

THE EXAMINATION OF THE ROLE OF ACHINA WOMEN AFTER THE NIGERIA-BIAFRA CIVIL WAR 1970-2000

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Abstract

This work examines how the lives of these women evolved in the face of globalization and democratization. Research findings from this study show that Achina Women progressed from the traditional *mise en scene* to the advanced world of modernization. The maleness syndrome which is the obvious norm of a typical Igbo culture did not hinder their active participation in the development of Achina and Anambra as a whole, as they were fully integrated in the happenings around their families and the state through various government programmes that gave them liberty to exercise their intelligence and capacity in various ways. The use of primary sources derived from oral information, focus group discussion, archival periodicals and newspapers, and archival materials from the National Archives, Enugu. Oral information was obtained through various people in Achina, group discussions and the use of questionnaires. To understand the necessity of this study, this paper grappled with the question: How did women's role in Achina evolve from the 1970s to the 2000s in response to local socio-political changes? This inquiry highlights the need to delve into the complex interplay of external forces, such as globalization and democratization, and their interaction with local dynamics bringing to light the broader implications of gender dynamics. Women's participation in politics, decision-making, and community development is central to understanding the evolving power structures within Achina.

Keywords: Achina, Women, Roles, Community, Community Development.

1. Introduction

In Achina, like many traditional societies, women had historically served as the backbone of the family, responsible for nurturing and sustaining their households. However, as the wind of change swept through the community, women's role extended beyond the confines of their homes. Empowered by increasing access to education and exposure to new ideas, they ventured into uncharted territories, seizing opportunities in education, entrepreneurship, and public life.

This transformation, while empowering, was not without its share of challenges. Women often found themselves pushing against deeply entrenched societal norms, challenging traditions that had long defined their roles. Nevertheless, their unwavering resilience and determination propelled them forward, resulting in unprecedented achievements that have indelibly marked the history of Achina.

The immediate years following the Nigerian civil war was markedly a period of transition and restructuring as the Eastern part sought to rebuild and recover most of what were lost and destroyed in the war. Achina community was not left out in this rebuilding process as its citizens sought to regain their status as an autonomous community capable of

sustaining itself and catering for its needs. However, while the wind of change and modernization already blowing in the socio-political structures of the Eastern parts of the country, the change in the social, political and economic lives of the women in Achina was not yet experiencing such rapid changes. This paper highlights and discusses in detail the social, political and economic structure of the lives of the women of Achina.

2. Social Life of Achina Women

The experience of Achina women within the context of their daily experience of life and of the world around them constitutes the discuss of this paper. It examines their day-to-day life and activities as was evident following the aftermath of the Nigerian Civil war. It is important to note that while there were evidences of progress in the lives of these women in the immediate years after the war, there was no abrupt change. The social life of Achina women will be discussed in the following sub-headings, namely: Achina women in marriage, widowhood rites in Achina and finally, the inheritance rites of women in Achina.

A. Achina Women in Marriage

The social life of the average Achina woman is epitomized in her marital life. Marriage embodies her destiny and what every Achina woman looks forward to; for any woman to pursue any profession or expertise, she must be prepared to do so within the sphere of marriage. Her doing the contrary by intentionally rejecting marriage or not being 'favoured' by marriage, negates any accomplishment she must have thought she has achieved. In such a scenario, she is likely seen as wayward or a social misfit. Nothing matters if an Achina woman remains unmarried, not her social status or achievement. Hence, it is common to see a woman desperate for marriage, ready to sacrifice or relegate her social status or achievements to the background until she ensures that she gets married.

The priority of marriage for Achina women and indeed, most Igbo women stems from the worldview that the husband of the woman is regarded as a shelter and protection for her. A belief encapsulated in the Igbo expression: "*Di bu ndo*", which roughly translates to "A husband is a shelter". Thus, a woman without the 'luxury' of having a husband is regarded as unprotected and defenseless. She is subject to harassment, pestering and aggravation at the hands of men and without a man to call her own, her ordeal intensifies.

