

Examining the Role of Christian Women Ministries in the Development of Some Selected Theological Institutions in North- Central Nigeria

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Abstract

This study examines the role of Christian women ministries in the development of Some Selected Theological Institutions in North-Central Nigeria. Despite cultural, religious, and institutional limitations that historically restricted women from leadership positions, they have continued to contribute significantly to the development of Theological Institutions through teaching, administration, discipleship, missions, counseling, church planting, music ministry, and community outreach. This study adopts historical and analytical methods to evaluate the contributions, challenges, and prospects of women in theological institutions. The study argues that Christian women ministries have positively influenced enrollment, spiritual formation, community transformation, and theological inclusiveness in North-Central Nigeria. However, patriarchal interpretations of scripture, socio-cultural restrictions, and inadequate institutional policies continue to hinder the full participation of women in theological institutions. The study recommends that Theological Institutions in North-Central Nigeria can achieve holistic development through intentional inclusion of women in theological training and leadership.

Introduction

North-Central Nigeria is home to many theological institutions that have played a crucial role in ministerial formation, leadership development, and the growth of all Christian denominations across the region. These institutions have contributed significantly to evangelism, discipleship, and community transformation. Historically, Theological Institutions in North-Central Nigeria are dominated by men because ministry leadership is perceived as a masculine responsibility. Women are largely confined to supportive roles within church structures such as choir leadership, children ministry, hospitality, and welfare services. Despite these stereotypes, theological discourse and practical realities have demonstrated the indispensable role of women in ministry in theological institutions.

Christian women ministry is the participation and involvement of women in Christian service, leadership, theological instruction, missions, counseling, discipleship, administration, and pastoral support within ecclesiastical and theological institutions. In North-Central Nigeria, women ministries have increasingly become instruments of educational development and spiritual formation within theological institutions. Women contribute to the growth and development of Theological Institutions through student mentorship, mission outreach, teaching, and administrative support. Adesanya argues that feminist leadership and women participation in theological institution are essential for gender justice and sustainable theological development in Nigeria (29).

Consequently, it is germane to examine the role of women ministries in the development of some selected Theological Institutions in North-Central Nigeria. This is because the region presents a unique context for theological education due to its religious diversity, Islamic influence, patriarchal

structures, and socio-cultural conservatism. The study discusses the historical development of Christian women ministries, the contributions of women to the development of theological institutions, challenges facing women in theological institutions, and strategies for improving women participation in theological seminaries.

Christian Women Ministries

Christian women ministries encompass organised and informal Christian services performed by women. Such ministries include teaching, evangelism, missions, music ministry, pastoral counseling, administration, discipleship, humanitarian outreach, and spiritual mentoring. In biblical accounts, especially in the New Testament, women such as Martha and Mary her sister (Luke 10:38-42), Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Susanna (Luke 8:2-3) contributed greatly to the ministry of Jesus. Also, women like Mary the mother of John Mark (Acts 12:12), Lydia (Acts 16:11-15), Priscilla (Acts 18:1-4, 18-28), and the four daughters of Philip (Acts 21:8-9) became known in the early Church for the ministerial dispositions (Morris 14).

Theologically, proponents of Christian women ministries argue that God empowers both men and women for service within the body of Christ. Biblical examples of women who demonstrated active involvement in leadership and ministry include figures such as Deborah, Esther, Priscilla, Phoebe, and Lydia. Feminist theological scholars emphasise equality, inclusiveness, and liberation from patriarchal restrictions. Adesanya substantiate this position and argue that theological education especially in Nigeria must reject discriminatory stereotypes against women in ministry because such stereotypes hinder institutional and spiritual development (31). Theological Institutions must serve as important platforms and a starting point for redefining women's participation in Christian leadership.

Christian women ministries in North-Central Nigeria are connected with community development. Women ministers frequently engage in literacy programs, conflict mediation, poverty alleviation, healthcare support, and

trauma counseling. These activities contribute positively to the public image and influence of theological institutions.

