

**MAXIMISING THE OFFICE OF FIRST LADY: A CASE STUDY OF MARIAM
BABANGIDA FROM 1985-1993**

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**A PROJECT SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY AND
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CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that this project was carried out by **OSAS PEACE OMOSIGHO** in the Department of History and International Studies, Faculty of Art, University of Benin, Benin City, under my supervision.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this project to God almighty for his continuous protection over my life throughout my stay in the University of Benin and throughout the process of writing this.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to use this opportunity to thank God almighty the source and giver of knowledge and strength for sparing my life throughout the course of this thesis.

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And lastly to my friends the ones I lost on the way and the ones still present that contributed to the success of my education in the persons of Fortress, Jennifer, Maria, Angel, Oke, Irene, Ope, Vera and Courage and to as many I couldn't write thank you .

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CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Introduction

The emergence of women advocates and activists has a relative long history with a variety of approach and strategies, in different parts of the world. Coordinated efforts toward women advancement, as an issue on the front burner of global concern for quality life dates back to the 1923 League of Nations.¹ Sequel to the outcome of the League was the systematic articulation and enumeration of global Covenants and Treaties as stated in the founding documents of the United Nations (UN). Since then women issues have become ever topical in national planning, across the regions of the world.² It is on this backdrop, this study examines the impact of maximizing the office of first lady with reference first lady Mariam Babangida from 1985 to 1993.

Nigerian first ladies, beginning from Maryam Babangida, obtruded upon public affairs and minds of Nigerians through the initiation of a number of philanthropically-inspired programmes that sought to satisfy their craving for the limelight, wealth and influence. This development is, without doubt, unprecedented in the history of this country as none of the first ladies before 1985 seemed to have courted or savoured publicity.³ Although no part of the Nigerian constitution states any official role for spouses of political office holders, in the last three decades, wives of Presidents, Governors and Local Government Chairmen have created a special role for themselves called the Office of the First Lady. Though unofficial, occupants of this office from the

Presidency to the state and local government level, wield so much power that constitutionally recognised public officials fall at their feet, worship and pay homage to them to receive favour from their husbands.⁴

The Office of the First Lady has been part of the Nigerian political system since independence, but it wasn't relevant and influential until General Ibrahim Babangida overthrew the military government of General Muhammadu Buhari to become the Head of State in 1985. His wife Maryam Babangida popularised the office, added glamour and poise that made it look attractive for those who would come after her.⁵ She transformed it from being just a ceremonial position to a position of power and influence. Unlike other wives of former Heads of State and Presidents who kept a low profile life, the dark-skinned Maryam, born in Asaba, Delta State in 1948 to Igbo father and Nupe mother, announced her presence as the First Lady with the launch of Better Life Programme for Rural Women in 1987. The programme was designed to empower and eradicate poverty among rural women.⁶ Despite the allure and fanfare that come with public office, Maryam was not blinded by them, the plights of the downtrodden was said to be germane to her. Those who were privileged to walk that path before her must have envied how Maryam dignified and popularised Office of the First Lady.⁷

Aim and Objectives

The aim of the study is to examines the impact of the Office of the First Lady with reference to Mariam Babangida, while the objectives includes

- i. To examine the concept of the office of the First Lady and the evolving political role of Nigerian first ladies in Nigeria.
- ii. To examine the early life and biography of Mariam Babangida.
- iii. To examine the impact of First Ladies' women empowerment, crusade and pet Projects under Maryam Babangida.
- iv. To examine the challenges faced by Maryam Babangida as First Lady and a women.

Scope of the Study

The study will cover biography of Mariam Babangida and the impact of her first lady in Nigeria from 1985 to 1993. The reason for this period is because the period marked the era when the office of the first lady was popularised, and added glamour and poise that made it look attractive other first lady who came after her.

Methodology

This research would employ the historical research methodology. Relevant data would be gotten from the primary and secondary sources.

Primary Sources

The primary sources of data would include oral interviews and archival materials which would be relevant to this research work.

Secondary Sources

The secondary sources of data would include textbooks, journal articles and online materials which would be sourced from the University of Benin, John Harris library, other public libraries in Nigeria and the internet.

Literature Review

The literature review explores the various authors who have written on the office of first lady and its impact on women and child empowerment and development.

Fatai Ayinde Aremu, work titled “First Ladies As Instantaneous Philanthropists: How Public Office Holders’ Wives (Un)Do Philanthropy For Sustainable Development In Nigeria,”⁸ examines how huge sums of money are generated for philanthropic purposes and the outcome on the lives of ordinary Nigerians. The author also examines the implications of such practices for the theory and practice of philanthropy and sustainable development in Nigeria. The author traced the concept of philanthropy in Nigeria to cultural and religious obligation which is expected to be positively responded to. The author further argued that any willful attempt not to oblige the call to philanthropy in Nigeria is highly considered a sin against God and humanity. The interactions between the givers (philanthropists) and the takers (beneficiaries) have unconsciously led to an asymmetrical relationship where the philanthropists now dictate how the beneficiaries socially behave. The author also argued that political elites (of which the first ladies are inclusive) have since seized the opportunity to use

philanthropism to expand the frontier of their political dynasty and foster their interests in the political space.⁹

Jibrin Ibrahim, article titled “The First Lady Syndrome and the Marginalisation of Women from Power: Opportunities or Compromises for Gender Equality?,”¹⁰ The author seeks to explore the dynamics of marginalising women from political power, and the ways in which “First Ladies” have sought to intervene through their special position as spouses of men in power. In many African countries, the First Lady phenomenon has opened doors for women that had previously been closed. At the same time, it has created a dynamic in which political space has been appropriated and used by the wives and friends of men in power for purposes of personal aggrandisement, rather than for furthering the interests of women. Nonetheless, by placing the gender question on the public agenda, new opportunities for gender equality struggles are being created. The author mainly discusses the Nigerian situation, but also draws on the Ghanaian experience.¹¹

Ejovi, Austine & Mgbonyebi, Voke Charles, in their work titled “Cultural and Socio-political issues: Gender Politics of Military & Civilian; The Nigerian woman,”¹² posits that the pattern of culture and socio-political development in any given society generates peculiar structural inequalities between men and women. This goes a long way in determining the opportunities available to both sexes in the economy, politics, religion, education etc which in turn reinforces the roles played by the sexes in the prevailing culture and socio-political order. Thus author argues and sheds light on the structural

inequalities that exist between men and women in which woman's rights are abused is due largely to the patrilineal nature of the society. In Nigeria, Gender politics of military and civilian rule is largely a function of the prevailing and entrenched pattern of human rights practice, the role of the military and political gladiators cannot be overemphasized, which of course is a reflection of the cultural and socio-political values of the Nigerian society.¹³