Mrs. Ngozi Okereke, a determined Achina woman narrates how she had always aspired to become a successful entrepreneur while also yearning for a fulfilling marital life. Mrs. Okereke studied hard, worked diligently and achieved remarkable success in her business. However she never lost sight of her desire to find a loving partner. She finally met her husband, Mr. Chibuzor Okereke and she balanced her career with her newfound role as a wife and eventually a mother. Her achievement in both spheres were celebrated within her community aligning with traditional expectations.

Her story reflects the way Achina women prioritize marriage while pursuing their personal and professional aspirations. Marriage is seen as a complement to their accomplishments enhancing their social status and fulfilling their cultural roles.

Another pertinent reason why marriage is stressed for the average Achina woman is because it is regarded as a means of protecting her purity and chastity prior to marriage. While the issue of sexual purity before marriage is not taken seriously with regard to men, it is treated with gravity an importance when it concerns the female counterpart. Anne Nasimiyu-Wasike, in explaining why this has been the case in almost all African societies

and not just exclusive to Achina community is due to the fact that a woman is chiefly regarded as a “field of protection” of children. For her to remain a virgin or chaste prior to marriage then means this field is still intact and has not been tampered with, thus promising an utmost fruitfulness. In addition, young girls who are presumably chaste give intending suitors added reasons to believe they will exhibit more faithfulness to their husbands within marriage than others.

In the same vein, within the context of marriage, it is taken for granted that women of Achina must remain compliant, subversive and submissive to their respective husbands. Thus, in order not to jeopardize this societal norm, the traditional Achina man does not go seeking to marry a woman whom he perceives to be above him in social ranking, especially as it pertains to her family background, education or exposure.

More so, women are not involved in decision making. When a man intends to negotiate with the family of his daughter's suitor, no woman is allowed into the room where the marital negotiations and proceedings take place. The belief is that the menfolk are more rational and suited for such negotiations than their female counterpart who are relegated to the duty of beautifying the intended bride and preparing her for the occasion which follows the marital negotiations.

Mrs. Adaobi Ikem, a loving and determined mother experienced firsthand, the gender dynamics surrounding marital negotiations in the community. Her daughter, Obiageli had found a suitable suitor and the family was thrilled about the upcoming negotiations.

While the actual negotiations were held behind closed doors with the men of both families, Mrs. Ikem played a crucial role in her own way. She beautified her daughter making sure she felt radiant exuding confidence. Although, she wasn't part of the decision making, she exemplified the belief that the women of the community could contribute to the marital process, even if their involvement occurred outside the negotiation room.

Further, the art of cooking is one of the prominent duties which a married woman in Achina owes her husband. While her husband might help in providing some supplies for the cooking, it is the woman, nevertheless, who is expected to provide the necessary ingredients for the cooking. The onus lies on her to purchase these items from the market as the idea of a man buying groceries in the market is frowned at. More so, the woman must ensure that her husband's meals are made on time and dutifully served. It is a sign of negligence for the man to return from his daily chores and find out that no food has been made for him. In the same vein, the woman must also train her own female children to master the art of cooking and help out in the kitchen, so that when the latter matures, they may also be dutiful to their respective husbands and make sumptuous meals for them. A woman, however, who is menstruating is not allowed to cook for her husband as she is considered to be ritually unclean. However, this is no longer a common practice in Achina community but only observed by core traditionalists. In such a scenario, the woman's daughters cook for their father or her husband's other wives assume the duty, in the case of a polygamous home. The husband eating his wife's meals is a sign of love and content, hence, a man rejecting his wife's food was a very painful ordeal for the latter and often signified great tension and conflict in the home.

In Achina community, a woman is also expected to respect and submit to her husband in a great manner. It is frowned upon for a woman to raise her voice on her husband, argue with her husband or worse still, throw him to the floor during a fight. In the latter case, the erring wife must perform reparatory rites and sacrifices to restore the balance in her home

and appease her husband. This form of deference is often associated to be the *secret ingredient* of any successful marriage and a woman who flouts these societal and marital norms is considered to be unruly and obstinate. In severe cases, such women are sent parking and returned to her father's house, arrangements are then made with her family for her brideprice to be returned to her husband's family.

It is also the woman's duty to safeguard her husband's reputation at all cost, even if it demands her sometimes bearing the blame for her husband's irresponsibility. For instance, it is unthinkable for a wife whose husband is impotent to divulge this 'secret' to any outsider, even if it entails her being temporarily labelled *aga*, that is, infertile.

