

**GENDER ROLES IN RELIGION AND DEMOCRATIC SUBSTANCE IN NIGERIA: AN
IMPLICATION FOR GENDER EQUALITY**

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the complex relationship between religious gender roles and gender equality within Nigeria's contemporary democratic framework. Nigeria, with its diverse religious landscape comprising Christianity, Islam, and traditional African religions, presents a unique case study for understanding how religious doctrines and practices influence gender equality in democratic societies. Through a comprehensive analysis of existing literature and empirical evidence, this study explores how traditional gender roles embedded in religious institutions both challenge and potentially support gender equality initiatives. The research reveals that while religious institutions often perpetuate traditional gender hierarchies that limit women's participation in political, economic, and social spheres, they also possess transformative potential as catalysts for gender equality when progressive interpretations and reforms are embraced. The findings indicate that Nigeria's democratic progress is significantly influenced by the negotiation between religious traditions and modern egalitarian values, with implications for policy-making, legal frameworks, and societal transformation. This paper concludes that achieving sustainable gender equality in Nigeria's democracy requires strategic engagement with religious institutions, promoting inclusive theological interpretations, and developing culturally sensitive policies that bridge the gap between religious values and democratic principles.

Keywords: Gender roles, religion, democracy, gender equality, Nigeria, Islam, Christianity, traditional religions, policy implications

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Introduction

Nigeria's shift to democracy in 1999 was a major step forward in the country's political journey. However, the promise of equal and democratic governance has often been complicated by ongoing gender inequalities that are deeply rooted in long-standing religious and cultural traditions (Mama, 2020). As Africa's most populous nation with more than 200 million people, Nigeria's religious makeup is incredibly diverse: about half of the population identifies as Muslim, 40% as Christian, and the rest follow traditional African religions (Pew Research Center, 2019). This rich religious diversity adds to Nigeria's cultural wealth but also presents complex challenges when it comes to achieving true gender equality within a democratic framework.

The intersection of religion and gender holds particular importance in Nigeria because the country's constitution guarantees both religious freedom and gender equality. Article 42 of the 1999 Constitution forbids discrimination based on sex, while Article 38 protects freedom of religion (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999). Yet, despite these formal protections, putting these ideals into practical effect has been difficult. Deeply ingrained traditional gender roles within religious institutions and practices continue to limit progress.

Religious institutions in Nigeria have a strong influence over social norms, family life, and everyday behaviors. This makes them key players in either promoting or obstructing

efforts toward gender equality (Okafor & Akokuwebe, 2021). The challenge is to find ways to engage these institutions positively supporting democratic values while respecting religious independence and cultural traditions.

This paper explores the complex relationship between religious gender roles and gender equality in Nigeria's modern democracy. It asks important questions such as: How do traditional gender roles shaped by Nigeria's major religions affect women's participation in democratic life? In what ways do religious institutions help or hinder gender equality? And how can policy makers design effective interventions that balance respect for religious traditions with the goal of achieving democratic gender equality?

This study takes a qualitative approach, drawing on secondary data and an extensive review of existing literature to explore how religious gender roles intersect with gender equality in Nigeria's democracy. To gain a deeper and more nuanced understanding, the research applies several analytical lenses, including feminist theological analysis, democratic theory, and postcolonial studies. This combination allows the study to carefully examine the complex dynamics at play in this important issue.

Conceptual Clarification

Gender

Gender refers to the characteristics of women, men, girls, and boys that are socially constructed. This includes norms, behaviors,

and roles associated with being a woman, man, girl, or boy, as well as relationships with each other ((World Health Organization, 2020). As a social construct, gender varies from society to society and can change over time. Gender is hierarchical and produces inequalities that intersect with other social and economic inequalities. Gender-based discrimination intersects with other factors of discrimination, such as ethnicity, socioeconomic status, disability, age, geographic location, gender identity, and sexual orientation, among others. This is referred to as intersectionality. Hornby (2005) defined gender in Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary as 'the fact of being male or female'. But this is more than just physical differences. It includes the totality of what makes a man, a man, and what makes a woman, a woman. Thus, it includes psychological orientation and physiological differentiation. Gender may be referred to as a system of roles and relationships between women and men that are determined not only by biological traits but by the social, political, and economic context (World Health Organization, 2020). Gender can equally be seen as the process by which individuals, who are born into biological categories of male and female, become the social categories of men and women through the acquisition of locally defined attributes of masculinity and femininity (Cornwall & Lindisfarne, 2016). This is the fact of being male and female. The pursuit of equal rights for women through international law has been a slow process. The principle that everyone is entitled to rights 'without distinction of any kind, such

as race, colour, or sex was given voice in Article 2 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. However, the declaration was non-binding and it took over 30 years for the international community to create a robust legal framework against gender injustice. The Convention to eliminate all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) was adopted in 1979 (Ayeni & Ajibogun, 2013).