Chinaza Asiegbu's article titled "Overcoming the Extravagant Woman Phenomenon: The Evolving Political Role of Nigerian First Ladies and the Influence of the African Union, 1960–1998,"¹⁴ examines this stereotype by exploring the political endeavors of Maryam Babangida (August 27, 1985–August 26, 1993) and Maryam Abacha (November 17, 1993–June 8, 1998). Reconciling optimistic and unfavorable depictions of African First Ladies and critically examining their tangible programs, this paper studies public perceptions of extravagance and corruption analogized with Nigerian First Ladies and the evolving expectations of the First Lady role in Nigeria. The author aims to demonstrate how African First Ladies have refuted public scrutiny through advocacy work, women and youth empowerment, and engagement in community-level activities. Continent-wide development of First Ladies has contributed to collaboration and coalition building among powerful African women through Pan-African leadership organizations, such as the Organization of African First Ladies for Development (OAFLAD) and the Organization of African Unity (OAU), now the African Union (AU).¹⁵

Abdullahi Abdulkadir; & AbdulRauf Aliyu Yusuf's article titled "Women Empowerment and Pet Projects of Wives of Heads of State in Nigeria: An Assessment,"¹⁶ the authors discussed the impact of Pet Projects of wives of Military and civilian Heads of State through the review of existing literature and covers the period from the time of Maryam Babangida to Patience Jonathan. It begins by introducing the challenges of gender disparities, then proceed the briefly discuss the concepts First Lady and Pet Project; adopted the Gender and development and Women Empowerment theory as the framework of explaining the impact of Pet Projects of wives of Heads of states; analyse the impact of their Pet Projects which the authors identifies as very important but recommends certain measures to improve their operation.¹⁷

A. A. Fari's work titled "First Ladyism": A Condoned Aspect of Corruption under Successive Governments in Nigeria, 1985 – 2014,"¹⁸ argued that a more serious but overlooked aspect of the first ladyship and its many activities is that it has since 1985 constituted a form of corruption which for want of a better term is called "first ladyism". In the first place, first ladyism, which is a mindset, was a new development involving the existence of a parallel and informal source of influence, exercised largely over the womenfolk, particularly the wives of administrators/governors and chairmen of local governments and leverage with government officials. Secondly, it was the object of a state treatment during visits to parts of the country by all tiers of government and drew on government resources in terms of protocol, security and staffing. Lastly, it was an avenue for accessing funds that not only by far outstripped the cost of the pet projects but were

not accounted for. Thus, first ladyism represented a rare opportunity for amassing wealth and influence which was an aberration going by standard governmental practice.¹⁹

Ngozi N. Iheanacho, “First Ladies in Nigeria: The Rise of Amazon Crusaders for Better Life of the Vulnerable”²⁰ The author is a study of the status and operations of Nigerian First Ladies. The rise and boom dates back to 1987, during the tenure of Maryam Babangida wife of the then president. Subsequent national First Ladies cued into the structure and legacy of the office and extended the phenomenon to state First Ladies. Like Amazons, they have continued to rise in fame, with exotic paraphernalia of office and pet-projects, making Nigeria a bee-hive of First Ladies operation. Through ethnographic and phenomenological method of knowledge inquiry and presentation in qualitative analysis the report is replete with reasons for the boom—the major being the people’s cosmology of woman and motherhood and, the onerous desire of women to adequately cue into the global project of gender balance in advancement. In spite of the marginal status of the office in the body polity of the nation, First Ladies have contributed significantly to human development index of the target group and, provided strategic platform for women mobilization and consciousness in public affairs.²¹

Uchenna Patricia Ekwugha work titled “Gender Representation of Women in Nigerian Leadership and Decision-Making Process: A Discourse Analysis,”²² The author attempt at investigating the gender representation of women who constitute the majority of the voters’ population during elections with regards to active political participation and representation in the Nigerian media. The work is a modest attempt to investigate what

happens at the moment as regards the thirty percent affirmation, its empowerment to the women and the level of implementation in some countries. At the end, it was noted that though some countries have high level implementation of the policy, but in Nigeria today, only at the ministerial position at the Federal level have women been given voices, but in other areas of public life, appointments of women to key positions are still grossly low and women are underrepresented. The appointment of women to other public bodies and institutions, including to international organisations is still quite low. The general observation is that although efforts have been made and are still being made to give more women political opportunities, the ratio of women to men in governance is still insignificant, women are more or less not present in decision-making bodies and they are not properly represented in the political arena. Despite the Affirmative Action, available statistics reveal that from 1999-2009; the state of women participation and representation in politics and governance in Nigeria is still poor, that a great deal of inequality still exists.²³

Chapter Outline

CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

This chapter is the background to the study, It contains the introduction, aim and objectives, scope of the study, methodology, literature review and endnotes.

CHAPTER TWO

FIRST LADY AND THE EVOLUTION OF FIRST LADIES POSITIONS IN NIGERIA

This chapter examines the concept of first lady and the historical antecedence of first lady position in Nigeria and how it has influence the development of pet project in Nigeria.

CHAPTER THREE

A BIOGRAPHY OF MARIAM BABANGIDA

This chapter examines the biography of Mariam Babangida and how she became the first lady of Nigeria from 1985 to 1993. The chapter also surveys her impact on the development of women empowerment by identifying her numerous pet project in Nigeria.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE IMPACT OF FIRST LADY MARYAM BABANGIDA ACTIVITIES ON WOMEN EMPOWERMENT AND PROJECTS

This chapter examines Mariam Babangida as the first lady and its impact on the development of the Nigerian state and economy.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

This is the concluding chapter of the work; it consists of the summaries and conclusion of the work.

Endnotes

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CHAPTER TWO

FIRST LADY AND THE EVOLUTION FIRST LADIES IN NIGERIA

Introduction

First Lady is not defined in African constitutions. This clear absence of its constitutional approved functions leaves the First Lady with no specific assignments and responsibilities, which, as a result, are open for each president and his First Lady's interpretations. One would argue that, for accountability purposes, this uncertainty does not help issues because the laws guiding its functions are not clear line to subject them (First Ladies) too.¹ It is on this backdrop, this chapter examine the nature first ladyship and the evolution first ladies in Nigeria.

Origin of Nigeria's First Lady Position

Women have been agitating for gender equality, and are apparently succeeding at expanding the frontiers of their social and political relevance.² Women's desire for reverse discrimination and equality with men has led to many reforms.³ For instance, in the United States of America, statements that in the past used 'man' and which invariable reflected gender bias have been modernized to be gender-neutral or gender-inclusive.⁴ It sounds like modern English just as we have Modern Mathematics.

The word 'chairman' and 'mankind' have therefore become anachronistic. Instead, it is now often the case to hear of common gender phraseologies such as 'chairperson' and 'humankind' so as to be modern and less gender discriminatory. Politics has been another very crucial area where women are seeking gender equality or at least the

limiting of discrimination against women. However, Kolawole argues that the odds are still so loaded against women that only a few countries can boast of having women political heads.⁵ The critical question therefore remains: will the next American or Nigerian president be a woman? Women, nevertheless, have been utilizing the election of their husbands to political positions to project, beyond the closet, their innate political acumen. The election of their husbands confers on them the status of First Lady.

