studies theoretical lens helps to examine the role of Christianity in shaping women's identities, values, and aspirations. It explores how religious beliefs and practices have influenced women's involvement in social and political activism. In addition, Social Capital Theory is used to analyse the social networks, trust, and reciprocity that enable women to mobilise resources and influence decision-making processes. It examines how women's participation in religious organisations and community groups has contributed to their social and political empowerment.

Religion and Women

Before the Age of Enlightenment in the 14th and 15th centuries, religion was always unfair to women because it kept them from being involved in making decisions for the community (Oduduye, 1988). Modernisation

ushered in a new way of living that freed women from male chauvinism and allowed them to participate in society. Men can take their faculties to plausible logic because of how women are treated in religious and political matters. Women tend to be passive and deferential to the male deity authorities who preside over topics of faith and politics (Otonko & Opara, 2023, p. 193). However, in some African civilisations, both men and women had different types of heavenly encounters and had them in varied settings. In order to fulfil the directives of God, these experiences are shared with a larger section of society. In several Nigerian ethnic communities, women take the initiative in spiritual affairs. They are called to serve as priestesses and seers. Some of them have ties to deities, gods, and ancestral spirits in order to placate their ghosts and offer specific atonement at a time when plagues, natural disasters, and bad luck have been commonplace. Before Christian missionaries from European and American nations arrived, southern Nigerian women were already in this situation. These southern Nigerian women's steadfast conviction opened up space for other Nigerian women to immediately accept the effort to be more responsible. Many of the local women were converted by the Christian missionaries, who also instilled western education and polite behavior (Opara, 2025, p. 5). The church and society empowered women to participate actively in a variety of endeavours. It is important to be aware that in southern Nigeria, there was a shift from traditional to modern methods of carrying out tasks in terms of empowerment, accountability, and active participation. Women have held positions of leadership in several Christian churches, such as Bishops, priests, deacons, CWO president, rushers, prayer leaders, choir mistresses, as well as traditional positions as priestesses, mediums, and medical advisors. For instance, the Catholic Women's Organization or the Church of the Lord's Praying Union (Aladura). Others include the Women's Missionary Union in the Nigerian Baptist Convention, the Good Women's Association in the Christ Apostolic Church, the League in the African Church, and the Methodist Women's Fellowship in the Methodist Church. Some Nigerian women serve as pastors, evangelists, deacons, Pentecostal church overseers, and even the founders and bishops of churches in their home country. In their numerous congregations, they preside over services and act as spiritual advisors. They continue to build contemporary structures, including hospitals, schools, and clinics.

Southern Nigeria

The south-south, south-east, and south-western regions of Nigeria make up its southern region. When Lord Lugard formally merged the nation in 1914, the North and the South became one country with a single government. The two sizable rivers, the Niger and the Benue, established a natural boundary between the north and the south with distinct cultural and traditional religious foundations. The foliage and humidity of the southern climate, along with the abundance of rain and dense forest, are its main defining features. Southern Nigeria is home to a variety of ethnic groups, the most well-known of which are the Yoruba, Igbo, Ibibio, Efik, Annang, Ijaw, Uroghbor, Ishikiri, Ishan, and Bini. The southern region of Nigeria is heavily inhabited by diversely populated communities. The arrival of Christian missionaries brought with them the same Christian culture that had Jesus Christ's life and teachings as its centre. A unified community was created throughout southern Nigeria as a result of the missionary mentality. The method used by Christians to publicly declare their faith is the same. The truth is that European culture had modernised the Christian missionaries. They brought civilization and Christianity to southern Nigeria (Nwadiolor, 2014).

Historical Overview of Christianity in Southern Nigeria

Faith has served as the driving force behind Nigerian Christians' moral deeds. It has inspired Christian women to take the initiative in innovating new things in Nigeria during the past ten years. Portuguese Catholic