However, the religious system in Nigeria is expected to advocate for gender liberation, freedom and more participation in decision-making. It is apparently that the status of the study of gender in religion also reflects the status of women in society as a whole (Sibani, 2017). Religion plays a vital role in the cultural life of different spaces; it is deeply rooted in peoples' experiences and influences the socio-economic and political direction of society. Akindele & Dunmade (2020), therefore, believe that religion in Nigeria has encouraged certain women who have risen to significant positions and that there was no statistically significant difference between Christianity, Islam and other religion in their participation in the decision making process. Adeogun (2016) therefore, maintains that different challenges have been identified in various studies on women and politics as inhibiting women's political participation. Some of these are vulnerability, fear of internal ostracism, and male dominance, stigmatization, low level of education, meeting schedules, and financing, political violence, religious and cultural barriers. . Kelly (2019) reports that in Nigeria, religious

and traditional norms reinforce practices which inhibit women's political participation. Therefore, Orji et al. (2018) observe that some Nigerian political parties build their functionalities around religious and cultural norms, thereby enshrining some forms of gender roles.

Religion

Religion is a pervasive social institution that encompasses a system of beliefs, practices, and moral codes centered on the sacred and divine, significantly shaping the behavior, values, and identities of individuals and communities (Alade & Adeyanju, 2016). In Nigeria, religion transcends the private sphere and profoundly influences social and political life due to the country's diverse religious landscape, which includes major faith traditions such as Islam, Christianity, and indigenous beliefs. Understanding religion's role is indispensable to analyzing Nigerian democracy because religion shapes political inclinations, participation, and governance at multiple levels (Alade & Adeyanju, 2016).

In the context of Nigerian democracy, religion plays multifaceted roles. It fosters social cohesion by providing shared moral values that can underpin democratic ideals such as justice, respect for human dignity, and the rule of law (Koko & Oko, 2020). Religious institutions mobilize civic participation and have the potential to act as agents of peacebuilding and social stability in Nigeria's ethno-religiously plural society (Alade & Adeyanju, 2016). However, religion's intersection with politics can also pose

challenges. Politicians may exploit religious identities to consolidate power, often leading to voter manipulation, marginalization of minority groups, and inter-religious tensions that undermine democratic consolidation (Oshewolo & Borok, 2016; Okpaga, 2016). A major challenge remains the complexity of navigating the diverse religious beliefs to foster a common public political space that respects freedom of conscience while promoting inclusive governance (Alade & Adeyanju, 2016).

Democracy

Democracy from conceptual clarification is explained as a form or system of government under which people exercise the governing power, either directly or through the representatives that they elect periodically (Bernal, 2013). The popular Abraham Lincoln definition of democracy is germane here. He sees democracy as the government of the people by the people and for the people (Schmidt, 2013). In this case, a state is said to be democratic if it provides institutions for the expression and, in the last analysis, the supremacy of the popular will in basic questions of social direction and policy. The popular will is what the people want the government to do for them. People here do not exclude women, the policy emphasizes the participation and involvement of sane people in the state (Harris et al., 2010). From the explanation above, democracy is seen as a system of government through elected representatives. It also refers to an attitude of a set of people yearning for freedom through

equal treatment and equal recognition. And in fact, equality is an important democratic value, though not in an absolute sense as in the Athenian model. Equality, in this sense, must be seen as equality of opportunity in an open competition, creating room for equal participation and recognition in governance. The notion of democracy and democratic process emphasize that every effort by the citizen irrespective of colour, sex, religion, etc. must be rewarded equally. Thus, the democratic system is built on treating equals equally and unequally (Ayení & Ajibogun, 2013).

Traditional Gender Roles in Religion

Islamic Gender Constructs in Northern Nigeria

In Northern Nigeria, Islamic traditions have long emphasized distinct but complementary roles for men and women, rather than equal ones, assigning separate responsibilities to each gender (Callaway & Creevey, 1994). According to traditional Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh) as practiced in this region, men are seen as heads of households tasked primarily with economic support and external affairs, while women are largely responsible for domestic duties and child-rearing (Imam, 2012).