First Lady refers to the woman who is foremost in position, rank and importance among other women. The person so designated has precedence over her female counterparts. She is *primus inter pares*. More specifically, according to Simpson and Weiner, the First Lady is the most important lady and particularly the wife of a President or Head of State. The office of the First Lady, in the opinion of Kolawole, has recently globally become a means of negotiating the corridors of power by women. However, according to him, the irony of the degree of women participating in politics is that women themselves are not agreed on the extent of their right to participate.⁶ To support his assertion, he cites for example that when Governor Dukakis, as the Democratic Presidential candidate in the United States in 1992, attempted to have a female vice-presidential candidate as a means of appealing to the female voters, the attempt was met with rebuff, especially by women.⁷

Until recently, Nigeria had no tradition of involving first ladies and women generally in the political process. Women were usually not incorporated into the mainstream of development policies. Besides, wives of Chief Executives were hitherto

passive observers of the unfolding political process. Prior to the Babangida regime, the position of the First Lady had been conservative in government and politics. Hitherto, occupants had been restricted to purely traditional roles, including for instance, visiting hospitals and children's homes during national day celebrations and at Christmas and New Year festivals.⁸

The pioneer indigenous First Lady, Azikiwe's wife, Flora, and later Victoria Gowon were very active ceremonial first ladies during their husbands' tenures. Suffice it to say that, as observed earlier, the wives of Obasanjo and Buhari were virtually unknown as they never appeared in public with their husbands. However, the entry of Mrs Maryam Babangida in 1985 to the nation's State House brought a new dimension to the status of the office. The conservative, non-active nature of the previous political heads' wives was discarded, and she elevated the office to a position of national prominence and recognition only just short of constitutional acknowledgement.⁹ Maryam Abacha automatically continued in this role when the military seized power in November 1993. However, in a move to surpass Mrs Babangida's achievements, Mrs Abacha extended the political influence of the office of the First Lady beyond the Nigerian shores to galvanize other African first ladies to attend the 'African first ladies Peace Mission Summit' in May 1997 in Abuja, Nigeria. Thus, the position now accorded to Nigerian first ladies, through the actions of the two Maryams, matches that of the United States of America. In essence, the popularity which the concept of First Lady has had since the Babangida regime is a phenomenal development.¹⁰

Gender Mainstreaming by First Ladies

It has been acknowledged that women's marginality and subjugation have been sustained over the years by successive regimes, both military and civilian. Representation of the female gender, which accounts for about 50 per cent of the population, was less than 4 per cent. The 1979 Constitution, which constituted the legal foundation for the Second Republic, entitled women to all the fundamental human rights. During the Republic, a few women were appointed as Commissioners and Ministers. These appointed positions granted to some women were seen by feminists as mere tokenism that should be rejected. Female elites in the country, therefore, agreed that women could not achieve full and adequate representation in government unless they fought for it. Female agitators for women's emancipation from male subjugation and liberation from socio-economic penury and political marginalization have converged under different women's movements.¹¹

The National Council for Women's Societies (NCWS) set the pace in 1959. Its aims were to promote women's welfare and progress, especially in education, and to ensure that women were given every opportunity to play an important part in social and community affairs. The impact of the Council was never felt beyond the urban centres. Women in Nigeria (WIN) emerged in 1982 as a concerned women group founded by women academics from the Ivory Towers. It sees itself as the voice for the oppressed masses of women.¹² It reiterates that women suffer from the exploitative and oppressive character of Nigerian society. As a way out, it believes the position of women can be

improved through transformation of the social system. The most remarkable achievement of WIN is in its consciousness-raising about the plight of women in Nigeria. Other women's associations include Women Lawyers, Committee on Women and Development (COWAD), and Women Journalists, all advocating women's liberation. Three major observations can be gathered from these women movements. One, membership is limited to educated female elites in the cities. Two, the impact of their advocacies has not been felt in rural areas.¹³ Three, the founders of the movements are usually of little political influence that cannot effect any significant change through intended governmental policies. Consequently, because of these identified weaknesses, the movements have failed in their intended aims of pursuing feminine emancipation and seeking active participation in political affairs for women. The emerging active participation of first ladies in feminism is, therefore, an attempt to complement the efforts of the above-mentioned women's movements, which had not made significant achievement in terms of gender mainstreaming. The following section analyses the gender mainstreaming efforts of the first ladies.¹⁴

The Origin of Nigerian First Ladies

The story of the First Lady role in Nigeria is a story of compensation. It tells a narrative about women in power women who are in a constant struggle to reclaim, through the limited means available to them, a public presence that was taken from them. In understanding the conditions that inspired the salience and national concern for the First Lady role, it is imperative to first comprehend the function of women in Nigeria

even before the arrival of federalism instituted a new socio-political culture and convention. In the midst of a readjusting society whose gendered principles were fundamentally aligning with Western traditions, the Office of the First Lady emerged as a prospect for the socioeconomic and political mobility of women. With their autonomy denied and authority undermined, women viewed the Office of the First Lady as designed for their participation.¹⁵

In the pre-colonial setting of traditional Nigerian society, women occupied a declining power base due to the influence of colonial sexist biases that recast women as subordinates to men in public and private spheres. Nonetheless, women enjoyed public relevance by serving in political administrative roles. The predominant traditional communities of Yorubaland best exemplify this because Yoruba women spearheaded various public occupations, such as guarding the palace shrine (the Erelus), coordinating cultural functions (the Iyalodes), directing market women (the Iyalojas), and supporting kingdoms (the Oloris), along with additional responsibilities. Adequate documentation has not surfaced that sufficiently acknowledges the powerful women that commanded vital town operations through political management of intra- and inter-community conflicts.¹⁶ Though the reiteration of this era in certain Nigerian regions is eminent, the core values ingrained in these traditional communities through female-dominated roles were hampered by imperial rule.