missionaries first came to southern Nigeria, Benin, and Lagos in 1472 to convert local populations to Catholicism (Fafunwa, 1974, p. 74). They were dealt with by obas, chiefs, and kings who lured them into commerce. As business took hold, the zeal for missionary spirits diminished. Their objective was accomplished as a result of their involvement in trade and business services. Based on the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, Christianity is a religion. Jesus assigned his followers the task of travelling the globe and spreading the message of peace until the end of time (Matthew 28:19-20). The second wave of Christianity in southern Nigeria saw the emancipated slaves fulfil the message of Jesus. The Niger Expedition (Salami, 2015, p. 17) brought freed slaves and Europeans, together with European missionaries, to southern Nigeria intending to study, evangelise, and convert the locals to Christianity. Mary Slessor (Salami, 2015, p. 52) in 1844 and Sr. Charles Magdalene Walker RSC in 1923 are two examples of European women. To concentrate on women's education, the male missionaries were joined by Okure 57 and others. Together with conventional schools for kindergarten, nursery, primary, secondary, teacher preparation colleges, and higher education institutions, they established vocational schools. Leprosy orphanages, maternity homes, dispensaries, health care facilities, hospitals, and habitation centres were all constructed. Their efforts were made to help the natives become less impoverished and to encourage them to become Christians. Women were converted in significant numbers to Christianity. Most of them had professional training in a variety of fields. Some southern Nigerian women were educated on how to serve whites and assist with managing and administering healthcare and educational institutions. Nigerian women worked tirelessly to establish the church in southern Nigeria, taking the initiative to pass on the knowledge they had learned from European missionaries. It's crucial to keep in mind the rapidly vanishing cultural chauvinism against women that existed in traditional settings in southern Nigeria before the entrance of Christian missionaries. On the other hand, indigenous women in Nigeria were taught about women's empowerment by Christian missionaries. This has developed into a workforce that is committed to fostering creativity and initiative in southern Nigerian women. Since Nigeria gained independence in 1960, the efforts have been ongoing and have contributed to the development of Nigerian society. This fact can be seen by quickly examining the influence of Christian missionaries on Nigerian women.

Effect of Independence on Women in Southern Nigeria

The British ruled Nigeria up until her independence on October 1, 1960. This refers to the time when Nigeria as a country attained political independence. It marks the start of political liberation from reliance on and subjugation to colonial authority. The ladies in the south responded to the cry for women's emancipation earlier than women in other regions of Nigeria. They quickly accepted the duty of establishing the country. Funmilayo Ransom Kuti, a certified teacher who entered politics and actively participated as a politician and women's activist, was the first woman to own and operate a vehicle. Funmilayo was one of three influential women who helped bring about Nigeria's independence, along with Hajia Gambo Sawaba and Margaret Ekpo (Bakare, 2023). They served as an inspiration for other women of like minds to take an interest in politics, nation-building, and development and to come out and take part openly. A successful campaign against separate taxes for women was also led by Funmilayo (Eluwa, Ukagwu, Nwachukwu, & Nwaubani, 2016, p. 226). Her courageous action motivated the women in Nigeria's southern region to be proactive and actively participate in matters related to nation-building. Women have the right to participate in all political, religious, cultural, and economic activities. Together with other special privileges, they have also been given the ability to vote and be elected. Throughout the 1990s, more women participated in politics. Two examples of women who advanced to the status of constable in various states are Mrs. Cecilia Ekpenyong of Cross River State and Alhaja Sinatu Ojikutu of Lagos State. In

addition, Mrs. Kofo Bucknor and Chief Mrs. Florence Ita Giwa were elected to the Senate and House of Representatives, respectively, from the Calabar area (Oluyemi, 2016). The role of minister for women's issues has been held by several women. The House of Representatives' Speaker was Mrs. Patricia Olubunmi Etteh. Women are working harder than ever to get involved in politics at all levels. Sarah Jubril tried to run for president in the 2011 primary but was unsuccessful (Akpan, 2018, p. 100). The late Professor Dora Akunyilu, Obiageli Ezekwesili, and Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, who served as federal government ministers, are three more noteworthy women. Chinyere Kalu made history by becoming the nation's first female pilot. The women in the southern region of Nigeria were granted a special freedom that allowed them to work in various companies and support the development of their country. Women therefore played important roles in the daily or irregular marketplaces. They strolled from house to house selling their items, ran food carts, and set up shop on the side of the road. Iyaloja, who is known as the "mother of the market" in English, had a significant role in the management of the market in western Nigeria. She went by the name Iyaloja. For instance, she was in charge of making sure that the market was maintained, and she also informed the chief, who was in charge of the market, of her findings (Inumidun, 2025). Women made a substantial and essential contribution to the expansion of labour on family farms. They took part in the crops' planting, weeding, and harvesting in some way. In Nigeria, women play a crucial part in every industry's production process. This was particularly true for businesses that produced ceramics, beer, and extracted vegetable oils, as well as other products. Women were equally significant in Nigeria's textile manufacturing sector. For instance, cotton spinning, cotton dyeing, and similar procedures. Traditionally, women were thought to handle tasks like making vegetable oils and soap. Women produced beer in different parts of the country as well, especially in the eastern section. Southern Nigerian women proved and displayed their value in many respects.