The practice of purdah, or female seclusion, continues to play a significant role in many Northern Nigerian communities, restricting women's freedom of movement and participation in public life (Pittin, 2002). However, scholars such as Imam (2012) suggest that these practices stem more from cultural customs than from the core teachings

of Islam, which emphasize the spiritual equality of men and women. This ongoing tension between cultural traditions and Islamic reform movements has opened up possibilities for alternative interpretations that promote greater gender equality.

Sufi orders like the Qadiriyya and Tijaniyya, which are influential in Northern Nigeria, have historically granted some women religious authority and influence, albeit within certain limits (Boyd, 1989). Female religious scholars and spiritual leaders in these traditions have occasionally contested restrictive views on women's roles, fueling important discussions about gender within Islamic practice.

Christian Gender Dynamics in Southern Nigeria

Christianity arrived in Nigeria through missionary efforts in the 19th century and has since given rise to a variety of approaches to gender roles across different denominations. Mainline Protestant churches such as the Anglican, Methodist, and Presbyterian denominations have generally adopted more egalitarian views, ordaining women as ministers and supporting their active involvement in church leadership (Kalu, 2008). However, the rapid expansion of Pentecostal Christianity since the 1980s has introduced more complex and sometimes contradictory gender dynamics.

Pentecostal churches in Nigeria present a paradox when it comes to gender: they highlight spiritual equality and celebrate women's prophetic gifts, yet often uphold

traditional roles for women within marriage and family life (Ukah, 2008). The “prosperity gospel,” widely preached in many Nigerian Pentecostal churches, encourages women’s economic empowerment but typically maintains established hierarchies within marriage, with men as heads of households (Adogame, 2010).

In Catholic communities, especially in the Southeast, there is a delicate balance between the Vatican’s teachings on gender complementarity and local cultural expectations. While women are not permitted to be ordained as priests, they wield considerable influence through their work in religious congregations, educational settings, and social service organizations (Achunike, 2004).

Traditional African Religious Perspectives

Traditional African religions in Nigeria are diverse and reflect a range of ethnic traditions, each with its own understanding of gender roles. In Yoruba traditional religion, for example, powerful female deities such as Oshun, Oya, and Yemoja symbolize women’s spiritual authority and provide strong theological foundations for female leadership (Oyewumi, 1997). The Yoruba institution of the “iyaloja,” or market queen, also highlights formal roles for women in economic leadership.

Similarly, Igbo traditional religion recognizes important female roles, including the position of “eze nwanyi” (female king), as well as women serving as priestesses and ritual experts (Amadiume, 1987). However, the

influence of colonialism and missionary activity has often weakened these traditional forms of female authority, presenting challenges for advancing gender equality today.

In Northern Nigeria, Hausa traditional religions now largely merged with Islamic beliefs historically included “bori” spirit possession cults, which created unique spaces for women’s religious expression and social influence (Besmer, 1983). Despite the predominance of Islam in the region, these traditional religious practices continue to shape contemporary gender relations.

Gender Equality in Democracies

Gender equality in Nigeria’s democratic system is an ongoing challenge marked by significant disparities in political, social, and economic participation between men and women. While democracy aspires to promote equal rights and opportunities for all citizens regardless of gender, Nigerian realities reveal pronounced structural and cultural barriers that hinder this ideal (Ifejika& Ojo, 2024).

In political representation, women constitute nearly half of Nigeria’s population but remain severely underrepresented in governance. Female legislators account for less than 5% of national legislative seats, with all 36 state governors being men (Chinako&Daniel, 2024). This gender imbalance restricts women’s influence over policy discourse and decision-making processes that affect both men and women, perpetuating systemic exclusion.

Beyond politics, gender inequality permeates economic opportunities and social rights. Women face higher barriers to formal wage employment and greater domestic burdens, while gender norms often define roles in ways that limit men's and women's equitable access to education, healthcare, and technology (NBS, 2018). For example, only 13.4% of Nigerian women have ever used a computer compared to 21.8% of men, highlighting digital divides that affect economic participation (NBS, 2018).

