

Women and National Development in Nigeria: A Study of the Yoruba Ethnic Group

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Abstract

This paper examined the contributions of Yoruba Women towards National Development. It gives the roles of the cultural women at pre-colonial and modern times in the country. The challenges of the Yoruba women contributions to the development of the Nigerian nation were highlighted. However, their contributions cannot be discountenanced in household and national economies. The current role of the Yoruba women in national development is remarkable towards peace and direction of the economy and society.

Keywords: National Development, Nigeria, Women, Yoruba Ethnic Group.

1. Introduction

Women are the fundamental human reservoir of every society as they control most of the non-monetary economy (subsistence, agriculture, bearing children, domestic labour etc.) and play an important role in the monetary (training wage labour, employment etc (Yawa, 1995). Women in most societies, whether developed or developing are regarded as currency with which political and economic alliances are cemented. Thus in social anthropology, the transfer of women between lineages and clans is regarded as a medium of communication more potent and clearest than language itself (Coleman, 2007). The woman as a person is an agent of reproduction of life itself. This places her in the position of the life itself. This places her in the position of the life blood of the entire humanity. The industrial revolution in England and other parts of the western world in the 18th century drastically altered the primary role of women in the society. Women henceforth could be seen playing roles hitherto regarded as the exclusive reserves of men in the economic, political and social lives of the society in the African setting women have played the role of peace maker, the symbol of beauty and major moulder of the character of the children she is the first teacher, the sustained and maintainer of the home.

In Nigeria, Fasugba (2000) asserted that many women today are engaged in activities and jobs hitherto regarded as the exclusive reserve of men. He further states that since women have become conscious of their right, they have continued to slug it out with men in all areas of human endeavours. By their sheer psychological, physiological and intellectual make up they do perform more than mere complementary roles in the production process (Teminiwa, 1995). Ekong (2006) asserts that women are the real engine driving the economy of this country and are the keys to development and therefore crucial to the goal of sustainable development. In 1975, FAO reported

that 70% of all the work in food processing and almost 100% of all domestic and households' chores are performed by women. This trend has not changed except that women now take additional burden of extra-domestic affairs. **Agbola (1990)** confirmed this assertion by concluding that women are the operators of the economy and constitute a major arm of the labour force, and that Nigerian women are dynamic, industrious and resourceful.

Most researches like **Okoro (1996)**; **Mivanyi (1996)** and **Ekong (2006)** had looked at the contributions of women based on the cultural gender division of labour, which before the colonial era was restricted to farm, and household activities. But the contributions of women in National Development were beyond agriculture and household duties. Few works (**Olurin 1996**; **Anikpo 2000**; **Agbola 1996**) assessed their contributions beyond farm and household chores (subsistence) and noted that the narrow perception of women's duties may be attributed to the late arrival of women in the colonial system or administrative works. Nigerian women played a vital role in politics during the pre-colonial era, African social system and the form of division of labour which existed. Nigerian women participated in politics and government through, the institution of women chiefs the authority of first daughters and the age grades. According to **Afonja (1996)**, the advent of colonialism disturbed the functioning of these traditional institutions suppressing them and imposing alien system through education, religion and other socio-cultural institutions. In pre-colonial Nigeria women played prominent roles in politics and held important positions among the majority of ethnic groups particularly among the Yoruba, Hausa and the Igbo. However, this article will be streamlined or focused on the contribution of Yoruba women national development in Nigeria.

2. Conceptual Review

2.1. Women and National Development

Development means different things to different people. Some people however stressed material prosperity as the ultimate objectives of development efforts. **Rogers (1976)** describes development as a type of social change in which new ideas are introduced within a social system to produce higher per-capital incomes and levels of living through more production methods and improved social organization. **Mabogunje (1980)** identifies them to be economic, growth, modernization, distributive justice, socio-economic transformation and spatial reorganization.