As regards the woman's sexual relations with her husband it is often the husband that sets the pace for their carnal relations. In any case, most women are often afraid to reject their husband's sexual demands at any time. This often stems from the fear of her husband seeking sexual pleasure elsewhere, in which case there exists the tendency he may contract a disease and bring it home to his wife or worse still, the man may decide to marry another woman.

In traditional times, polygyny was rampant. Many men took two or more wives, but this practice is not so common now as most men prefer monogamy to polygamy. Childlessness and the inability to bear a male child is worrisome to the families of both spouses. It is the woman, however, who bears the brunt of the situation more. In traditional times, when a woman dies in the community without conceiving any offspring, in order to convey their dissatisfaction with her, the community ensures her abdomen is slit across prior to her burial. According to Basden, she has failed to fulfil her function in life; and this mutilation of the corpse is the token of her failure; her name is blotted out for ever. Hence, most women end up being desperate to conceive by all means, which at times might lead them into being unfaithful in their marriage. Often, when the problem is found to be from the husband, secret arrangements might be made for the woman to have carnal relations with a man approved by the man's family, so that she may conceive.

Thus, one observes that the stability of a marriage is mainly placed on the woman. This may lead to an unhealthy dependence on her to do everything within her power to ensure her marriage is 'successful', even if it includes her making some painful compromises or enduring forms of domestic violence and abuse in her home. For instance, some level of wife-beating are allowed for the husband which is to the woman's detriment. An erring wife is expected to be disciplined by her husband, even if this entails beating or flogging. The community only takes exception in cases when the victim, that is the woman, is pregnant or the husband 'crosses the limit' in disciplining his erring wife.

Nevertheless, victims of such domestic violence are often reluctant to open up to people. Most times, the fear of being labelled a home wrecker, being 'too civilized' for marriage dissuades them from reporting their husbands to an external party. Indeed, the response to a questionnaire shared to 45 women revealed that 42% of women in Achina community had experienced a form of domestic violence in their marital homes. However, of this 42% of women had suffered abuse, only 12% had made an official complaint to any external party. Most prefer to keep quiet, living in the façade of being in a happy home.

A. Women and Widowhood Rites in Achina

The Igbo ethnic group generally regards the husband as the shelter, the glory, and the pride of the wife. Therefore, his death entails, as it were, the vanishing of the shelter, the glory, and the pride. This entails a very significant reduction in her social status and prestige.

Okagbue notes, that being bereaved of her husband, a woman immediately loses “that intangible but definitely observable status which Nigerian society accords to 'wife', the loss of which somehow makes the widow less deserving of respects and consideration than her married counterparts.”

The traditional widow, *nwanyi ajadu* undergoes a lot of mapped out rituals and rites at the death of her husband. These practices are often regarded as sets of expectations as to action and behavior, by the widow, actions by others towards the widow, and rituals performed by, on behalf of the widow from the time of the death of the husband.

In Achina community, the widowhood rites, *ima ekpe*, as it is called, are observed mainly before the funeral of the deceased husband. The first process involves the widow undergoing a phase of intensive wailing in commemoration of her late husband. Though, she is joined by other members of the household in crying for the dead, her own wailing is more pronounced as she runs around the compound, flailing her arms and bemoaning the death of her husband. This is intended to show her state of misery and her acceptance of hopelessness without a husband and the bleakness of her future at the loss of her 'glory' and 'pride'. In Achina community, the widow sleeps outside at the Ezemuo stream at night, after the death of her husband. During these nocturnal hours, she is expected to weep profusely till she falls asleep, she begin her early morning cry during the early hours of the day, after which she solemnly returns to her home and eat to regain some strength.

For example after her husband's passing, Mrs. Chinwe Nnadi experienced the Achina widowhood rites. She engaged in an intense mourning process, running around the compound and wailing to express her misery and hopelessness without her husband. At night, she wept by the Ezemuo stream, symbolizing her transition into widowhood. In the early morning, she returned home, resuming her daily routine while honoring her late husband's memory. These rites were emotionally challenging but deeply rooted in tradition, helping widows navigate the grief and transformation that comes with their loss. The widow during her observation of these rites is strictly supervised by the female relatives of her deceased husband, *otu umuada*. She is expected to carry out her mourning rites adherently and stoically, else she may be accused of having a hand in her husband's death.