Nigeria's legal framework and electoral institutions are increasingly mobilizing to address these disparities. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has developed gender-responsive policies aimed at enhancing both men's and women's participation by mainstreaming gender considerations throughout electoral processes (Osimosu& Adefisoye, 2023). Advocacy for the passage of gender quota legislation, such as the "Reserved Seat for Women Bill," seeks to guarantee legislative seats for women to foster inclusivity while preserving meritocracy (Ifejika& Ojo, 2024).

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in an interdisciplinary theoretical framework that integrates feminist theological analysis, democratic theory, and postcolonial studies to examine the complex relationship between religious gender roles and gender equality in Nigeria.

Feminist Theological Analysis
Feminist theology, influenced by thinkers such as Mary Daly, Rosemary Radford

Ruether, and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, provides critical tools to interrogate how religious doctrines, narratives, and interpretations shape and often reinforce gender roles. This approach challenges patriarchal readings of sacred texts and illuminates alternative, egalitarian interpretations emphasizing justice, dignity, and spiritual equality between men and women. In the Nigerian context, feminist theological analysis helps uncover how religious institutions can both perpetuate gender-based discrimination and, when progressive theological perspectives are embraced, act as powerful agents for promoting gender equality (Imam, 2012). This theory supports examining religious scholarship and leadership development as avenues for transforming restrictive gender norms within faith communities.

Democratic

Theory

Democratic theory, drawing on foundational ideas from theorists like John Rawls and Hannah Arendt, emphasizes equal citizenship, political participation, and human rights as core pillars of legitimate democratic governance. Rawls's principles of justice as fairness highlight the imperative of addressing inequalities including gender disparities to achieve a just society. Arendt's concept of the public sphere stresses inclusive political engagement as essential to democracy. Applied to Nigeria, this framework foregrounds the tension between the constitutional guarantees of gender equality and freedom of religion, and the influence of religiously informed gender norms that complicate women's full

participation in democratic life (Mama, 2020). This theory guides the analysis of policy interventions and institutional reforms that aim to reconcile democratic principles with religious and cultural realities.

Postcolonial

Studies

Postcolonial theory, influenced by scholars such as Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, and Homi Bhabha, provides insight into the lingering effects of colonialism on religious and gender dynamics. It reveals how colonial and missionary interventions disrupted indigenous religious authorities and gender systems, often marginalizing women's traditional roles and creating legal pluralism that complicates women's rights today. In Nigeria, this lens is critical for understanding how historical power relations and cultural resistance shape contemporary religious gender roles, as well as the negotiation between local traditions and global discourses on gender equality (Amadiume, 1987; Ezeilo, 2008). Postcolonial theory thus informs the study's exploration of how Nigeria's legal and social landscapes mediate the interplay between religion, culture, and gender.

By integrating the insights of these theorists and their frameworks, the study offers a rich, multidimensional understanding of the factors shaping religious gender roles and their impact on gender equality within Nigeria's democratic context. This comprehensive approach enables a nuanced examination of how religious teachings, political structures, and historical legacies can both hinder and promote women's empowerment and participation.

Impact on Gender Equality in Democracies

Political Participation and Representation

Religious gender roles play a major role in shaping women's political participation in Nigeria's democracy. In the 2019 general elections, women made up only 6% of the National Assembly, highlighting significant barriers rooted in deep religious and cultural expectations (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2019). This is especially true in Northern states, where Islamic traditions often stress women's roles within the home, leading to very limited female involvement in politics.

Nonetheless, progress has been made in some areas where religious institutions actively encourage women's political engagement. For instance, Christian women's organizations in the Southeast have successfully mobilized greater female participation, contributing to increased representation of women in state assemblies (Mama, 2020).

The notion of "political purdah" informal restrictions on women's public political activities justified by religious interpretations still restricts democratic involvement for many women in certain regions (Pittin, 2002). This shows how religiously based gender norms can significantly limit women's democratic rights, despite constitutional protections.

Economic Empowerment and Religious Constraints

Religious gender roles have a significant effect on women's economic involvement and empowerment in Nigeria. Historically, Islamic traditions, especially in Northern Nigeria, have supported women's participation in activities like petty trading and textile production (Hill, 1969). However, recent interpretations that stress women's domestic roles have sometimes limited these longstanding economic contributions.

In Pentecostal Christianity, the focus on prosperity and entrepreneurship has encouraged greater economic participation by women, helping to create prominent female business figures and politicians (Adogame, 2010). Despite these advancements, traditional expectations that men lead family financial decisions often remain influential.

