

Evaluating the Social Responsibility of Muslim Women: A Study on FOMWAN, MSSN Sisters Wing, and MSO in Gombe State, Nigeria

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Abstract: This study explores the activities of three prominent Muslim women organizations in Nigeria, namely FOMWAN, MSSN Sisters Wing, and MSO. The research focuses on their national-level activities and specifically examines their operations in Gombe State. Various data collection methods, such as structured and semi-structured questionnaires, oral interviews, and documented sources, were employed. Additionally, the researcher personally attended workshops, schools, and entrepreneurial centres established by these organizations. The study highlights their extensive reach to remote Muslim communities across Nigeria and emphasizes their role in fostering unity among Muslim women from diverse backgrounds. These organizations not only provide humanitarian aid to vulnerable and displaced communities but also engage in da'awah activities to enlighten Muslim women on religious practices and socio-economic issues. However, they face several challenges, including inadequate funding, security concerns, limited political and moral support, and the need for increased publicity. Addressing these challenges would benefit from government intervention at both national and state levels.

Keywords: Social Responsibility, Muslim Women Organization, Propagation of Islam

1. Introduction

Throughout history, Islam has played a pivotal role in elevating the status of women, liberating them from the subjugation and inequality prevalent in various cultures and civilizations. Islam places women on equal footing with men in terms of their duties, obligations,



and rights, which is unparalleled in the history of humankind. However, there are certain exceptional circumstances where wisdom necessitates the prioritization of one gender over the other. Even in such cases, a careful analysis reveals that the chosen position is in the best interest of the entire society.

The Qur'an emphasizes the equality of men and women, declaring that they are created from the same origin and encouraging mutual understanding and respect. Allah states, "O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you." (Surah Al-Hujurat/Chapter 49, Verse 13 of the Qur'an).

In light of these principles, women recognize the importance of fulfilling their responsibilities and standing alongside their male counterparts in Gombe State, Nigeria. This research article aims to shed light on the social responsibility undertaken by Muslim women in Gombe State, Nigeria, focusing on the activities and contributions of three prominent organizations: FOMWAN (Federation of Muslim Women's Associations in Nigeria), MSSN Sisters Wing (Muslim Students' Society of Nigeria Sisters Wing), and MSO (Muslim Sisters Organization). The study sets out three primary objectives to provide a comprehensive analysis of the topic.

Firstly, the historical development of these organizations will be meticulously assessed, tracing their origins, growth, and transformation over time. By exploring their formation, the study seeks to provide insights into the contextual background and influences that have shaped these organizations' goals and objectives.

Secondly, the role of FOMWAN, MSSN Sisters Wing, and MSO in promoting social responsibility within Gombe State will be thoroughly examined. This evaluation will encompass various dimensions, such as community engagement, education, healthcare, poverty alleviation, and women empowerment initiatives. By delving into the specific activities and programs undertaken by these organizations, the study aims to evaluate their impact on the local society and their effectiveness in fulfilling their social responsibilities.

Lastly, the opportunities and challenges encountered by FOMWAN, MSSN Sisters Wing, and MSO in Gombe State will be critically evaluated. This assessment will encompass financial resources, community support, collaboration with government and non-governmental entities, as well as the prevailing socio-cultural dynamics. By identifying and analyzing these opportunities and challenges, the study aims to provide insights into the factors that facilitate or hinder the organizations' ability to fulfill their social responsibilities effectively.

The findings of this study will contribute to the existing knowledge and understanding of the social responsibility undertaken by Muslim women in Gombe State, Nigeria. Additionally, the insights gained from this research can inform policymakers, stakeholders, and the wider academic community about the potential of these organizations in addressing societal challenges and promoting positive social change.

By examining these aspects, we can gain valuable insights into the efforts undertaken by Muslim women in fulfilling their social responsibility and contributing to the betterment of their community.

2. Literature Review

Muslim women organizations in Nigeria have garnered significant attention in previous research, particularly regarding their role in social responsibility. Sarumi, Faluyi, and Okeke-Uzodike (2019) delved into the transcendent nature of a Muslim women civil organization in Nigeria, focusing on its ability to overcome ethnic and religious barriers in decision-making processes. Their study shed light on how this organization serves as a platform for diverse Muslim women to collaborate and actively contribute to decisions affecting their communities. Through qualitative data collected via interviews and focus group discussions, the research unveiled the organization's promotion of inclusivity, solidarity, and cooperation among its members. By facilitating dialogue and consensus-building, this civil organization plays a crucial role in fostering social cohesion, promoting women's empowerment, and generating positive outcomes in multiethnic and religious contexts (Sarumi et al., 2019).