Formerly, it was a very common practice for the widow's head to be thoroughly shaved and scrapped of any hair. Also, the shaving ritual is mostly carried out by the *otu umuada*. This process is known as the de-beautification phase, *imechi icho mma*. The woman is expected not to appear beautiful as the death of her husband, ensures that she literally has no need to show off her beauty at least temporarily, till her husband is laid to rest.

The shaving ritual usually precedes the wearing of the mourning dress, *uwe uju*. While this is not peculiar to the widow alone as other members of the deceased's family also put on a common mourning cloth, usually black in colour, however, that of the widow is more explicit. The widow wears a bigger pitch-black mourning attire, *ikpim*.

After her husband's passing, Mrs. Chinyere Okosi underwent the Achina tradition of head-shaving, a symbolic break from her previous life. She, like other family members, donned black mourning attire. However, her attire, known as "ikpim," was larger and more conspicuous, signifying her role as the widow and the depth of her grief. This practice highlights the significance of mourning attire in expressing the profound loss experienced by the widow in Achina community.

Several reasons are sometimes given for the de-beautification process such as an avenue

to ensure that the bond that exists between the woman and her husband is adequately severed. It is accepted that the uglier her appearance, the more unappealing she becomes to him and the more his spirit is dissociated from her.

After the de-beautification process, comes the period of physical confinement, *ino na nso*. The widow during this process stays confined in her own stead and is not allowed any physical interaction with outsiders, except the designated *otu umuada* who are to solely cater for her needs during this phase of her mourning. Thus, the widow is left alone to bemoan her fate. The fear of her being poisoned ensures that her meals are usually made by her own relatives. This extra caution is taken to avoid the danger of her dying during the mourning period, which is a taboo, and in some cases, a proof that she killed the husband.

Also her status as a woman ensures that she does not actively participate in the process of *igba izu* that is, consultations as regards the laying to rest of her husband. Rather, any suggestion she has to make is conveyed by her through her grownup sons, otherwise, she is shut off completely from the consultation and deliberation process.

Traditionally, once the widow completes her mourning period, she undergoes a final ritual rite to mark her re-integration into the community. The woman undergoes her final cleansing rite at the Ezemuo stream, where she is accompanied by the *otu umuada* and bathed naked. A communal meal is then prepared at her expense, to finally discard her state of impurity and confirm her re-integration into the community. Once this last cleansing rite is successfully completed, the widow once again is free to discard her *uwe uju* and start once more to beautify herself and interact freely with members of her community. In fact, having been freed from the obligation she owes her husband, she is now free to meet other men and may choose to re-marry, return to her kin, or enter into levirate relationship, *nkuchi nwanyị*, with one of her brothers-in-law.

A. Achina Women and Inheritance Rights

As regards women inheritance rights in Achina, it follows the traditional Customary court prescription with regards what ought to be done to a deceased man's property after his death.

Normally, the stipulations of a person's will is followed in the devolution of his property when he is gone. However, only few men, in Achina and indeed most Igbo communities would ordinarily will their real property, especially land to their wives. Their real estate is usually willed to their sons and brothers. The wife can have access to the property indirectly through her male children. If for any reason a man does will them to his wife, the living relatives practically do not respect such wills due to the absence of effective means of putting it into force. In such a scenario, the Igbo adage *Onye nwuru anwu kechaa ekpe, ndi di ndu ekegharia*, which roughly translates to: when a person has made his will, after the demise the living will redo it; is forcefully implemented.

Okoye asserts:

However, on account of inherent cultural disregard for women, the testacy or intestacy of succession does not apply in the traditional communities in Nigeria. Customarily, a woman has no title to land, whether married or unmarried. The existence of a will ordinarily instructs how a dead man's property should devolve. Nigerian traditional society does not recognize wills, especially where such wills give the right of inheritance of landed property to women.