Traditional African religions generally valued women's economic independence, but the impact of colonialism and modernization has weakened these systems (Amadiume, 1987). Today, a key challenge for Nigeria is to revive and adapt these traditional economic roles in ways that fit within the modern democratic context.

Legal Frameworks and Religious Law

Nigeria's legal landscape is complex, blending customary law, Islamic law (Sharia), and English common law. This creates challenges when it comes to achieving gender equality. Since 1999, twelve Northern states have implemented Sharia law, which has sparked concerns about women's rights especially in areas like inheritance, divorce, and criminal justice (Ostien, 2007).

The tension between religious legal systems and democratic principles is particularly noticeable in family law. Although the Nigerian Constitution guarantees gender equality, customary and religious laws often assign different rights and duties to men and women, leading to inconsistencies and inequalities (Ezeilo, 2008).

In recent years, Nigeria has passed laws like the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act of 2015, designed to create uniform protections against gender-based violence. However, the effectiveness of these laws varies widely across regions, as implementation is heavily influenced by local religious beliefs and cultural practices (Durueke et al., 2017).

Religion as Both Barriers and Catalyst

Religious Institutions as Barriers to Gender Equality

Religious institutions can play a major role in reinforcing gender inequality in several ways. First, some theological interpretations focus on gender complementarity rather than true equality, which can justify discriminatory practices (Imam, 2012). When religious leaders use sacred texts to endorse male authority and female submission, these views gain strong social acceptance.

Second, religious institutions often control important educational and social service resources, giving them the power to shape how gender roles are taught and understood from childhood through adulthood. For example, religious schools may promote

traditional gender roles through their curricula, behavioral expectations, and guidance on career choices (Callaway & Creevey, 1994).

Third, many religious authority structures exclude women from leadership and decision-making roles. When women are barred from becoming priests, imams, or traditional religious leaders, this exclusion reinforces hierarchical gender norms and sends a clear message about what roles women should play in society (Kalu, 2008).

Policy Development and Religious Considerations

The relationship between religious gender roles and policy development in Nigeria is complex and contested. Successful gender equality policies must navigate between constitutional requirements for equal treatment and respect for religious diversity and autonomy (Ezeilo, 2008).

The National Gender Policy, adopted in 2006 and revised in 2021, attempts to address this challenge by emphasizing dialogue with religious institutions and culturally sensitive implementation strategies (Federal Ministry of Women Affairs, 2021). However, implementation effectiveness varies significantly across states and regions depending on local religious contexts.

Legislative efforts face particular challenges when they conflict with religious interpretations of appropriate gender roles. For example, attempts to establish uniform marriage laws have faced resistance from

religious communities concerned about interference with religious autonomy (Ostien, 2007).

Policy makers increasingly recognize the need to engage religious institutions as partners rather than obstacles in gender equality initiatives. This approach requires sophisticated understanding of religious diversity and willingness to develop flexible, context-sensitive implementation strategies (Mama, 2020).

Societal Transformation and Religious Change

Religious institutions' role in societal transformation regarding gender equality extends beyond formal policy implementation to broader cultural change processes. As Nigerian society becomes increasingly urbanized and connected to global networks, religious institutions face pressure to adapt their gender teachings to contemporary realities (Ukah, 2008).

Younger generations of religious leaders often embrace more egalitarian interpretations of traditional teachings, creating potential for gradual institutional change. However, this generational shift occurs unevenly across regions and denominations, contributing to continued diversity in religious approaches to gender (Kalu, 2008).

The influence of international religious networks also affects local gender dynamics. Global Christian denominations' moves toward greater gender equality influence Nigerian churches, while international Islamic

reform movements similarly affect Nigerian Muslim communities (Adogame, 2010).

Education emerges as a crucial factor in religious and societal transformation regarding gender. As educational opportunities expand for women, including religious education, female scholars and leaders develop capacity to challenge restrictive interpretations from within religious traditions (Imam, 2012).