Southern Nigerian Christian Women's Initiatives for Nation-Building

In the southern area of Nigeria, despite male supremacy, Christian women have not abandoned the lessons imparted to them by foreign missionaries. Since Nigeria's independence in 1960, they have been committed to nation-building. "What are Christian women in southern Nigeria doing now to help build their country?", one might wonder. Their contributions to their immediate environment reflect their efforts to construct a nation. Examples include moral upbringing, school setup, economic contribution, political contribution, social contribution, cultural contribution, and medical contribution. Moral upbringing: Character formation based on Christian morals is one of the reasons enhancing projects in southern Nigeria. They've been taught to love, work hard, forgive, be kind and modest, to have forbearance, obedience, fortitude, kindness, patience, respect, loyalty, magnanimity, commitment, and courage, and to be patient (Ignacimuthu, 2004, pp. 74-78). To contribute to national progress, people of sound mind are required to take specific active actions. Maturity means achieving emotional equilibrium and accepting others as they are (p. 44). The ladies who followed genuine Christian moral doctrine demonstrated several moral virtues without a doubt. A famous Christian theologian, St. Thomas Aquinas, attested to some characteristics that motivate human endeavours towards nation-building, such as justice, honesty, discipline, tolerance, and truthfulness (Omoredge, 2018, p. 134). Any culture or nation benefits from the education of women. When women have moral character, they are inspired to take action and contribute meaningfully to nation-building while keeping an open mind. Despite males' unique position of being quiet and meek in matters of national upbuilding, women fiercely take the initiative to propose progressive suggestions (Njoku, 2018, p. 190). The truth is that moral education lays the groundwork for southern Christian women to

enter systems that support national development. Christian moms have a responsibility to promote moral ideals in their children and the nation (Opara, 2025). This will aid in the preservation of the country's sanity as well as the respect and dignity of labour. Moral rectitude will help to reduce the immorality that has enveloped society. Instilling strong Christian ideals will help in the fight against corruption, which is the cankerworm that is eating away at the fabric of modern society. Creating educational institutions: As Christian missionaries came to southern Nigeria, they saw the need for various levels of educational institutions to be established in various regions around the country. The indigenous people were thrilled to learn that the new educational system would be implemented alongside the previous traditional system. As a result, their perspectives and character depictions have shifted considerably. The Christian ladies comprehended the missionaries' numerous techniques and methodologies for imparting knowledge to the locals. In building several educational institutions throughout southeastern Nigeria, these Nigerian women followed the same strategy. To begin, Nigerian women religious from various congregations and institutions began building kindergartens, nurseries, and elementary schools on church grounds, thus initiating changes in the local church milieu. The Catholic, Anglican, Methodist, Baptist, and Presbyterian churches, all mainline denominations, were at the forefront of building schools to promote the intellectual talents of their people. This contributed to the growth of their immediate surroundings (Syed & Soneye, 2025). Several of the school buildings were constructed to resemble those in European countries, complete with cross-ventilation, flower beds, and eye-catching landscaping. Numerous textbooks, exercise books, and writing tools were brought in from foreign countries. To meet European and American standards, women took bolder steps to establish secondary schools and colleges. Among the most renowned women are the sisters of St. Louis Institute, Sisters of the Holy Child Jesus, The Eucharistic Heart of Jesus, The Handmaids of the Holy Child Jesus, The Sacred Heart of Jesus Congregation, Daughters of Divine Love, Daughters of Mary Mother of Mercy, and others. The majority of these secondary schools and colleges are built in contemporary architectural styles. The educational environment ushers in civilization, urbanisation, and contemporary perspectives. The Anglicans, Deeper Life Bible Church, Baptists, Evangelical Church of West Africa (ECWA), Living Faith Bible Church, Adventists, The Redeemed Christian Church of God Women, and missionary organisations worked together to establish schools at various levels to educate the next generation and impart moral and intellectual knowledge. Christian women founded a number of vocational training centres to assist women in learning new skills and crafts (Adegoke, 1991, p. 79). Some are employed by non-governmental organisations. Oti Ngozi established the Center for Women's Intervention in 1999. They specialise in organising seminars to teach rural women about their rights and duties. They also seek to empower women and strengthen their skills.