If the deceased leaves no will behind, as is mostly the case, the rules of intestate succession applies. The distribution of the deceased's estate under intestacy takes two forms: *per stirpes* and *per capita*. Distribution *per stirpes* usually happens in a polygamous household. In this mode of distribution, the eldest sons of all the wives, each representing his brothers of full blood, participate in sharing their father's estate. Each of them will then go and share his allotment with his brothers from the same mother. When the distribution is done *per capita*, the estate is shared out individually in the order of seniority among all the sons.

In a situation where a man's sons are not yet of age, either the wife alone or she together with any other member of the family is expected, according to the customary law, to hold the properties on trust for them until they are mature enough to manage them. The law requires, however, that even in those circumstances where the wife holds it alone, she must do so under the supervision of the nearest elder member of her husband's family. If, on the other hand, she has only female children all her husband's landed property go to his brothers. In a situation where a man has no surviving immediate brother, the law stipulates that his distant male relatives become the *oli ekpe* (successors to his estate). His wife or any of his daughters have no right to object.

All these points to the fact that according to legal experts, a widow only has the right to deal with her deceased husband's property, though with the consent of the family. By implication, her right over the property is merely possessory and not proprietary. She has no right to alienate or dispose of it in whatever form.

3. Achina Women Activities and Religious Participation

Catholic Women Organization

Achina community boasts a thriving Catholic community that actively engages in a wide array of social and developmental initiatives. Among these initiatives, the Catholic Women Organization (CWO) in the community stands out as a pivotal force for community development, consistently making substantial contributions to the betterment and advancement of society.

The CWO in Anambra State places a profound emphasis on education as a cornerstone of community development. Recognizing the transformative power of education, they actively champion educational opportunities for individuals of all ages. Their efforts encompass a spectrum of initiatives, including the establishment and maintenance of schools, provision of scholarships and financial aid to deserving students, and the organization of educational programmes and workshops. Through these concerted endeavours, the CWO has played a pivotal role in raising literacy rates and equipping individuals with the knowledge and skills essential for both personal growth and the advancement of their communities.

Mrs. Comfort Aghaneto, a dedicated member of the CWO in Achina, initiated a scholarship program. This effort provided underprivileged students with financial aid, enabling them to access education. The programme, supported by the CWO, significantly expanded educational opportunities for these students, promoting personal growth and community development.

Furthermore, the CWO's commitment to healthcare within the community is equally commendable. They have demonstrated a strong dedication to improving healthcare infrastructure, supporting healthcare facilities, and facilitating medical outreach programmes. This multifaceted approach ensures that community members have access

to quality healthcare services, ultimately contributing to enhanced well-being and health outcomes.

Poverty alleviation represents another key facet of the CWO's community development efforts. Through various initiatives, including microfinance programmes, vocational training, and income-generating projects, the organization empowers individuals to lift themselves out of poverty. By fostering economic self-sufficiency and financial stability, the CWO contributes significantly to poverty reduction and improved living standards within Achina community.

Women's empowerment is at the heart of the CWO's mission. They actively engage in programmes that promote gender equality, women's rights, and leadership development. By empowering women with knowledge, skills, and opportunities, the CWO not only enhances the status and agency of women within the community but also fosters a more equitable and inclusive society.

In summary, the Catholic Women Organization in Anambra State serves as a beacon of hope and progress within the region, actively driving community development across various critical domains. Their contributions in education, healthcare, poverty alleviation, and women's empowerment exemplify their unwavering commitment to the well-being and advancement of the society they serve. Through their tireless efforts, the CWO has left an indelible mark on Achina community, catalyzing positive change and fostering a brighter future for all.

4. Achina Women Organization As a Tools of Evangelization

Beyond their pivotal role in community development, the Catholic Women Organization (CWO) / Anglican Women Organization in Anambra State serves as a significant evangelization tool within the Catholic and that of Anglican church, actively propagating the teachings of the faiths and facilitating spiritual growth and religious education among its members. The organization's commitment to nurturing the spiritual well-being of its members is manifested through a range of religious activities that go beyond the realm of community development.

The Organization orchestrates regular retreats, creating sacred spaces for members to embark on spiritual journeys of self-discovery and communion with the divine. These retreats offer moments of reflection, meditation, and prayer, allowing members to deepen their faith and strengthen their connection with God. Prayer meetings organized by the organizations both Catholic and Anglican Faiths provide a communal setting where members can come together to offer supplications, thanksgiving, and seek divine guidance. Such gatherings foster a sense of spiritual community and mutual support among members, fostering spiritual growth and fortitude.