From the era of outright colonial conquest, the political marginalization of Nigerian women was imbued by Western economic and cultural penetration. On June 5,

1885, Great Britain declared Nigeria a colony, with indirect rule gaining effectiveness in 1900. Despite the outmoded narrative portraying Nigerian women as passive during the implementation of sexist colonial codes, Nigerian women retaliated against politically, economically, and socially extortive colonial laws. These laws promoted marital subjection, the prevention of female participation in communal and market affairs, and the dismantling of traditional women's institutions and governing councils that protected women's social and economic interests in Igboland.¹⁷ The silencing and enforced invisibility of Igbo women manifested through the denial of education, employment outside of domestic work, decision-making powers, and access to resources such as credit facilities and loan schemes. However, through shaping public policy and appealing to British officials in Igboland during the colonial era, the reality of Nigerian women as robust agents of change and contestants of power within male-dominated, British colonial Nigeria is evident.¹⁸

Indeed, though suppressed, Igbo women were never defeated. Between 1862 and 1960, Igbo women corresponded with British officials regarding their personal requests and socio-political and economic grievances, such as taxation, politics, policies, price control, cost of living, family issues, representation, marriages and so on. A far cry from the helpless reservation to subservience that Nigerian women have been presumed to have capitulated to, the creative and powerful evolution of their roles into a semblance of their pre-colonial expressions of political and socioeconomic power not only indicates Nigerian women's refusal to submit to the misogynistic colonial construct, but also an

eagerness to recover, revitalize, and reinvent their power within it.¹⁹ Perhaps this renegotiation of power that Igbo women discovered within the colonial framework, despite their disenfranchised status, is a precursor to the assertive civically engaged approach that Nigerian First Ladies would emulate. Albeit met with valiant resistance, deliberate colonial policies crowded women out of political sectors; already exploitative and corrupt Native Authority Systems also became gender exclusive, seeking to make male predominance the political and cultural tradition of Nigeria. Political women became Nigeria's counterculture in a postcolonial state.²⁰

As Nigeria transitioned into its post-colonial era, the advent of federalism consolidated the deconstruction of traditional female roles in society, which became the foundation onto which the First Lady role became so important to the involvement of women in politics in general. The role became the mechanism through which female power manifested itself in spite of Western influence and the misogynistic reconfiguration of female roles that accompanied it. Along with the economic tailoring of Nigeria, Western imposition demanded that social dynamics of traditional societies morphed with respect to Western advantage. With the arrival of federalism in 1954, under the tutelage of British colonial authorities, Nigeria adopted a federal constitution and established one central government, controlled by a British governor-general, and three regional governments reinforcing ethnic boundaries between the Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba, and Igbo. Nigeria's unification under one political framework facilitated the conformity of gender roles in Nigeria with those of the West.²¹ Upon adopting these

norms, Nigeria inevitably became perceived as oppressive and misogynistic in its post-colonial state. Even though Nigeria was simply maintaining its Western-adopted patriarchal cultural practices, it was disparaged as the West progressively transformed to encompass women into politics.

Subsequent to decolonization, formal administrative power was reinstated in Nigeria. Even so, gender inequalities within the Native Authority system overshadowed the traditional remnants of pre-colonial societies. In post-colonial Nigeria, women were excluded from development politics and relegated to positions of inactivity and observation (Ajayi, 2010:1). Among the Nigerian delegation to the 1957 Constitutional Convention, where Nigeria negotiated the stipulations of its independence, only three women were present: Chief Margaret Ekpo, Chief Wura Esan, and Chief Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti. Women were absent from politics but omnipresent in their nuptial duties to men in politics. In addition to the cyclical nature of low female involvement in governance, the dominant military rule and masculinism of this critical era reverberated political prejudices from colonial Regimes.²²

In the months encompassing Nigeria's independence on October 1, 1960, the title —First Lady began emerging in political nomenclature to describe Nigerian female figureheads, often the wives of heads of state. However, the role itself had not crystallized in Nigerian politics. The indeterminate role of the Nigerian First Lady as a —modern political import has been a continuing feature of public life in conversations about consumption, the role of women, and wealth distribution in Nigeria. The earliest

assignment of a Nigerian leader's wife as 'First Lady' can be found in a June 25, 1960 article of The Chicago Defender about Emily Akintola, wife of the Prime Minister of Western Nigeria.²³ Before Nigeria transitioned into self-governance and instituted its own prime ministerial system of governance, Nigeria and the outside world had already begun placing identifiers for women in power, notably the First Lady title. American press published news spreads about Akintola nationwide from Baltimore to Memphis to Chicago to Detroit in astonishment that a First Lady is importing from Germany into Nigeria's Lagos up to 10,000 bags of cement each month; giving state dinners for an average of 30-40 persons; negotiating with a West Germany firm for the importation of a famous brand of beer and casting a speculative eye on the New York and London stock exchanges. Akintola's case offers insight into distinctions between politicians' wives before and after federalism and the reduction of women's capacity to preside over institutions of power.²⁴

Before federalism was implemented, traditional roles of women were more economic. In urban and rural settings, women engaged in trade, bought and sold in markets, and occupied commercial spaces. Akintola even stated that Nigerian women have all the money, and their husbands were not concerned that they were at the center of business. In fact, the First Lady proudly claimed that the well-to-do people of Nigeria are women because men give us all the freedom to do what we want. Akintola's declaration was exemplified by her extensive resume as an accomplished woman both inside and outside of the home. Akintola's balance of her political marital identity and

entrepreneurial spirit carried the semblance of prior traditional gender norms of West Africa, where women were at the economic forefront of politics and their homes. Simultaneously, in America, the industrial essence of Nigerian women was unconventional.²⁴

Nevertheless, this newly inherited fate of Nigerian First Ladies, sealed by Nigerian independence, directed them to be conservative seen but not heard. The first wave of Nigerian First Ladies can be defined by their management of family affairs and domestic duties, patronage of charity and voluntary organizations, and public appearances when summoned. Similar to The First Lady, Nigerian First Ladies pre-1985 emulated Iya Bose in their honorary role that was fixated on decorum, such as visiting hospitals and children's homes during national day celebrations and at Christmas and New Year festivals.²⁵

The First Ladyship appeared to be an informal formality. The pioneer indigenous First Lady was Flora Azikiwe (October 1, 1963–16 January 1966), accompanied by the First Republic Prime Minister's wife, Tafawa Balewa. On June 19, 1963, Azikiwe was publicized in *The Washington Post* for visiting the Nigerian Embassy as a guest of honor and attending a 1955 National Council of Negro Women reception for wives of black international diplomats and politicians in Washington, D.C. Victoria Gowon (August 1, 1966–July 29, 1975) was also noted as active ceremonially during her husband's tenure.²⁶ The individual glitz and glamour of elite politicians concealed the slow collective progress of First Ladyship. By 1966, First Ladies were seen as the personification of

illegitimate power, despite having no constitutional right or structure to exercise it. Because of this outlook, even currently, the agency of First Ladies determines whether the title is merely political grammar.²⁷

Conclusion

It should be noted here that in understanding the Nigerian First Lady role, there exists discrepancies between their potential for women's political representation and their dependent relationship with male politicians, which is believed to undermine those very initiatives. As a result, First Ladies have been held to a greater expectation to engage in social initiatives, both from their obligation to fulfill their unique potential and their need to redeem themselves from ironic marital privilege. Their social work defines the degree to which they and the administrations they represent are perceived to be corrupt. They have accomplished great feats through their roles and provide insight for future First Ladies, albeit their position's inherent self-involvement.