Before Christian missionaries came to southern Nigeria, women there often worked hard. In the decades since Nigeria got its independence, they have made a lot of progress in making the economy stronger. The weaving business has grown so that it now makes a huge number of high-quality fabrics in a wide range of patterns and designs. This has helped reduce the demand to import foreign cloth. Clothing is one of the most fundamental human needs. Christian women contribute significantly to the nation's clothing supply. They develop from weaving to Adire, Ankara styles, Aso Ebi, and other fashionable traditional styles (Opara, 2025). Several female entrepreneurs own and operate enterprises that produce and process maize flour, rice flour, cassava flour, and yam flour. Additional economic contributions include the processing of palm oil, farming, sewing, and pottery. Pottery refers to the technique and product of creating vessels and other items out of clay and other ceramic materials and firing them at high temperatures to give them a hard, lasting shape. Earthenware, stoneware, and porcelain are the most prevalent varieties. A pottery is also a place where a potter manufactures

such items. These pots are used to put gorgeous flowers around residences, compounds, and streets. They are used as house decorations both inside and outside. Palm oil processing has helped to produce vegetable oil, soap, cream, and margarine. Palm extract is used to make a range of soaps and medications. These economic activities boost the rate of food production and the market exchange of goods and services. Raw materials are produced for use by other companies, factories, and industries around the country. After independence, people's living standards increased. Njideka Akunyili Crosby (Tomiwa, 2018) has represented Nigeria well by exhibiting her artistic work outside of the country. Several Christian women from southern Nigeria design and sew garments in Dubai, Italy, Switzerland, and China. Consequently, women engaged in skilled artisanship have influenced development in southern Nigeria, and their engagement in commerce has introduced civilization (Jaja, 2003, p. 226). Political contributions: Southern Nigerian women are respected for their public comments and ideas, which they deliver with confidence. The bulk of them are in charge of raising their children until they reach maturity. They see incremental behavioural changes in their children during the child-rearing process. They could predict their children's emotional, social, and moral development. The psychological gift that God has given to women has the potential to represent them as good governance agents in their respective households. Christian women have made major contributions to church administration in a variety of capacities. Some serve as chairpersons and leaders of the women's wings of their churches. Some are pastors, bishops, or church founders, while others are elders, overseers, choir mistresses, or presidents of other church organisations. Recognizing missionaries' freedom is vital in order to allow southern women to actively engage in church administration and governance. Christian women have great leadership skills. They work to maintain people's sanity, justice, equity, and fairness; examine the August gatherings in the eastern Nigerian states. Every year in August, Christian women from the Southeast assemble for the August meeting. This is a typical women's conference open to both domestic and international attendees. A week of meetings had been scheduled by the women who had come together. It is a women's government that is geographically unified. Women run for president and other roles, and the system is democratic. The presidential election has begun, and the individual receiving the most votes will be the winner. Women's strong leadership styles can exist alongside national governance. Women are capable of managing a nation based on their political qualities. There is a separate constitution, executive branch, and judiciary for Christian women. They enact legislation and penalise those who break it. The establishment of laws and order by women in a geographical settlement adds to the growth of the nation. Several Christian women have joined the national party to contest for various political offices throughout Nigeria's independence. To name a few well-known Christian women, Dora Akunyili, Oby Ezekwesili, Ngozi Okonjo Iwuala, and Viola Onwulili (Oke, 2012, p. 168) have made specific contributions to national building in their feminine capacities. Mrs. Cecilia Ekpenyong was named Deputy Governor of Cross River State in 1991, and Lady Barr. Valerie Ebe was appointed Deputy Governor of Akwa Ibom State in 2011. Enugu State's Mrs. Cecilia Ezeilo, Lagos State's Dr. Idiat Oluranti Adebule, and Otunba Mrs. Grace Titilayo Laoye-Tomori of Osun State were all elected in 2015 and 2017 (Vanguard). These noble women are genuinely concerned about the social predicament of the girl child. They contributed significantly to national development in Nigeria's southern states. Their names will live on, as will the important roles they played in national growth. Women are viewed as inferior by the male population, and Christianity thrives in communities where believers can share their encounters with God the Almighty. Some women in southern Nigeria, on the other hand, have rejected the demeaning role that society's males have assigned to them. They were freed and given the ability to protect the dignity of women in society. In response to the kidnapping of the Chibok girls in 2014, Oby Ezekwesili, for example, started the "Bring Back Our Girls"

campaign. Christian ladies organise youth rallies and engage them in a range of activities that promote youth vigour. Plays and quizzes are held to energise the younger generation and inculcate in them the fervour and ambitious spirit of patriotism, motivating them to pursue and love the path of creating something new for the nation.