In the context of healthcare sector development, Ahmad and Liman (2022) explored the roles and challenges faced by Muslim women in Nasarawa state, Nigeria. The research highlighted the diverse contributions of Muslim women in healthcare, ranging from medical doctors and nurses to administrators. Additionally, the study examined the obstacles encountered by women in low-status health-related occupations. By providing a conceptual understanding of the health sector and the multifaceted roles of women within it, this research shed light on the supportive systems in place to help women achieve their professional goals. It contributed to a deeper comprehension of the involvement of Muslim women in the healthcare sector, encompassing both conventional and traditional practices (Ahmad & Liman, 2022).

Fahm's study (2017) delved into the social responsibility of Muslim women in Nigeria, with a specific focus on the contributions of the Federation of Muslim Women's Associations in Nigeria (FOMWAN). The research explored the emergence of FOMWAN as an organization dedicated to strategic engagement in development projects and the promotion of its vision of development. Through activities such as Da'awah, establishment of educational institutions, and provision of healthcare and humanitarian services, FOMWAN actively supports the Islamic faith in Nigeria and endeavors to improve the conditions of women, youth, and children. This study emphasized FOMWAN's commitment to fulfilling its socially responsible role and contributing to the empowerment of Muslim women. By expanding the knowledge base on Muslim women, particularly within the Nigerian context, this research provides valuable insights for Muslim women organizations operating in the country (Fahm, 2017).

These previous studies collectively contribute to our understanding of Muslim women organizations in Nigeria and their vital roles in promoting social responsibility. The research highlights the transcendent nature of these organizations, their contributions to healthcare sector development, and their commitment to empowerment and community welfare. By examining the experiences, challenges, and achievements of Muslim women within these organizations, these studies expand our knowledge base and provide insights for policymakers, practitioners, and scholars interested in fostering inclusivity, gender equality, and effective decision-making in Nigeria

3. Method

The research methodology employed in this study is primarily historical and descriptive in nature. The research aims to examine the activities of various Muslim women faith-based organizations in Gombe State and explore how these organizations strategically engage in development projects that foster growth and development across different spheres of life.

The target sample population for this research consists of members belonging to the faith-based women organizations in Gombe State, namely FOMWAN, MSSN Sisters Wing, and MSO. Data collection was carried out through in-depth interviews conducted with selected members of these organizations using unstructured questionnaires. Additionally, written sources such as journals, books, and minutes of meetings were utilized.

The collected data from the sample population underwent a critical examination and analysis. Following W. H. Walsh's (1970) perspective, data analysis involved the scrutiny of assumptions to facilitate examination. There are some criteria for assessing primary sources in historical work, including distance from the event, veracity of the information recorder, form of preservation, feasibility, and corroboration. These criteria were considered during the analysis of the data gathered. The analysis of research materials entails an explanation of the available data or documents obtained from the fieldwork. Scientific tools were utilized to assess and interrogate the historical data, ensuring its validity and establishing the internal consistency of the documented information.

4. Result and Discussion

4.1. The Historical Background of Muslim Women Organizations in Gombe State

Gombe State, located in north-eastern Nigeria, has a diverse ethnic and religious composition. The state is inhabited by various ethnic groups, with the Fulani, Bolewa, Kanuri, and Hausa peoples residing in the north and centre, while the Cham, Dadiya, Jara, Kamo, Pero, Tangale, Tera, and Waja peoples populate the eastern and southern regions (Tiffen, 1974). The majority of the population in Gombe State is Muslim, comprising about 75%, while Christians and traditionalists make up approximately 20% and 5% of the population, respectively.

The Muslim Women faith-based organizations under study, namely FOMWAN, MSSN, and MSO, have been active in Gombe State for several years. These organizations gained prominence

and expanded their activities in 1996, following the creation of Gombe State from the former Bauchi State (EMCC, 2003). FOMWAN, MSSN, and MSO are non-profit and non-governmental civil societies that operate independently and autonomously, with their national headquarters located in Abuja, the Federal Capital Territory of Nigeria.