Rogers (1980) believed that development should mean a widely participating process of social changes in society intended to bring about social and materials advancement (including greater equality, freedom and other valued qualities) for the majority of people through gaining control over their environment. **Murel (1992)** has claimed that women predominate among the poor in the world today and they are more in the rural areas their annual incomes throughout the world have declined so sharply in recent years that they had fallen below poverty line. Women work two-thirds working hours according to the united nations millennium campaigns (**Unagha, 2006**) to have world poverty by the year 2015 the overwhelming majority of the labour that sustain life – growing food, cooking, raising children, caring for the elderly, maintaining a house hauling water in done by women and universally this work is accorded how status and no pay. The ceaseless cycle of labour rarely shows up in economic analysis of a society's production and value.

Various researchers (**Okoro 1996, Mivaniyi 1996, Ekong 2006, Mabogunje 1991**) had reported on the contributions of women in agriculture, community, development and physical development. For instance, **Ekong (2006)** asserts that women are the keys to development and therefore crucial to the goal of sustainable development. In 1975 FAQ reported that 70% of all domestic and household chores are performed by women. This trend has not changed except that women now take additional burden of extra – domestic affairs. Agboola (1990) confirmed this assertion by concluding that women are the operators of the economy may constitute a major arm of the labour force, and that Nigerian women are dynamic industrial and resourceful.

All these researchers had looked at contributions of women based on the cultural gender division of labour, when before the colonial era was restricted to farm and household activities. But the contributions of women in national development were beyond agriculture and household duties. Few works (**Olurin 1996, Agboola (1996) and Mabogunge (1991)**) assessed their contribution beyond farm and household chores (subsistence) and noted that the narrow perception of women's duties may be attributed to the late arrival of women in the colonial system or administrative works. Mabogunje (1991) identified the eight cardinal elements of sustainable or National development as the affect women e.g. education, health culture, politics, economy, agriculture, enhanced environments quality and peaceful co-existence. The work will review the contribution of Yoruba women in these various aspects of development in Nigeria.

2.2. Yoruba Culture and Women

The Yoruba people predominantly belong to the Oyo, Ogun, Ondo, Osun, Ekiti and Lagos States. They equally form parts of Edo, Kwara and Kogi states (**Awolalu & Dopamu, 1979**) and some parts of Republic of Benin and Togo. The question of their origin is debatable and in the present state of knowledge, not much is categorically known about it (**Idowu, 1996**). However, two different answers are found in oral traditions. The first holds that their founding fathers were immigrants from a northern source variously identified as Egypt, Meroe, Yemen or Arabia while it is claimed in the second body of traditions that Ile-Ife was the first habitable place created on earth, from which all earthly creation began. For this reason, Ile-Ife is referred to as the cradle of the Yoruba race (**Akintoye, 2004**).

The Yoruba nation like many other African societies is essentially patriarchal; hence men are understood to be more privileged than women. Such a society is described by (**Ubrurhe, 1999**) as that which is characterised by male super ordination and female subordination. Men show superiority over their women counterparts, who are usually relegated to the background. Therefore, socially, politically, economically and religiously women are to a very large extent, disadvantaged since decision were taken mostly by women the males. This has consistently manifested in various way as shall be established in this section. According to **Adetunji (2001)**, the cultural and gender problem, which African women have been facing dates back to their birth as in many homes the birth of a baby girl does not receive the kind of enthusiastic reception that is usually given to that of a baby boy. Thus is somebody is treated with inferiority right from birth, it may be difficult for such a person not to be perpetually caught in the web of such a treatment. **Olabode (2009)** is also affirmative that: Immediately a child is born, the question that will be posed will centre on sex, not minding of health of the mother. If the baby is a female, the mother will be scolded and treated as a

lazy, good for nothing woman. On the other hand if the child is a male, praise will be showered on the mother, not considering the fact that Biology has shown that it is the father who determines the sex of an offspring.