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CHAPTER THREE

A BIOGRAPHY OF MARIAM BABANGIDA

Introduction

Maryam Babangida wife of Nigerian military President Ibrahim Babangida, who with her visibility and glamour elevated the position of the first lady. Urbane and beautiful Maryam opened an office for herself in the presidency when her husband became president.¹ In 1987, two years into her husband's military presidency, she launched the Better Life for Rural Women Programme (BLP), which incorporated the wives of all senior state officials. The wife's impact during her husband's rule was highlighted by her notable surrogate with Balanle Awe, a history professor she had appointed to lead a state committee, which ultimately led to the committee being placed under her direct supervision.² The first lady, friend to the elite, died on the 27th December 2009 of ovarian cancer, which she had battled for 10 years.³ It is on backdrop, this chapter examines the early life and activities of Maryam Babangida during her times as the first lady.

Early Life

Maryam Babangida was born on November 1, 1948, in Asaba, Delta State, Nigeria. Maryam Ibrahim Babangida, was destined for greatness from an early age. Her innate grace and elegance became evident as she grew into a young woman. Her poise and charisma were not only visible in her public appearances but also in her private life. She started her early education Asaba and later move to Kaduna, where she attended

Queen Amina College,⁴ Federal Training Centre Kaduna and La Sale extension university in Chicago USA, in 1962. She also earned a certificate in Computer Science from the NCR Institute in Lagos in 1963.⁵

Family Life

On 6 September 1969, two months before her 21st birthday, Maryam married Major Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida with whom she had four children-Aisha Shinkafi, Mohammed, Aminu and Halima. After her husband became Chief of Army Staff in 1983, Maryam Babangida became President of the Nigerian Army Officers Wives Association (NAOWA).⁶ She was active in this role, launching schools, clinics, women's training centres and child day care centers. When her husband became head of state in 1985, Maryam Babangida moved with her children into Dodan Barracks in Lagos.⁹ She had to arrange for considerable renovations to make the rooms more suitable for formal receptions.⁷

Her Life and Career

As the wife of General Ibrahim Babangida, President and Commander in Chief of the Nigerian Armed Forces from 1985 to 1993, Maryam carried herself with dignity and became a symbol of sophistication, through her immense qualities of care and compassion for, commitment and sensitivity to, the situation of the less privileged in society. She was widely praised for her single-minded determination to bring the plight of rural women, often neglected in the urban domination of national issues, to the forefront of public concern.⁸ Similarly, her vigorous campaigns on behalf of the disabled, and

against the use of drugs among Nigeria's younger generation, became a testimony that the position of First Lady could be transformed from one of comfort, vanity and complacency to a platform for active participation in nation-building. Maryam was unrivalled as the first to venture beyond the traditional role of patron of charities and women's organizations, into the more challenging field of active campaigns and advocacy on behalf of society's less fortunate.⁹

When Maryam Babangida became Nigeria's eighth First Lady on August 27, 1985, probably, only a few had any inkling that she would be revolutionizing the institution of the First Ladyship to unfold its enormous potential for public good. After eight years of her tenure, she did just that, to the pleasant surprise of Nigerians and with a charm and grace that was exclusively hers.¹⁰ Surely, and steadily, she applied the gentle strokes of a peaceful, persuasive advocate to that sector of society which she aptly described as "the domestic side of the polity". Her most ingenious master stroke was the Better Life for Rural Women Program, which, by any stretch of the imagination, was a quiet revolution that redefined the entire spectrum of life for Nigerian women and those who dwelled in the rural areas.¹¹

Under this program, the vast majority of rural women and, indeed men, voluntarily mobilized themselves into functional co-operatives to pursue the benefits of communal joint-effort and self-help. Practically, every field of human endeavor in agriculture, craft and art was covered by the co-operatives; and with easier access to soft loans and grants as well as the goodwill of the First Lady, they increasingly acquired

simple new technologies – *gari friers, corn and rice mills, cassava graters, fish smoking devices, etc*²⁰ and building, training and leisure facilities such as communal health centers, women resource centers and day-care centers to improve their lot. The entire countryside was awash in a new awareness as a result of the Better Life Program. From Nigeria, she championed women issues vigorously and reached out to the First Ladies of other African countries to emphasize the effective role they can play in improving the lives of their people.¹²

Maryam's influence extended beyond the traditional role of a First Lady. She was a trailblazer, redefining the expectations placed on women in Nigerian society. Her commitment to education, health, and social welfare marked a departure from conventional roles, establishing her as a transformative figure in the nation's history. That the Better Life Programme for Rural Women made significant contributions to improving the lives of women in rural Nigeria is an understatement.¹³ It empowered women through education, skills training, and access to resources, leading to increased food production, improved healthcare, and enhanced economic opportunities. The program remains a notable example of Maryam Babangida's commitment to social development and women's empowerment in Nigeria.¹⁴

Maryam recognized the pivotal role education could play in empowering individuals and communities. Her passion for education manifested in various initiatives aimed at improving access to quality education across Nigeria. Her efforts in championing the cause of education also led to the establishment of the National

Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult, and Non-Formal Education.¹⁵ Maryam’s vision went beyond conventional schooling, emphasizing the importance of literacy and skills development for all, irrespective of age or background. Maryam Babangida’s philanthropic endeavors extended to the realm of healthcare. The creation of the “Pet Project” marked a turning point in the healthcare landscape of Nigeria. Through this initiative, she advocated for improved maternal and child healthcare, pushing for policies that addressed the unique health challenges faced by women and children.¹⁵

The “Breast Cancer Awareness” campaign, a flagship project of the Pet Project, brought attention to a critical health issue affecting women. Maryam’s efforts to destigmatize discussions around breast cancer and promote early detection played a pivotal role in raising awareness and saving lives. Her commitment to healthcare left an indelible mark, laying the foundation for future initiatives focused on improving the well-being of Nigerians.¹⁷ Maryam Ibrahim Babangida was a fervent advocate for the rights and empowerment of women. She believed that empowering women was key to unlocking the full potential of society. Her initiatives sought to address the unique challenges faced by women, from education and healthcare to economic opportunities. She recognized that empowering women was not just a moral imperative but a strategic investment in the nation’s future.¹⁸

Her advocacy also extended to issues such as gender fairness and domestic violence. By speaking out on these issues, Maryam Ibrahim Babangida contributed to changing societal norms and fostering an environment where women could thrive.