Historical Background of Christian women ministries in North-Central Nigeria

Turaki traced the origin of Christian women ministries in North-Central Nigeria to the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. He notes that these ministries were initially conceptualised within the rigid understanding of European and American missionary expectations. Early colonial missionary enterprises, such as the Sudan Interior Mission (SIM) established in 1893 and the Sudan United Mission (SUM), arrived in North-Central Nigeria with predetermined concepts of Christian womanhood (45). These early operations sought to instill western domestic values into indigenous female converts, focusing heavily on what is call "devout domesticity" (Women and the Christian Missionary Encounter 203).

Missionary wives trained indigenous women in western domestic science, home management, hygiene, needlework, and child care (Turaki 48). The aim of this train was to prepare African women to be suitable partners for native pastors and catechists. In these formative years, the participation of local women remained strictly auxiliary and informal (Women and the Christian Missionary Encounter 205). This type of training relegated women to supportive functions such as hospitality, basic prayer meetings, and childcare, while formal clerical authority and institutional administration remained exclusively patriarchal domains.

Despite this type of train, indigenous women strategically deployed their limited agency, subtly shifting their ministries from passive domestic circles into active platforms for social security, community evangelism, and material development across the North-Central region (Badejo 88). The transition of women's ministries from loose domestic groups to highly organised entities became evident by the mid-twentieth century. For instance, around 1930 in Jebbu-Miango, located within the Bassa Local Government Area of Plateau State, a woman endured severe complications during childbirth and nearly

lost her life due to a complete absence of local medical facilities. Her sister, named Daho, recognised the systemic threat maternal mortality posed to local women and mobilised the Christian women of the Sudan Interior Mission (SIM) in Miango with the aim of raising funds to purchase a bicycle, which would serve as an emergency transport system to convey pregnant women over twenty kilometers to the nearest medical facility in Vom (Brief History of ECWA 3-4).

Recognising the practical value of this grassroots mobilization, Miss E. Varley, an SIM missionary, formalised and sanctioned the initiative (Brief History of ECWA 4). This collaborative financial action effectively laid the historical foundation for what evolved into the Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA) Women Fellowship (Badejo 91). This incident demonstrates that early Christian women ministries in North-Central Nigeria were not merely inward-looking spiritual clubs; they were responsive, community-centered mechanisms designed to fill critical socio-economic and medical vacuums left by both the colonial state and early missions.

Concurrently, other denominational streams saw the birth of unified umbrella organizations that redefined female mobilization in the North-Central Nigeria. Around 1942, the *Zumunta Mata* (meaning "Women's Fellowship" or "Association of Women" in Hausa) emerged within the Church of Christ in Nigeria, now known as the Church of Christ in Nations (COCIN) (Ogli-Habila 6). Prior to 1942, women's groups existed as fragmented, isolated fellowships managed independently by individual pastors' wives at local parish levels.

The consolidation of *Zumunta Mata* created a unified regional structure that standardised women's involvement across North-Central Nigeria (Ogli-Habila 7). This movement rapidly spread to other mainline and evangelical denominations, including:

- i. The Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA)
- ii. The Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria (LCCN)
- iii. The United Methodist Church in Nigeria (UMCN)
- iv. The Assemblies of God

v. Anglican church

As these ministries matured, they developed unique cultural tools to exercise theological and social influence, most notably through the *Mawakan Zumunta Mata* (Women's Fellowship Choirs). In non-Pentecostal congregations throughout the North-Central Nigeria, these choirs became a crucial mechanism for women to negotiate power and express agency within liturgical spaces dominated by male clergy (Our Singing is a Ministry 47). Singing in local languages and utilizing traditional African instrumentation such as indigenous drums, these choirs blended local musical idioms with Christian devotional texts (Our Singing is a Ministry 49).

Through their public performances, particularly during annual event structures like "Women's Week," the *Mawakan Zumunta Mata* disseminated messages centered on social responsibility, peaceful coexistence, and communal resilience (Ogli-Habila 12). Their musical ministry provided a distinct public voice for women, allowing them to shape communal theology and model leadership without explicitly violating established church hierarchies (Our Singing is a Ministry 52).