However, **McIntosh (2009)** argues that because Yoruba women did make decisions concerning their lives and the lives of others, they exercised agency. In other words, they had power and control and although the colonial experience constrained this in many ways, women were determined to circumvent the system for their own economic and social gain. This was particularly evident in her discussion of the role of missionaries' attempts to introduce Anglo-European Victorian values and attitudes. Yoruba women thus faced multiple demands as they were expected to trade to earn money to support themselves and their children, but they were also to work on their farm plots, as well as on those of their husband's family. They were in no position to withdraw into domesticity, but had to remain active in various economic sectors, continuing to engage in everything from trading to weaving, to dying cloth, to cooking and selling food. In addition, they rejected the missionaries' views that women should not play a visible and active role in the church. When it was evident that their roles would be diminished or eliminated in churches, they, along with men, formed breakaway African churches.

3. Role of Women in Pre-colonial Economy

For most of the kingdoms in the pre-colonial Nigerian region, the women folk occupied an important place in the political economy of the state. They participated in various forms of economic activities including those that involved production, manufacturing, catering service as well as exchange i.e trade and commerce. As **Clarke (1972)** rightly observed during his visit to Yoruba land in the 1850s, the women folk were actively involved in virtually all forms of economic activities that were conducted in the emirate. It is therefore relevant to state that Yoruba women equally accounted for the high rate of economic growth witnessed by Western States during the 19th century and indeed up to the era of British rule (**Gavin, 1977**).

The women played an equally important role in the process of economic transformation of the western Nigeria as their participation in various forms of commercial activities did compliment the efforts of the men by which the emirate's economy was able to rank high both among the pre-colonial Yoruba kingdoms and also among the emirates within the Sokoto Caliphate setting especially during the

19th century. Some of the important economic development fields where Yoruba women featured prominently and contributed meaningfully toward the attainment of a stable economy for Nigeria are as follows:

3.1. Agriculture: Among the most important forms of economic practices in pre-colonial Nigeria was agriculture. It engaged the services of the larger proportion of the working populace, and constituted a major thrust on which the economy of most of the pre-colonial Nigerian states was based. Apart from farming to raise food and cash crops as well as vegetables for domestic use and exchange, agriculture also involved fishing, livestock production, animal husbandry and cattle rearing, manure production etc. Most of the agricultural practices in pre-colonial western states were conducted with the involvement of the women folk. The Ilorin women participated in specific

aspects of agricultural production such as planting, crop tending, harvesting, and farm produce marketing; they also cultivated varieties of crops such as vegetables, pepper and tomatoes all-year round through the traditional mode of irrigation. By providing the labour requirements in certain areas of agricultural production, and through direct participation in such practices that were peculiar to production relations within the agricultural sector as already identified, the women folk contributed to the growth of indigenous crop production process, and thus became quite important to the agricultural industry in pre-colonial Nigeria economy (**Raji, 1998**).

3.2. Pottery: The pottery industry was as one of the dominant forms of indigenous industrial enterprises which predominantly engaged the services of the women folk during the precolonial period. The industry mostly produced both domestic and industrial utensils in clay forms which were usually fashioned into objects such as cooking pots, water cans, trays, storage tanks, weavers/dyers pots, and other items of various grades and sizes. The products were also used for spiritual activities by herbalists, diviners and other traditional medical practitioners especially in Yorubaland. The production of pottery was popular at *Ebu Dada* in *Okelele* ward as well as in *Oloje, Ita-Amo, Isale-Asa, Kankatu* and *Abemi* areas of Ilorin during the 19th century. The pottery industry which was first started in Ilorin by one Hasana Ebu, had remained dominant in these areas during and after the colonial period (**Awero, 2011**). The major raw material used for production in Ilorin pottery industry was clay which had two varieties namely 'amon' and 'ayan'. Yoruba pottery industry provided gainful employment for several groups of women and was a source of revenue for the emirate's treasury during the 19th century. The demand for products of the pottery industry was high in the pre-colonial period as the industry received patronage from customers who engaged in commercial relations at the different markets within the Yoruba country, and also in parts of the Nupe region as well as in Hausaland.