The establishment of FOMWAN can be traced back over thirty years ago, with its foundation attributed to the efforts of committed Muslim women who initiated the idea for an umbrella organization during the Muslim Sister's Organization (MSO) conference in 1984 (Fahm, 2017). FOMWAN has since grown to have members in all 36 states of Nigeria, as well as affiliate groups spread across villages, towns, and even other African countries (Fahm, 2017).

According to an interview with the pioneer chairperson of MSO, the organizational structures of MSO, FOMWAN, and MSSN were established concurrently in Gombe State in 1997 (Yaya, 2021). Each organization formed executive bodies led by the Chairlady (Amirah) and five other offices. Similar structures were replicated in the eleven local governments of Gombe State. The state chapters aligned their aims and objectives with the national objectives of their parent bodies.

4.2. The Role Muslim Women Organizations in Social Responsibility in Gombe State

The Muslim Women faith-based organizations have played a significant role in shaping the perception of women and womanhood in Gombe State. Prior to the emergence of these organizations, women were often regarded as inferior beings with limited roles in society. However, the activities of these organizations have empowered women to a great extent, leading to increased female participation in positions traditionally dominated by men (Ahmad, 2011).

One of the prominent activities of Muslim Women organizations in Gombe State is their involvement in da'awah (proselytisation) efforts. These organizations engage in spreading basic Islamic teachings not only to women but also to children and youth. FOMWAN, MSSN, and MSO each design their da'awah activities to cater to specific target groups. For instance, MSSN focuses on formal school students, while FOMWAN directs its activities towards the welfare of the general public, and MSO primarily targets educated women (Sintali, 2021).

As part of their da'awah efforts, FOMWAN has established numerous women Islamiyyah schools across Gombe State, offering classes at various educational institutions such as the Government Arabic College Gombe, Bubayero Primary School Gombe, GSS Nafada, GDSS Billiri, and Kaltungo (Yaya, 2021). These schools aim to provide women with a comprehensive education in Islam.

One significant area of focus for Muslim women faith-based organizations in Gombe State is the provision of healthcare services. In the past, Muslim women faced challenges accessing medical services due to the predominantly male service providers. To address this issue, these organizations have made significant strides in providing healthcare services and interventions to underprivileged Muslim communities in Gombe State (Sintali, 2021).

Efforts have been made to train Traditional Birth Attendants (TBAs) and implement programs such as the Prevention of Mother to Child Transmission (PMCT) of HIV/AIDS, which is supported by UNICEF. Additionally, these organizations conduct advocacy campaigns emphasizing the importance of attending Ante-Natal Care (ANC) through tours of the 11 local government areas (LGAs) in Gombe State (AbdulGafar, 2017; FOMWAN, 2015b). FOMWAN, in particular, has taken a keen interest in promoting reproductive and maternal health by providing various services such as in-patient, out-patient, antenatal and postnatal care, surgical procedures, laboratory services, radiography, and VVF repairs (AbdulGafar, 2017).

Furthermore, Muslim women faith-based organizations actively engage in creating awareness, sensitization, and community mobilization to improve the overall health status of the population, particularly women and children (Sintali, 2021).

In addition to healthcare facilities, Muslim women faith-based organizations in Gombe State contribute to education for marginalized communities. Through partnerships with organizations like Women in Nigeria (WING), guidance and counseling initiatives, the Doma Education Development Foundation, and the Planned Parenthood Federation of Nigeria (PPFN), these organizations have raised funds to establish schools in remote areas with limited access to education (Sintali, 2021). They have also launched the Education Crisis Response Project to address educational challenges.

The MSSN Sisters Wing in Gombe State engages in numerous social activities and services, some of which are carried out jointly with their male counterparts, while others are solely undertaken by the Sisters Wing. Many of these activities align with the objectives of the national body and are replicated at the state level.

One such activity is the organization of quiz and essay competitions for female Muslim students in post-primary institutions. These competitions aim to stimulate academic engagement and prepare students for future challenges (Sintali, 2021).

The MSSN Sisters Wing in Gombe State conducts symposiums in female public schools on a termly basis. These symposiums serve as platforms to enlighten students about various relevant issues within the school environment. Schools such as Government Girls Secondary School, Doma, FGGC, and GGSS Kuri are among those where these symposiums are organized (Sintali, 2021).