Maryam Babangida was renowned for her impeccable fashion sense and style. She became an icon, not only in Nigeria but also globally, for her elegant and sophisticated fashion choices. Her distinctive outfits not only displayed her impeccable taste but also promoted Nigerian fashion designers, contributing significantly to the growth of the fashion industry.¹⁹

Maryam Babangida was also known for her commitment to the institution of marriage and her loyalty and dedication to her husband, Ibrahim Babangida. Their marriage was a prominent aspect of their public life in Nigeria. A friend who once accompanied this writer on a visit to the General describes the late former first lady thus, “I remember her very well: tall, serene serving her husband and his friends at table all by herself, as though she had no housemaids! That, to me, was clearly a sign of unadulterated love for her husband, honor, humility and respect for tradition”.²⁰

It was indeed, remarkable that Maryam Babangida still found time besides her challenging domestic and public responsibilities, first, as a housewife and secondly, as First Lady of the most populous and complex country in Africa to cultivate her literary appetites. In September 1988, she made her debut in the hallowed world of authors with **The Home Front**, a candid profile of the life of army officers’ wives. The book, the first by any First Lady before her, was acclaimed by critics and the public alike as a work of exemplary sensitivity.²¹

Her second book: Nigeria’s First Ladies – Life in the State House, published in 1990 was a historical tribute to previous Nigerian First Ladies whose valuable roles as the

stabilizing force behind the nation's most powerful citizen had hitherto been ignored by writers and historians alike. Maryam Babangida successfully established a glamorous persona, and by and large, the "Maryam Phenomenon" became a celebrity and an icon of beauty, fashion and style in Nigeria and beyond. Writing about the opening of the seven-day Better Life Fair in 1990, one journalist remarked that "she was like a Roman empress on a throne, regal and resplendent in a stone-studded flowing outfit that defied description."²² Women responded to her as a role model, and her appeal lasted long after her husband left office in 1993 till her last day on earth. For her relentless services to humanity Maryam received several awards, prominent among them was the prestigious Africa Prize for Leadership for the Sustainable End of Hunger in London on 19th September, 1991.²³

Life After 1993

One would have thought that her passion for empowering the underprivileged and the rural woman would have waned when her husband left office in 1993, but rather, Maryam Babangida remained steadfast, and continued to be involved in various social and philanthropic activities in Nigeria. As a woman of influence in a patriarchal society, Maryam became a role model for women across Nigeria. She used her platform to advocate for gender fairness, encouraging women to pursue their dreams and aspirations. Maryam's Islamic beliefs reinforced her commitment to children's issues, empowering women, and advocating for their well-being and empowerment. In addition to all these

preoccupations she had her pet educational project in Minna, El Amin International School and other cottage businesses to worry about.²⁴

Probably, not known to many Nigerians, throughout her post-First Lady years Maryam Babangida was also engaged in a quiet Islamic proselytization work within rural communities in Niger State and beyond, spreading the principles of Islam and promoting its teachings. This aspect of her work reflected her deep commitment to her faith and her desire to share its positive impact with others. In the rural communities, Maryam recognized the importance of providing spiritual guidance and support to individuals who may have limited access to religious resources. She believed that embracing Islam could bring about positive change in people's lives and communities, and she actively sought to create opportunities for this transformation.²⁵

Maryam's quiet proselytization work involved organizing Islamic awareness campaigns, hosting religious gatherings, and supporting the construction of mosques and schools in rural areas. By doing so, she created spaces where individuals could come together, learn about Islam, and deepen their understanding of the religion's principles. Through these initiatives, Maryam aimed to empower individuals to live their lives in accordance with Islamic values. She believed that by embracing Islam, individuals would find solace, guidance, and a sense of purpose.²⁶

Maryam created a holistic impact on the lives of those she reached through the integration of her quiet proselytization work into her overall philanthropic efforts. It is however, important to note that her proselytization work was done with respect for the

diversity of beliefs within the communities she served. She approached her work with inclusivity, recognizing and respecting people's individual choices. Her intention was to offer guidance and support rather than impose her beliefs on others.²⁷

Until her death on the 27th of December, 2009, Maryam was known for her unwavering support for widows. She recognized the challenges faced by widows, who often struggle with financial stability, social isolation, and emotional distress. She diligently worked to address these issues and provide assistance to widows in need. Her support for widows encompassed various initiatives, including the establishment of programs that provided financial aid, skills training, and emotional counseling. Maryam's support for widows helped restore dignity to their lives, gave them a sense of hope, enabling them to become self-sufficient and active contributors to society.²⁸

Her journey on earth, shaped by her faith in Islam, exemplifies the power of compassion, education, and empowerment. From her philanthropic initiatives to her advocacy for women's rights, Maryam's contributions have left an indelible mark on Nigerian society and would, certainly, inspire generations to come. Her generosity positively impacted countless lives, uplifting the less privileged and providing them with essential resources and opportunities.²⁹ She exemplified the true essence of leadership, using her position to drive positive change and uplift the lives of those in need. Her memory serves as a reminder of the transformative potential of a life dedicated to service and the influence of Islam in shaping one's character.³⁰

Endnotes

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CHAPTER FOUR
THE IMPACT OF FIRST LADY MARYAM BABANGIDA ACTIVITIES ON
WOMEN EMPOWERMENT AND PROJECTS

Introduction

The office of the First Lady in Nigeria has been a tumultuous one. Some of the citizens have so much disdain for the office. Their reasons for showing so much disdain for this office range from its unconstitutionality and the occupants of the office show of flamboyancy, lavishness and lack of decorum. Most of the First Ladies flaunt pet projects immediately after they assume office and these pet projects are usually funded mainly with State funds. These projects have been variously criticized as not being able to achieve their objectives of empowering vulnerable groups in the society. There have been debates on whether the Office of the First Ladies should be institutionalized.² It is on this backdrop, this study examines the impact of first lady Maryam Babangida on women's empowerment and project.



Photo showing First Lady Maryam Babangida on International hosting of the First Lady of America

The office of the First Lady is styled and accompanied with different dimensions of projects in an attempt to justify the cause, political legitimacy and influence of the office. Late Mrs. Maryam Babangida initiating Better Life for Rural Women Programme created special awareness in the minds of women and men alike on the roles and importance of women in national development. Mrs. Maryam Abacha set up Family Support Programme/Family Economic Advancement Programme (FSP/FEAP), Mrs `Yar`Adua's Women and Youth Empowerment Foundation (WAYEF) and Mrs. Dame Patience Jonathan established Women for Change and Development Initiative. All the aforementioned organizations were directed towards greater awareness, relative

economic independence, better healthcare, greater involvement and participation of women on the socio-economic and political fronts.³

Impact of Mrs. Maryam Babangida First Lady Empowerment programmes on socio Economic Wellbeing of Rural Women

It was the era, that herald, the beginning of repositioning the place of the wife of the Head of State in the sphere of governance. In 1987, Nigerians witnessed the launch of Better Life Programme for Rural Women (BLPRW). For the purpose of BLPRW unprecedented mobilization of human and material resources was undertaken. The aims and objectives of the programme were broad in scope and the target was unmistakably rural women. Ajayi outlined the aims of the programme as: a. Enhancing and stimulating rural women in particular, and the rural populace in general, to improve their standard of living and their environment; b. Cultivating the spirit of self-development in rural women through the promotion of rural education, business and recreation; c. Creating greater awareness among the populace about the plight of women.⁴