Conclusion

The relationship between religious gender roles and gender equality in Nigeria's contemporary democracy presents a complex mix of challenges and opportunities that deeply affect the country's democratic development. Religious institutions hold influential positions that can either promote or hinder gender equality, making their active engagement essential for sustainable democratic progress. Traditional gender roles rooted in Nigeria's main religious traditions - Islam, Christianity, and traditional African religions continue to shape women's participation in political, economic, and social spheres. Yet, the impact is neither uniform nor fixed. Some religious interpretations reinforce hierarchical gender norms that limit women's democratic involvement, while others offer theological and institutional bases for women's empowerment and equal participation. This paradox is evident in several ways: Islamic traditions in Northern Nigeria, although emphasizing women's domestic roles, also have historical precedents for female economic activity and

religious scholarship; the rapid rise of Pentecostal Christianity has fostered women's economic empowerment while upholding traditional marital hierarchies; and traditional African religions, once recognizing female spiritual authority, have been weakened by colonial and missionary interventions, complicating contemporary efforts toward gender equality.

The implications of these dynamics for Nigeria's democracy are significant. The continued presence of religious gender norms that restrict women's participation undermines the core democratic principle of equal citizenship and representation. When nearly half the population faces barriers to full political and social engagement rooted in religious interpretations, both the legitimacy and effectiveness of democratic governance are at risk specially given Nigeria's constitutional commitments to gender equality and religious freedom. However, there is also considerable potential for religious institutions to act as catalysts for change. Progressive religious interpretations that highlight human dignity, justice, and spiritual equality offer strong theological foundations to challenge discrimination. Alongside their moral authority, religious institutions' extensive social networks and control over education and social services position them as vital partners in promoting gender equality. Meanwhile, Nigeria's complex legal system which integrates customary law, Islamic law (Sharia), and English common law presents both obstacles and opportunities. Although the adoption of Sharia law in twelve Northern states has

raised concerns about women's rights, ongoing legal reforms and advocacy efforts suggest that culturally sensitive approaches can be developed to respect religious autonomy while advancing gender equality principles.

Recommendations

Based on this analysis, several key recommendations emerge for policymakers, religious leaders, civil society groups, and international partners who want to promote gender equality in Nigeria's democracy, all while respecting the country's rich religious diversity.

Government and Policymakers
Governments should support thorough research that highlights successful examples of religious institutions promoting gender equality. This research can provide valuable lessons and practical models that other communities and policymakers can adapt and apply.

Religious Leaders and Institutions
Religious leaders should focus on developing and sharing progressive interpretations of faith that emphasize justice, human dignity, and the spiritual equality of all people. This requires investing in religious scholarship that challenges outdated, discriminatory views. It's also important to increase women's roles in religious leadership such as ordaining women where allowed, creating leadership training programs for women, and making

sure women have a voice in religious governance and decision-making.

Religious schools and educational programs should update their teaching materials and approaches to promote gender equality while staying true to religious values. Educators need to be trained to identify and challenge gender stereotypes, and curricula should celebrate positive examples of women's roles in both religious and community life. Additionally, encouraging ongoing dialogue between different faith groups about gender equality can help build shared understanding and foster cooperation.

Civil Society Organizations

Civil society should build strong partnerships with religious institutions by improving cultural understanding and religious literacy among secular gender advocates. It's especially important to support religious women's groups, which often have the deepest insight and strongest influence in faith communities. Providing these groups with technical support, funding, and opportunities to exchange ideas will strengthen their impact.

Advocacy efforts for gender equality should be carefully tailored to fit local religious contexts, using language and frameworks that resonate with faith communities rather than relying solely on secular models. Civil society groups should also set up systems to regularly monitor and report progress within religious institutions, sharing both successes and ongoing challenges with religious leaders,

policymakers, and international partners to encourage open and informed collaboration.

International Development Partners

International organizations need to recognize the important role religious institutions play in advancing gender equality and develop strategies to engage them meaningfully, moving beyond purely secular approaches. Building partnerships with progressive religious leaders and groups is essential. Supporting the growth of religious leadership in gender equality advocacy—through scholarships for women’s theological education, exchange programs that expose leaders to inclusive interpretations, and backing institutions committed to equality—is critical.

It’s also valuable to create opportunities for Nigerian religious leaders to learn from the experiences of their peers in other developing countries, especially within Africa and the broader global South. Sharing these success stories and best practices can greatly strengthen local efforts. Additionally, international partners should invest in research and innovative initiatives that create theological scholarship, educational materials, and advocacy strategies which respect religious authenticity while promoting gender equality within faith contexts.

These recommendations offer a clear, respectful, and practical roadmap for advancing gender equality in Nigeria’s democratic society by working with all stakeholders and honoring the country’s cultural and religious richness.

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