3.3. Trading: It is evident that one of the most lucrative economic activities that engaged the attention of the Yoruba women folk in pre-colonial times was trading. This was also one of the important forms of economic activities of the women class in pre-colonial Yorubaland. Trading has remained the main occupation for the women folk in every part of contemporary Nigeria. The specific forms of trading practiced by Yoruba women included the long distance trading, short distance trading, domestic trading, wholesale and retail trading, and hawking or street trading. Most trading activities were often conducted in the major market centres at Oja-Oba, Gambari market, Oja-Gbooro and other indigenous markets in pre-colonial Ilorin. The articles of trade were household goods, farm produce, imported items, jewellerys, implements and other products of the blacksmithing industry, woven cloths, plates, craft works, oil, fish and vegetables etc.

3.4. Weaving Industry: The weaving industry represents one of the most vibrant and important industries in pre-colonial Nigeria, and where the women folk had a considerable measure of participation. It is also obvious that one of the notable industrial engagements characteristic of pre-colonial Yoruba economy was weaving. It was an industry that engaged the services of the women population in such aspects as cotton picking, processing, spinning and ginning etc in pre colonial Ilorin. Weaving was a major occupation among the women folk in Ilorin as was the case with most of the settlements throughout Yorubaland before British conquest. As **Olaoye (1996)** suggests, the weaving industry provided employment opportunities and means of livelihood for a large proportion of the women population in different wards of Ilorin. It also stood as one of the most important and

flourishing indigenous industries in pre-colonial times. For example the Ilorin weaving industry is also widely believed to be one of the most ancient indigenous industrial establishments in the region. The practice of weaving seemed to be as ancient as Ilorin settlement itself. As a region where cotton was produced in substantial quantity (**Clarke, 1972**), cloth weaving was an important economic venture or industry with readily available raw materials. Weaving was popular, widespread, and was dominated by the women folk in precolonial Ilorin, and this probably explains the prevalence weaving centres in the notable wards of *Omoda, Isale-Aluko, Okelele, Ode-Afanda, Ita-Amo, Adabata, Oju-Ekun* and *Alanamu* where women weavers produced varieties of traditional cloth materials (*Aso-ofi*) that were in high demand both within and outside Ilorin. Such traditional woven materials were always used at festivals, wedding/engagement ceremonies, naming, coronation, installation, outings, anniversaries and other related festivities, most especially in pre-colonial Yorubaland. According to Clarke (1972), weaving was women's predominant occupation in several Ilorin wards by 1856. He stated further that the good quality production standard which the industry commanded at that period made the products of Ilorin weavers to flood major markets in different parts of the Yoruba country. This help to explain that the import of the Ilorin weaving industry stems from the fact that the products of the industry had continued to be of relevance to the economy as the industry had always attracted patronage during and after colonial rule.

3.5. Craft Works: The craft industry was also an important industry which contributed to the process of economic growth in pre-colonial Yoruba land. It was indeed an industry that engaged both youth and adult population in Yorubaland during the pre-colonial period. In the traditional Yoruba society, it was a source of pride for anyone to acquire the potential in one form of craft or the other (**Biobaku, 1973**). Although the men folk dominated the industry, the women were also quite relevant to the production process in several crafts such as broom making, trays and basket making, carvings and calabash designs etc. The distribution or sale of these craft works with those that were produced by the men to prospective buyers or users in the various market centres within and outside metropolitan Ilorin also formed part of the commercial obligations of the women folk during the pre-colonial period.