The objectives, of Better Life Programme for Rural Women (BLPRW), are further designed to a. raise the social consciousness of women about their rights, as well as their social, political and economic responsibilities; b. bring women together and closer for better understanding and resolution of their problems through collective action; c. mobilize women for concrete activities towards achieving specific objectives, including seeking leadership roles in all spheres of national life; d. stimulate and motivate women in rural areas towards achieving a better and higher standard of living as well as

to inform the general populace of the plight of the rural women; e. educate women on simple hygiene, family planning and on the importance of childcare; f. enlighten women in rural areas on opportunities and facilities available to them at their local government areas; g. Improve and enrich family life; and h. encourage and institutionalize recreation.⁵



Photo showing First Lady Maryam Babangida on International hosting of the First Lady of America

a) Mobilization for Political Participation and Socio-Economic Wellbeing of Rural Women:

Afinja and Aina revealed that women have been described as an integral part of nation building. They are integral agent for sustainable development at all levels. As in other democracies of the world, successive governments in Nigeria have been engaged in

the sustained campaign for greater and effective participation in politics in line with the Beijing conference declaration which advocates for 35 percent in appointments into political and public offices. According to Ukpom to realize the 35 percent affirmative action the federal government set up the National Gender Policy to promote the attainment of this target.⁶ Ubeku stated that consequent upon the establishment of National Commission for Women by Maryam Babangida and later upgraded to the Ministry of Women Affairs at the national level. This was followed by State Governments throughout the country. These institutions are permanent structure of government today. There has been continued impetus for the increasing positive role of women in politics as indicated by the emphasis on the mobilization of rural women by First Ladies at State level. Through the political activities of state first ladies, women organizations are now beginning to find a rallying point for common action politically, economically and socially. Ukpom commented that with Women for Change Initiative, the empowerment project of First Lady, Maryam Babangida Nigerian women have been awakened and empowered through various summits, programmes, enlightenment campaigns to ensure that women are constitutionally recognized as stakeholders. Tolabi stressed that First Ladies Maryam Babangida have canvassed for their women to be given opportunities to contribute to the development of the nation and this has yielded results through the high proportion of women in political offices in the present government.⁷

Health Care Services and Socio Economic Wellbeing of Rural Women

The overriding importance of an effective maternal and child health or health care delivery system is underscored as it represents one of the drivers of rapid economic, social and political development. Social health of the citizenry ensures greater human development.⁸ The affirmation by the Alma-Ata declaration of 1978 stated access to basic health care services including maternal and child services is a fundamental human rights. However, after many decades a high proportion of people particularly in rural areas lack access to basic health care services. UNDP report confirmed that over 30,000 children die each day from preventable diseases, more than 500,000 women die during child birth and complications in pregnancy over 1 million under 5 years old children die of malaria every year, approximately 20 million people have died of HIV/AIDS while over 38 million are living with the disease, 8 million people develop active TB each year out of which 3 million die of it. Maternal and child health care programme have been the concern of First Lady Maryam Babangida.⁹

Social Welfare Services and Socio Economic Wellbeing of Rural Women

First Lady Maryam Babangida concern in social welfare includes initiating programmes whose explicit purpose is to protect adults and children from the degradation and insecurity of ignorance, illness, disability, unemployment and poverty. Social welfare generally denotes the full range of organized activities of voluntary and governmental organizations that seek to prevent, alleviate or contribute to the solution of recognized social problems or to improve the wellbeing of individual, groups and communities.¹⁰

The First Lady Maryam Babangida have over the years embarked on social interventions intended to enhance or maintain the social functioning of women and children especially in alleviating distress and poverty or ameliorating conditions of causalities of society as indicated by various social and economic rehabilitation activities.

Agriculture and Socio-Economic wellbeing of Rural Women

Williams reported that the involvement of the First Lady Maryam Babangida in the affairs of Nigeria rural women in the area of agriculture has had enormous socio-economic impact on the rural environment. The First Lady's Women's Agricultural Entrepreneurship Development Programme makes loans available to rural women farmers. Over 2,500 women benefited from the programme in 1999 across the geo political zone.¹¹ This is one of the life touching social intervention projects designed to make a difference in the lives of women, children and the less privileged at the grassroots. The women were enrolled for training in agro-production and agro-trading and equally empowered with an interest free loan. The First Lady stressed that investments in women and children were important because of the multiplier effects on the economy.¹²



Photo showing First Lady Maryam Babangida on displaying her leadership prowess at different fora

Promotion of Cooperative Societies and Socio-Economic Wellbeing of Rural Women

Development organizations are emphasizing the use of women's groups as a strategy to improve rural women's lives. Ihejiamaizu observed that the formation and management of cooperative societies is one of the important ways rural dwellers are using to address problems of neglect, poverty and deprivation. The First Lady all agreed as manifested in their empowerment activities that women are oppressed and seriously hit by poverty. Thus, their empowerment programmes through promoting cooperative societies have helped to transform the lives of rural women since cooperatives are meant to build social and economic capacities.¹³ First Lady, Maryam Babangida stated that the establishment of cooperative societies in rural areas for rural women is an effective method for facilitating their access to the means of production, hence, personal and household income. Rural women cooperatives, as aspect of empowerment programme for

socio-economic wellbeing have created avenues for women to participate in development thereby improving their quality of life.¹⁴

Health care services and Socio Economic Wellbeing of rural women

The findings support Udofia that First Lady Maryam Babangida used the Family Support Programme (FSP) to vigorously pursue maternal and child health services. Her health programme included mass deworming of school children. Udofia revealed that First Lady Maryam Babangida significantly sensitized the rural women to the benefits of immunization. The FGD indicated that she took necessary steps to educate and raise awareness level of people on the reality of Lassa Fever. The First Ladies at the local government level strongly articulated the philosophy of “health is wealth”. The discussants agreed that more maternity homes were opened and National Programme on Immunization and campaigns against Lassa Fever were vigorously pursued. This helped to enhance the health status of rural women.¹⁵ The findings support Etuk who revealed that First Lady Maryam Babangida’s health empowerment programme rested on the assumption that women are the immediate care givers to their husband, children and households in general. Her empowerment programme afforded women health education about diseases such as Lassa Fever, TB, blindness, hypertension, diabetes etc and how to prevent them. Women were also enlightened on their right to satisfy their personal needs. William stated that the Family Life Enhancement Initiative (FLEI) of First Lady, Maryam Babangida has been at the forefront of the campaign to reduce maternal and child mortality/morbidity.¹⁶ The premise of FLEI is that the promotion of maternal and

child health are the key to achieving the globally agreed Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The finding of this study support William that FLEI is responding to the challenge of reducing the state's high child and maternal mortality statistics through the use of innovative advocacy strategies. Uforo Ubon, FLEI magazine is currently being used as an advocacy tool to take the campaign to women and the wider public. FLEI is also employing its wide grassroot network to mobilize and educate rural women on the importance of registering early at the primary health facilities in their communities for child birth and immunization.¹⁷