Furthermore, the ladies constructed town halls and piped water to their surrounding settlements and towns. Women are seen as good communicators of cultural values in their societies. What society values are values. When two values are added together, the greater of the two is selected. Through engagement and integration, some Christian women have gone global. Such worldwide movements bring together women from all around the world. The meeting aims to improve the local traditional culture by exchanging cultural perspectives and ideas. Women excel in performing cultural dances. They represent the forefathers' attempts to maintain unity, peace, and progress. The truth is that Nigerian mothers who live in other countries teach their children cultural values and conventions. Among other things, they compete in dancing competitions, perform ethnic dances, and commemorate National Independence Day. Culture is a way to express oneself. Southern Nigerian Christian women promote traditional dress such as jooji fabric or wrappers, asoke, beads, and earrings. Cultural exhibits allow you to emphasise the inherent culture that contributes to nation-building. Pastoral medical assistance: One of the endeavours of Christian missionaries in southern Nigeria is the supply of medical facilities. Nigerian women are consistent in their support for the medical services provided by Christian missionaries. Several Christian women's organisations construct hospitals, clinics, and maternity homes. The goal is to put an end to unhealthy lifestyle choices. Since the country's independence, Christian women in Nigeria have worked ceaselessly to promote health and vitality. The Catholic Church is generally credited with being the driving force behind the development of enormous hospitals, clinics, and maternity homes. Religious contributions: During the early years of Nigeria's independence, Christian women in southern Nigeria were mostly passive participants in church activities. In the early years of Nigeria's nation-building, the patriarchy framework in southern Nigerian society looked to be a hindrance to women. In recent decades, women's freedom and empowerment have elevated the prominence of women's religious contributions to nation-building. Pastor Bimbo Odukayo has significantly contributed to the Christian faith. Many people who sought her spiritual advice found her to be an inspiration. Women were encouraged to take on church leadership responsibilities. Deacons, evangelists, pastors, church overseers, and church elders are among those who serve. Bishops Oluremi Ayotunde Obembe, Bola Odeleke, Peace Okonkwo, and Archbishop Margaret Idahosa are South African Christian women who have earned the post of bishop (Damilola, 2022, p. 6). These Christian women bishops made significant contributions to nation-building. They created beautiful modern church structures. The majority of churches were constructed with the human environment in mind. More importantly, they preached and sought new members for the church. They labour tirelessly to provide spiritual services to the members of their church. These women understood the significance of being willing to serve God's people, proclaim the message of salvation, and aid people in accepting Jesus Christ's gospel. Southern Nigerian ladies believe that both men and women were created by God. Both feel inspired to continue serving and worshipping him in diverse capacities.

Findings

1. Christian women of southern Nigeria played an important role in the dissemination of Christianity. It was discovered that women had an important role in the process of evangelism within family circles, women's fellowship, prayer meetings, schools, health care, and community involvement.

2. Christian women greatly contributed to the education process. It was discovered that women had a very important role in the education process by promoting literacy and education, especially among girls. They did so through missionary schools, Sunday schools, and adult literacy programs.

3. Women's organizations strengthened social and community development.

4. Church-based organisations like women's fellowships, Catholic Women Organisation, and mothers' unions helped contribute to community welfare through charity work, caring for vulnerable members of society, health care initiatives, and economic empowerment through vocational training and cooperatives.

5. Christian women defined morals and family values. From the results, it is evident that women were key transmitters of Christian morals in their families and communities through leadership in child-rearing, marriage counselling, and moral guidance, among other roles.

6. Women Christian leaders have defied cultural boundaries of gender role expectations. It was found that women have created more chances for themselves to lead churches and communities despite cultural constraints. They established ministries, headed educational centers, initiated missionary work, and pushed for the inclusion of women in the process of decision-making.

7. Christianity has improved the social standing of women without threatening their culture. It can be concluded from the results that Christianity has provided women with more educational and leadership opportunities. On the other hand, Christian women in Southern Nigeria have managed to incorporate their religion into culture.