3.6. Bead-making and Jewelleries: The production of beads which the women folk dominated in Yoruba land, was meant to meet the ornamental needs of the royalty or the aristocracy and other members of the ruling elites. Both the beads and jewelleries were also used as items for ceremonies such as wedding and other social activities in pre-colonial Yorubaland. The bead making business was popular among Ilorin women especially at Ile-Asileke in Oke-Imale ward where a remarkable level of bead production took place during the pre-colonial period. It is also noteworthy that most of the beads, jewelleries and other items of adornment which were produced in Ilorin, as **Ajayi and Smith (1969)** suggest, were marketed by women all over the Yoruba country during the 19th century.

3.7. Soap Making: The art of soap-making was to become an important economic activity for the women folk in Yoruba emirates due to the high demand for local soap and the fact that most of the raw materials required for production in the soap-making industry were sourced locally. It was also an industry that was exclusively meant for the women folk, and it has maintained this characteristic up to the contemporary period. Some of the notable centres of soap production in pre-colonial western states include Adifa, Oloje, Ita-Amo, Ode-Afanda and Ita-Adu etc. The various products of

soap-making industry competed favourably with those from other regions as the local (black) soap dominated the sales in the major markets in both Yorubaland and the Nupe region during the 19th century.

3.8. Operation of Market Cycles: There were different types of markets that existed in pre-colonial Yoruba emirate. These included the daily markets, the 5-day markets, the 9-day markets, the periodic markets, and the night markets. The Ilorin women folk naturally played a leading role in the operation of such markets as they conducted series of commercial activities in the markets on daily or periodic basis. Several enterprising Ilorin women who had no stalls to operate or goods to sell due to their inability to mobilize enough resources equally registered their presence in the markets for daily survival as they served as carriers, sales attendants, porters, hawkers of farm produce and other petty items as well as artisans/apprentice in one form of trade or the other.

3.9. Food Processing: As an agrarian economy where various forms of agricultural production took place, the aspect of food processing formed an integral part of the economic activities in precolonial times. The women folk were more involved in food processing than their men counterparts as they dominated the industry especially in Yorubaland during the 19th century. Items of agricultural production which the Yoruba women processed during the pre-colonial period included yam and cassava flour, locust beans, cow milk into cheese, vegetables and fruits, palm oil and palm kernels, corn and sorghum flour, smoked fish, pepper, garri, sheer butter and other forms of processed food items (Usman, 2011). The sale of these processed foods in the daily or weekly markets as well as through hawking was also usually co-ordinated by the women. The task of food processing thus represented an important form of economic activity that engaged the Ilorin women folk through which they contributed to the growth of Yoruba economy.

3.10. Cloth-dyeing and Embroidery: One of the notable forms of indigenous industrial production techniques in pre-colonial Yorubaland was cloth-dyeing which in itself was an occupation exclusively conducted by the women folk. Within the Yoruba society during the pre-colonial period, embroidery or cloth-dyeing represented an industry that engaged the services of several groups of women who served in various capacities as factory workers, raw material suppliers, carriers, dye makers/mixers, embroidery designers, and hawkers as well as distributors/marketers of finished products. For each of the specialized aspects within the cloth-dyeing industry, the women in Yoruba were gainfully engaged, and through such practices, contributed to the process of economic growth of Yoruba's and the entire nation. The dyed cloth materials produced in Yoruba lands were distributed across the market centres in parts of Yorubaland and other parts of the Nigerian region. Clearly, this form of economic activity mainly conducted by women, certainly represented the effort of the women folk at contributing to the growth of Nigeria's economy.

3.11. Haggling and Negotiations: The act of haggling was a practice characteristic of Ilorin commercial class. Most of the people that are involved in haggling often secure patronage in the major market centres as they loiter around for customers who would presumably require their services. Several Ilorin women folk, like their male counterparts, were involved in haggling during the pre-colonial period. It is a practice that has remained a peculiarity of the Yoruba's economy up to the contemporary period. The hagglers' major task was to provide price negotiation services to customers mostly without request, and once such customer eventually purchased the items or goods

so negotiated, the haggler would take his commission from the seller after the customer had departed from the trader. It should be noted that those that are often involved in haggling are usually people that do not have strong capital base to secure shops and stalls, and also those with bilingual or multilingual skills. Thus, beyond their role as price negotiators for prospective customers, the women that were involved in the task of haggling also served as intermediaries between buyers and sellers, and also served as interpreters mostly for non-Yoruba merchants in the various market centres.