The FGD session revealed that women have benefited from FLEI's quarterly intervention event to enlighten the women on healthy living and support them with a subsistence grant. Hundreds of multiple birth families are impacted yearly through this intervention. The women agreed that their health care has been significantly enhanced and this has manifested in improved health status. The women, children and the aged have been touched through the activities of FLEI. The First Lady believed that the protein energy malnutrition was the leading cause of child morbidity and mortality.¹⁸ The affected children also received treatment for malaria, worm infestation, anaemia, diarrhea and surgical operations. Archibong commented that the CDT also took a holistic approach to solve the problem of poverty in the families of the treated children through financial empowerment to their mothers. Mothers were educated on good nutritional habit for their children, provided care and support to people and families battling with Lassa Fever.¹⁹

Its modus operandi was also broad. The First Lady, Mrs Babangida, was the National Chairperson. The wives of State Governors were Chairpersons at the state level, while wives of local government chairmen throughout the federation were chairs at the grassroots level of government. Each constituency also had a co-ordinator. Perhaps, the most novel gain of the BLPRW was the creation of societal awareness about the plight of the grassroots women. In this regard, symposia, seminars, public rallies, lectures, etc., all meant to draw the attention of government, agencies and the general public to the problems of rural women, were held at various levels. The material productivity of women was assisted by the formation of women's co-operatives and associations to provide better access to the utilization of production resources and credit facilities.²⁰

Cottage and small-scale industries such as gari processing, soap making, weaving and dyeing, dress making and fashion designing, baking, etc., were established across the country, which were meant to improve the income-generating capabilities of rural women. Female farming productivity was boosted with the supply of fertilizer to all the units in the Better Life Programme as cited in Ajayi. In the field of educational development, at least one day-care centre was established in most local government areas for the education of children. Admission was open to all children and was free.²¹ A vocational school was also founded in each local government area for school drop-outs and women adults who had not had the opportunity of going to school. Students of the school were taught vocations such as dyeing, weaving, motherhood skills and childcare, home economics and fashion design. The adult education aspect of the BLPRW taught adults

how to read and write. Other areas of achievement included primary health care, social welfare, cultivation of agricultural plantations and financial grants and credits to rural women to boost their economic activities.²²

In summary, by November 1993, when the administration of President Babangida came to an end, the BLPRW had succeeded in establishing 9,492 Co-operative Societies for women to have access to finance, and sundry resources; 1,435 cottage industries; 1,784 farms and gardens; 495 shops and markets; 1,094 multipurpose women centres for skills acquisition; and 135 fish and livestock farms; establish the National Commission for Women in 1990 and directed state governors to establish similar commissions;. The regime also made it a policy of appointing at least a woman to the position of commissioner in each state's cabinet.²³

Endnotes

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2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., 48.
4. The Better Life Programme and the Rural Economy of Nigeria," *CBN Economic and Financial Review* 28(3), 1990, 41.
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8. A. A. Fari, "First Ladyism": A Condoned Aspect of Corruption under Successive Governments in Nigeria, 1985 – 2014," *The International Journal of Humanities & Social Studies*, 6(2), 2018, 99.
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10. Ngozi N. Iheanacho, "First Ladies in Nigeria: The Rise of Amazon Crusaders for Better Life of the Vulnerable" *European Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 2011, 23.
11. Ibid., 26.
12. Ibid.
13. Uchenna Patricia Ekwughа "Gender Representation of Women in Nigerian Leadership and Decision-Making Process: A Discourse Analysis," *Advances in Applied Sociology*, 2016, 6(1), 134.
14. Ibid., 135.
15. Ibid.
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20. A. S. Ajala, & O. A. Wulemat, "From Kitchen to Corridor of Power: Yoruba Women Breaking Through Patriarchal Politics in South-Western Nigeria," *Gender Questions*, 1(1), 10th May 1999, 58-59.
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CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

This study has analysed the participation of women in politics (first ladies) as regards the initiations of their pet projects which were meant to be independent of or parallel to their husbands' government and the implications of these on national development in Nigeria. The study has concluded that though these projects are aimed at achieving developmental objectives, they are means of official looting of the state treasury, thus having debilitating implications on national development of the Nigerian state.

This study also captured how Pet Projects and the First Lady office might be popular among some sections of the women population of Nigeria, however, the study has rightly observed, that the operational reality has been hijacked for the benefit of a few in Nigeria; hugely politicized, and used mostly for electioneering campaigns, rather than for genuine empowerment, development and betterment of women. Although politicized, the Pet Projects, to a large extent, still contribute immensely to women empowerment and development.¹ The study further examined the activities of FLs and their Pet Projects face some criticisms such as excesses in the use of state connections, abuse of power, meddlesomeness in their husband's administration, lack of checks and control mechanism in their operations which makes them powerful and dictatorial. Accusation of illegal fund raising, abuse of privilege, lack of transparency in handling their finance,

lack of audit and accountability on the Pet Projects are numerous. Equally Pet Projects go into moribund immediately the initiator is out of office.²

However, the projects have given many people succour and new hope in life. Above all, the phenomenon of Pet Projects is a veritable instrument for improving women's consciousness and participation in politics and public affairs, toward their advancement. As pointed out by study, Nigerian women have so embraced the office of FL as a veritable avenue for them to make-up for what they fail to achieve in the male dominated political space of the nation. Women across the states of the nation, would rise vehemently to resist any attempt to scrap the office and status. The only legislation that is seemingly welcome is that which will legalize and reform the operations of the office, to the advantage of women's power holding and exercise.³ This study has attempted to assess the impact of the Better life Programme on the rural economy. The findings so far showed that despite the short period of its existence, the programme has attracted notable attention and patronage by all and sundry. In particular attention is beginning to be given to the overall plight of women, children and the rural dwellers in general through several incentives and public campaigns. Although mixed trends were observed in the degree of implementation of the project in different states, the efforts so far, represent a remarkable achievement, given the fact that it focused on economic and social programmes targeted at people who were often neglected by the general macroeconomic policies and public expenditure programmes.⁴ Based on the findings and the following conclusion are made.

It will therefore achieve greater heights and reach out to larger population of women in the country when it is taken out of the realms of politics and given more Federal Government, NGOs and international support. Therefore, the need to completely depoliticize the practice of Pet Projects in Nigeria to enhance better women empowerment in the country. It is also recommended that the design and operation of Pet Projects should ensure there is programme continuity after the expiration of the tenure of the First Lady; empowerment programmes should be left in the hands of professionals to ensure that implementation is based on adequate planning; appropriate programme findings are required to further ensure its continuity; First Ladies empowerment programmes should be constitutionally linked to the Ministry of Women Affairs; and an independent evaluation of the problem should be conducted that will provide information helpful to Policy makers and programme developments.

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2. Ngozi N. Iheanacho, "First Ladies in Nigeria: The Rise of Amazon Crusaders for Better Life of the Vulnerable" *European Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 2011, 23.
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