8. The economic efforts made by the women helped the church and the community grow. According to the study, women sponsored projects in the church, funded missionaries, engaged in fundraising exercises, and initiated income generation programs for both the church and the community.

9. The contributions of the southern Nigerian Christian women are still relevant. The research reveals that the current churches, education systems, health systems, and other community bodies still operate on the foundation laid by previous generations of Christian women.

10. There are still barriers limiting women's leadership. In spite of all their contributions, the study revealed that women still have some restrictions when it comes to accessing top leadership positions in certain denominations.

Conclusion

The study concludes that southern Nigerian Christian women have been indispensable agents of religious growth, educational advancement, social transformation, and nation-building. Their legacy extends beyond domestic and ecclesiastical roles to encompass leadership in community development, humanitarian service, and public life. Recognizing and documenting their contributions provides a more complete understanding of both the history of Christianity in southern Nigeria and the broader processes of national development.

For many years, despite worshipping the same God as their male counterparts, women were not valued in society. They were regarded as inferior to menfolk, to the lower ebb in matters of suggestions and contributions to the growth of the families and communities. Christianity arrived to enlighten the world. The Christian women were overjoyed to hear the good news. Worship and veneration of the Supreme Being, the ultimate reality, the transcendent and omnipotent God, are deeply concerning to women. Women were more receptive to missionaries who came to evangelise southern Nigeria. They gained a great deal from the missionaries, particularly in terms of knowledge and skills. Following independence, Christian women in southern Nigeria advanced to help build

the nation by instilling moral values in their children. They realised that their children would be the future of the nation and would help it grow. They established schools at various levels to instill knowledge and encourage character development. In general, education is an important component of any development. It allows for intellectual, rational, emotional, social, and economic development. Any society that invests in training and educating women in various fields is genuinely building a strong nation. Women are leading the way in making incalculable contributions to family sustenance. They help to build a nation by participating in economic, social, and cultural activities. They began to construct hospitals, clinics, maternity homes, orphanages, and rehabilitation homes. Christian women should be recognised and affirmed for their contributions to development. Women have always worked behind the scenes in their families' and communities' affairs. When it comes to making decisions, they give their husbands sound advice, one step at a time. As women take the initiative and gradually contribute to nation-building, the entire nation's development will be accelerated

Recommendations

- The study suggests that there is a need to appreciate southern Nigerian Christian women as important players in the development of religion, societies, and the nation in general.
- Taking care of the women's leadership, education, empowerment, and documenting the history of their contribution would not only serve as an acknowledgement of the contribution of the women but also increase their future contribution in the spiritual, social, and economic development of Nigeria.
- Promoting women's leadership in the church: Leadership training, mentorship programs, and theological education must be made accessible to women.
- Systematic documentation and preservation of women's contributions: Churches, theological schools, and historians must conduct systematic documentation of the lives and achievements of southern Nigerian Christian women.
- Developing women's educational and leadership development: Christian organizations need to support scholarships, vocational education, leadership development, and theology education to increase women's ability to serve the Church and the broader society.
- Economic empowerment of women: Christian churches and organizations should initiate programs in entrepreneurship, financial literacy, cooperatives, and skill development to help Christian women improve their economic standing and be better able to serve the community.
- Contributing to nation building: Christian women should be encouraged to participate in nation building through public services, governance, peace-building, education, healthcare, environmental management, and civic engagement in keeping with Christian ethics.
- Promoting gender equality in Christian organizations: The leaders of churches should look into institutional policies that unfairly limit women's involvement in ministry and leadership, and that could be promoted without compromising the theological beliefs of each denomination.
- Expanding ministry activities to meet contemporary challenges: Women's ministries should broaden their efforts in health campaigns, adult literacy, poverty reduction, mentoring of youth, family counseling, and humanitarian assistance to address current social issues.
- Inclusion of women's history in educational programs: Seminaries, colleges, and universities of theology should include the history and role of Christian women from southern Nigeria in theology courses, church history, gender studies, and African studies.

- Fostering intergenerational relationships: Churches should organize mentorship relationships where older generations of Christian women guide younger women in the spiritual life, in ministry and leadership, in family and professional life, and in community service.
- Encouraging further research: Further researchers should focus on the contributions of women from various churches, ethnic backgrounds, and generations in southern Nigeria. Comparative studies of women's involvement in Christianity between northern and southern Nigeria, cities and villages, and various Christian denominations should be carried out.

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