The Hijab Week Program, conducted annually by the national Sisters Wing, holds great significance. Considering the importance of hijab for Muslim women and the challenges they may face in school environments, the Gombe State Sisters Wing periodically reminds female students about the obligation and rights associated with wearing the hijab. This program emphasizes the fundamental right of Muslim sisters to wear hijab both within and outside school campuses (MSSN Gombe Area Unit, HWP). In Gombe State, many schools affiliated with MSSN organize weekly programs to enlighten and remind the Muslim Ummah about the challenges they face regarding the hijab (Sintali, 2021).

4.3. Challenges of Muslim Women Organizations in Gombe State

Despite their commendable efforts, Muslim women faith-based organizations in Gombe State face several challenges in fulfilling their social responsibilities:

- a) **Financial Problems:** One major challenge is the lack of a sustainable source of funds to support their activities. These organizations heavily rely on donations and contributions, which can be unpredictable and insufficient to meet their growing needs.
- b) **Lack of Support from Government:** Limited support from government institutions hinders the effectiveness and impact of Muslim women organizations. Without adequate government backing, these organizations struggle to implement their programs and initiatives at a larger scale.
- c) **Traditional and Cultural Restrictions:** Traditional and cultural norms in male-dominated societies sometimes limit the active participation of women in these organizations. Women may face resistance or discrimination, which obstructs their ability to fully contribute and make a meaningful impact.
- d) **Insecurity:** The prevailing insecurity in Nigeria poses significant challenges to the activities of Muslim women organizations. The unstable security situation in Gombe State and other parts of the country can disrupt their operations and limit their outreach efforts.
- e) **Religious Extremism:** The emergence of new waves of religious extremism within the Muslim community presents challenges to the work of these organizations. Religious extremist ideologies can hinder their progress and create divisions within the community, making it difficult to achieve their goals effectively.

Despite these challenges, Muslim women faith-based organizations in Gombe State continue to play a crucial role in promoting social responsibility, empowering women, providing healthcare and educational services, and raising awareness about Islamic principles. Their efforts contribute to the development of a more inclusive and equitable society, where women are recognized for their contributions and given opportunities to thrive. Through perseverance and collaboration, these organizations strive to overcome obstacles and make a lasting impact on the lives of individuals and communities in Gombe State.

5. Conclusion

This study has examined the social responsibility of Muslim women organizations in Gombe State, Nigeria, with a focus on FOMWAN, MSSN Sisters Wing, and MSO. These organizations have made substantial contributions to women's empowerment and the promotion of social responsibility in the state.

The findings of this study highlight the significant socio-economic and political role played by these faith-based Muslim women organizations in Nigeria. Their efforts have had a profound impact on society, addressing various areas such as education, healthcare, capacity building, and humanitarian services. It is evident that their work has positively influenced the lives of individuals and communities.

The study revealed that these organizations are actively involved in spreading Islamic teachings, establishing women Islamiyyah schools, providing healthcare interventions, and contributing to education in marginalized communities. These initiatives have resulted in the empowerment of women, increased female participation in diverse fields, and an overall improvement in their well-being.

However, it is important to acknowledge the challenges faced by these organizations in fulfilling their social responsibilities. Financial constraints, limited government support, traditional and cultural restrictions, insecurity, and religious extremism hinder their effectiveness in carrying out their activities.

Nevertheless, despite these challenges, the Muslim women faith-based organizations in Gombe State have shown resilience and continue to make a lasting impact. Through their unwavering dedication, collaboration, and commitment to social responsibility, they have reshaped societal perceptions, empowered women, provided essential healthcare services, and promoted education.

This study emphasizes the significance of recognizing and supporting the efforts of Muslim women organizations in Gombe State. It is crucial for the Nigerian government and relevant stakeholders to take deliberate actions in improving the conditions of the less privileged segments of the population. Addressing the challenges faced by these organizations, such as financial limitations and cultural restrictions, is essential to enhance their effectiveness and extend their reach to more individuals and communities.

In conclusion, the Muslim women faith-based organizations in Gombe State exemplify the crucial role of Muslim women in promoting social responsibility and creating inclusive and equitable societies. Their work serves as an inspiration and a catalyst for positive change, not only within Gombe State but also across Nigeria and beyond. It is recommended that further research and support be encouraged to amplify their impact and ensure a brighter future for Muslim women and their communities.

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