3.12. *Livestock Production:* It is noteworthy that livestock production represented an important economic activity in Ilorin emirate during the pre-colonial period. The presence of several pastoral Fulani groups in the districts of Ilorin made cattle rearing a major occupation of Fulani and indeed non-Fulani settlers in Ilorin. Apart from cattle rearing, the livestock production industry also involved goat and sheep rearing, poultry farming as well as fishing. The level of Yoruba women participation in livestock production clearly showed that they were actively involved in cow tending, and were directly involved in sheep and goat rearing as well as poultry farming. The Ilorin women also engaged themselves in the marketing of domestic animals and poultry products/brands such as eggs, hens, cocks and chickens which contributed substantially to domestic sub-sector of pre-colonial Yoruba economy.

3.13. *Sale of Foods and Confectioneries:* Within the social and economic setting of the pre-colonial Yoruba society, the task of food selling was predominantly that of the female population. Some of the major foods usually prepared and offered for sale included pounded yam (*iyán*), rice (*tuwo*), yam flour (*amala*), pap (*ogi* and *eko elewe*), bean cakes (*akara*), yam porridge (*asaro*), etc. Those that were engaged in food selling (i.e food vendors) often specialized in a particular food, and patronage always depended on quality of food prepared. The practiced was not restricted to any particular ward as several food vendors within metropolitan cities in Yoruba State who were predominantly women saw the sale of food as a good economic enterprise during the precolonial period. At the initial stage, such foods were always hawked around by female attendants, but with population growth, there gradually arose the need to have permanent selling points called food bay or food centre (*iso / buka onje*). There is no doubt that through the activities of women food vendors, the food needs of the populace were met, and the tolls paid by such women on periodic basis served as revenue source to the emirate's treasury, and later to the Native Authority by 1900 following the imposition of British rule (Elphinstone, 1929).

3.14. *Cow milk/Cheese Production:* Within the agricultural industry, cattle rearing represent an important economic activity. As a region with a large proportion of Fulani migrant settlers, Ilorin became a centre for cattle production during the pre-colonial period. While the male folk often engaged in the task of rearing flocks, the women were involved in the extraction and processing of cow milk and other products from cattle. This shows that the cattle business in Ilorin as in other places has a wide range of sub-divisions one of which is cow milk/cheese production. Most of those women that were engaged in the cow milk extraction and processing business were of pastoral Fulani stock while the distribution or marketing/sale of such products in local and distant markets engaged the services of both Fulani and non-Fulani women merchants.

3.15. *Production and Marketing of Traditional Herbs:* The provision of adequate medical services was critical to the survival of the populace in any society. For pre-colonial Ilorin, the provision of

healthcare services appeared quite important, especially as both the ruling elites and the masses required the services of medical experts for their healthcare needs. The pre-colonial Yoruba areas populace actually depended on the herb merchants who served as major healthcare providers that were commonly referred to as *Alagbo* for cure to most of the ailments that confronted the inhabitants of some Yoruba area. At a period when there were no modern hospitals, clinics/maternity centres, Yoruba people relied heavily on herb merchants who were predominantly women. Such traditional herb merchants also functioned as midwives during childbirths to ensure smooth and safe delivery. The economic value of such healthcare provisions/practices cannot be underestimated most especially when viewed from the perspective that it provided a means of livelihood for the practitioners; it was their primary economic activity; it brought them a stable income with which they could expand their enterprises and maintain their households; it provided healthcare services for the citizenry through which lives especially those of the working populace was preserved to enhance greater productivity; and that it provided gainful employment opportunities for women that were assigned into the health profession in the traditional or pre-colonial Yoruba society.