Furthermore, the women engages in active evangelization efforts, extending their outreach beyond the faithful community to reach non-faithful. They ardently share the message of the Gospel and the tenets of the Catholic, Anglican faith, contributing to the spiritual development of individuals who may be exploring or seeking a deeper connection with God. By actively participating in evangelization, the women enhances the visibility of the Catholic/ Anglican Church in Achina community and invites others to embrace the Christ.

In summary, the Achina women multifaceted approach to evangelization encompasses personal spiritual growth, communal worship, religious education, and outreach to non-faithful.

Through these activities, the organization enriches the spiritual landscape of the Catholic/ Anglican community in Achina and reinforces its role as a vital instrument for spreading the teachings and message of the Christ (Giorgi & Palmisano, 2020).

5. Non-Religious Women Wing

The Women's Wing of Achina stands as a dynamic and influential force, championing the development and empowerment of women. This dedicated group is steadfast in its commitment to advancing the rights and well-being of women, tirelessly advocating for gender equality, and addressing the unique challenges that women face within the context of Achina community.

Education emerges as a pivotal arena where the Women's Wing exerts a transformative influence. Their recognition of education's empowering potential for women and its role in fostering social development is unwavering. The Women's Wing actively channels its efforts into supporting educational initiatives. This includes the provision of scholarships, the organization of educational programs, and vigorous advocacy for equal access to education for girls and women. Collaborating closely with schools and educational institutions, they work to enhance educational opportunities while championing gender-sensitive teaching practices. Through these endeavours, the Women's Wing contributes significantly to the intellectual and personal growth of women across the community.

The Women's Wing also plays a pivotal role in championing healthcare initiatives within Achina community. Their partnerships with healthcare institutions and the organization of medical outreach programmes offer critical support to women and families in need of medical assistance. By raising awareness about women's health issues, conducting health screenings, and advocating for improved healthcare services, they are instrumental in facilitating better healthcare access and enhancing health outcomes for women in the state.

Beyond education and healthcare, the Women's Wing in the community actively engages in social welfare activities. Their provision of financial assistance to women in need, support for women's shelters, and empowerment programmes are paramount in enhancing women's economic and social standing. The Women's Wing vigorously promotes initiatives that safeguard women's rights, combat gender-based violence, and champion social justice. Through their dedicated social welfare activities, they play a pivotal role in forging a more inclusive and equitable society within the community.

The Women's Wing serves as an inspiring platform for women's empowerment and leadership development. Through workshops, seminars, and training programmes, they address critical issues such as gender equality, women's rights, and entrepreneurship. These initiatives provide women with the tools to develop leadership skills, engage in income-generating activities, and actively participate in decision-making processes within their communities. The Women's Wing's commitment to empowerment fosters the personal and professional growth of women across Achina.

Furthermore, the Women's Wing is deeply intertwined with the local community. Their active involvement in community development projects, collaborations with other organizations, and contributions to initiatives that promote social cohesion and unity serve as a testament to their commitment. Cultural events, fundraisers, and social gatherings organized by the Women's Wing celebrate the achievements and contributions

of women within the Achina community, strengthening bonds and fostering a sense of solidarity among women in Achina.

In conclusion, the Achina Women's Wing Anambra State stands as a vital force for the development and empowerment of women. Their contributions to education, healthcare, social welfare, and women's empowerment are instrumental in improving the lives of women and driving the overall development of the community. The Women's Wing's resolute dedication to gender equality, the protection of women's rights, and addressing the specific challenges faced by women in Achina exemplify the power of women's leadership and their capacity to bring about positive change. In their tireless efforts, the Women's Wing of Achina embodies the spirit of advocacy and progress, working towards a more inclusive and equitable society.

6. Achina Women Role in Economic Life

As already noted, agriculture plays a prominent role in the sustenance of livelihood of Achina community, while also enhancing their economic strength. The women of Achina are instrumental in helping to boost the economic structure of their community. They usually do this by assisting in the farms and cultivating such crops like yam, cassava, maize, okra, cocoyam, palmnuts, melon seeds, pepper et cetera.