3.16. The Contributory Credit Scheme: The guild practice characterized most of the occupations in pre-colonial Yorubaland; it was equally a practice that featured in the commercial activities of Yoruba women. The specialized professions and the specific articles in which the women traded in actually determined the form of occupational guilds they belonged to; and in the same vein, each guild devised a viable contributory credit scheme whereby enough fund is generated for members to conduct their commercial or related activities. The usual practice in pre-colonial throughout Yorubaland was that such fund is accessed by or released to contributors on rotational basis to finance and promote expansion of their business activities (**Raji & Abejide, 2013**). Most members of the different occupational guilds, as was the case with the merchant class in pre-colonial Yorubaland, made use of the credit scheme provided through the *Ajo* or *Esusu* to run their trades and enterprises (**Bascom, 1960**). The proceeds of such contributory scheme assisted guild members to finance or expand their businesses. Since most of the guilds were predominantly made of women merchants or entrepreneurs, the contributory credit scheme represented a major source of trade or business financing in pre-colonial Yoruba Lands.

4. Impact of Yoruba Women to National Development Recent Times in Nigeria

Yoruba women have been seen to break even such that today they have become a force to reckon with in the developmental processes of nation. During the second republic (1979 – 83) Nigeria had her first female senator in the person of Mrs. France Afegbua. In the fourth republic (1999 – 2004) three Yoruba women were elected into the senate while fifteen got elected into the house of representatives. **Agoawike (2000)** believed that the fourth republic has been a period of re-awakening for Nigerian Yoruba women both in terms of elected offices and political appointments. She expressed her feelings it might not be an exaggeration to say that the fourth republic has been best outing in political participation for especially for women.

During the civilian government of Obasanjo, women to be adequately accommodated and placed in areas of intense visibility as they held important and prominent positions. The ministries of Aviation

and Transport were headed by women, the ministers of state for science and technology and the sensitive ministry of defence were also women. These women were able to prove that they possess the quality, talents and characters traits required not only for the growth of the nation but for the enhancement of the progress and well – being of the human society in general. Today many women occupy elective and appointee positions in Nigeria

Women's participation in the decision-making of Yoruba communities therefore existed parallel to male hierarchies. Apart from holding specifically female chieftaincy titles such as the *lyalode* (representing the interests of women) (Denzer 1998), they held other ritual positions reserved for women in ancestral masquerade societies or Ogboni associations, which advised the rulers of towns and were generally concerned with maintaining social order and communal wellbeing (Denzer 1994; Nolte 2008). In addition, the importance of women's roles in palace affairs as *olori* and *iya-oba* remains significant in Yoruba traditional palace politics. The desire to reinvent the *olori* in representative government, with executive governors as leaders, may have informed the creation of the current office of first ladies. While *oloris*, as the Kings' wives, are afforded great political influence in the traditional political system, many first ladies who were the wives of state governors in the modern political system held political power and influence that was greater than that of deputy governors, and received statutory and constitutional recognition. In some Yoruba communities women access titles that were typically male, such as that of ruler of a town/kingdom, as with the regency in Akure (until 2009), and in many other Ekiti and Ondo communities. Denzer (1994) similarly points out that prior to the 19th century three women were installed as rulers of the Ijebu-Ode.

After independence, there was a boom in education of women (Ake, 1981), which was the catalyst needed for women to break into occupations that were hitherto monopolized by men. This era saw many women including Yoruba women into professional areas such as medicine, law, accountancy, engineering, power sharing and decision making, and their entrance into public service as men opted out into private sector between 1970 and 1980 during the civil war and the introduction of economic stabilization measures by Murtala Mohammed in 1975 where many workers were retrenchment.

5. Conclusion

There is overwhelming evidence from what have been discussed in this paper that Yoruba women are formidable productive force and a store of incredibly human resources which are required for national development. Their contributions cannot be discountenanced in household and national

economies, the current role of women in national development is remarkable towards peace and direction of the economy and society.

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