Since, the women naturally assume the role of dependents in their matrimonial homes, depending on their husbands who act as lords, masters and providers in the family, they look up to their husbands to be the breadwinners in the family.

Hence, the married women with their daughters assist their husbands in managing their respective farmlands. Most of these crops are harvested and stored in the family homes as edibles while the mothers, most times accompanied by their daughters go to the marketplace to sell their wares. On the popular market day of *Orie-Achina*, which is held every four market days, many of these women take their places in the market and sell their items to customers who come from every part of the community; its respective villages and beyond.

These women then invest the money made from their sales into their respective homes, using it to take care of their children and wards.

With the rise in female education in the eastern part of the country, more female children were enrolled into schools and acquired formal education, further boosting their career opportunities and economic prospects.

7. Achina Women's Role In Contemporary Era

Achina women in the contemporary era are making significant strides in various fields, breaking traditional gender barriers, and contributing to the socio-economic development of their communities. Achina is a town in Anambra State, Nigeria, known for its rich cultural heritage and strong entrepreneurial spirit. Women from Achina in contemporary era are involved and active in the following:

Economic Empowerment: they are entrepreneurs, starting businesses, creating jobs, and driving economic growth. Achina women are actively engaged in entrepreneurship, trade, and commerce, contributing significantly to the local economy. Okafor opines that Achina women participate in major agricultural farming operations. These women also belong to different co-operative groups in their towns. Majority of them have longer years of farming experience which help them in making effective

decision at their family farm level.⁵⁷

Political Participation: women from Achina are increasingly involved in politics, holding public offices and advocating for gender equality. Oloyede Oluyemi argues that under international standards, both men and women should have equal rights opportunities to everything worldwide; most especially to participate fully in all aspects and at all levels of political processes.⁵⁸ However, Agbalajobi opines that in Nigeria, about 51 percent of Women are involved in voting during elections. Despite these, women are still under represented in both elective and appointive positions. Available statistics revealed that overall women political representation in government of Nigeria is less than 7 percent.⁵⁹

Education and Personal Development: Achina women are educators, pursuing careers in education, shaping young minds, and promoting literacy. Achina women are pursuing higher education and personal development opportunities, challenging traditional gender norms. Education is said to be a vehicle that break the shackles of poverty thereby leading to transformation, development and progress.⁶⁰

Cultural Preservation: women from Achina continue to play a vital role in preserving and promoting the community's cultural heritage.

Achina women are also actively involved in community development initiative, such as, empowering young girls through mentorship programme, supporting women's cooperatives and skill acquisition training, advocating for gender equality and social justice. The achievements of Achina women in the contemporary era are a testament to their resilience, determination, and innovative spirit.

Presently, so many women in Achina community have acquired degrees from a tertiary institution and are found in many sectors of the economy. The level of dependence on their husbands for catering for their basic needs is also greatly reduced, ensuring more economic willpower and strength.⁶¹

8. Conclusion

This paper provided an insight into the socio-political and economic (as well as the religious) lives of the women of Achina after the Nigerian civil war. The sustenance of some of the traditional values and customs as discussed in this paper, despite the level of modernization that had taken place in the country goes to show that these cultural values and worldview are well entrenched in the lives of these women and the community as whole. While some of the aspects of life discussed in this paper have undergone some reformation of some sorts, nevertheless, they remain of core value, especially to the lovers and adherents of tradition.

Achina women had played vital role to close the gap of gender inequality in Achina and helped in so many ways in building their community hence, the paper submits that all forms of inhuman discrimination and gender inequality must be challenged and opines for a deliberate, sensitive, consistent and systematic approach of gender relations this should include gender mainstreaming in all aspects of life. It also found out that lack of mentoring, poor remuneration, women's lack of interest in academia, family responsibilities, the lengthy period of training, and the ideology that women should have low career aspirations due to traditional roles ascribed to them, accounted for the observed disparity in education.

The implication of this disparity on the development of women is the general reduction in their research output and the perpetuation of their low status in academia. The paper

concludes that appropriate institutional adjustments and affirmation action programmes are necessary to meet women's demands for equality.

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