The structural strength of these ministries culminated in larger ecumenical formations designed to address regional crises. In 1975, the ecumenical body *Tarayyar Eklisiyoyi Kristi a Nigeria* (TEKAN—The Fellowship of Churches of Christ in Nigeria) officially established the TEKAN Women Fellowship (Forced Displacement 115). This creation marked the first time indigenous women from various Protestant denominations across North-Central Nigeria formed a singular, unified front to address systemic regional challenges.

Despite these efforts, Yarkum observes that gender worldview and patriarchal traditions have historically limited women ordination and leadership opportunities within churches in North-Central Nigeria (54). However, the rise of Pentecostalism and evangelical Christianity in North-Central Nigeria has encouraged broader participation of women in ministry. For instance, the Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary introduced diploma programs in Christian women ministries and Religious Education as part of

its curriculum to improve women preparation and participation in church leadership (The Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary 111). The increasing acceptance of women theological education in North-Central Nigeria has contributed to seminary expansion. Female students now participate in theological studies, missions training, and leadership development. This transformation reflects changing attitudes toward Christian women ministries within Nigerian Christianity.

Contributions of Christian women ministries to the Development of Some Selected Theological Institutions in North-Central Nigeria

i. Contributions to Spiritual Formation and Mentorship

Generally, Morris (8) notes that women are found in forefront of church activities even in Africa where they are relegated to the background. In the area of spiritual formation and mentorship, Olajide and Oderinde portrayed Mrs Gowans as a good example. Mrs. Gowans was the mother of Mr. Walter Gowans, one of the founders of Evangelical Church Winning All (3). Her mentoring effort contributed to formation of Sudan Interior Mission (SIM) which evangelized North-Central Nigeria and established theological institutions. Today, women lecturers provide mentorship, counseling, and discipleship for students in Theological Institutions across the North-Central region.

Another instance is the case of Mrs. Rosette Kayser. She was the founder of the Youngstar Ministry, named ECWA Theological Seminary Youngstar Ministry, Igbaja, Kwara State. She founded the ministry as a way to cater to and nurture teenagers and children in the way of the Lord. The activities of the ministry include the following: library materials where children could find books and bible stories in written and visual form that could aid their meta narratives of the bible events and stories; weekly bible study; vacation bible school; scholarship for indigent children of the seminarians; Fulani evangelism and educational scholarship for the new converts; training of children teachers; writing of children ministry manuals; annual end-of-year party programs where she used the festive period to preach Christ to the

young people; children program outreaches within Kwara State and other states like Kogi, Kaduna, Oyo, Osun, Lagos, Ekiti, and so on (Olajide and Oderinde 8-9).

ii. Contribution to Mission and Evangelism

Christian Women ministries have greatly contributed to missionary expansion in North-Central Nigeria. Bauta (369) notes that Christian women ministries in North-Central Nigeria contribute to mission through prayer, nurture, and community engagement. They have engaged in evangelism, church planting, literacy education, and humanitarian outreach. In many rural communities, women missionaries have easier access to families and children than male ministers. Women therefore strengthen the missionary identity of theological institutions.

Theological Institutions benefit from women-led evangelical initiatives because such activities enhance institutional visibility and community impact. Women often coordinate outreach programs involving healthcare, orphan care, literacy training, and relief services. In ECWA theological college Karu, Mrs Rahila Emmanuel of the Department of Mission has been very active in organising outreach. The Department has nurture moral discipline, spiritual maturity, and emotional stability among students under her leadership.

Biblically, Titus 2:4-5 depicts mature women instructing younger women in every part of life, including marriage and home life. For Paul, a healthy church plant demands women discipline and training women and children. The vital roles women play in church planting, evangelisation, and organising can't be underestimated. Church planting demands teamwork, and those teams need women (Morris 19).

In North-Central Nigeria, Olajide and Oderinde (7) note that Women Fellowship International has been paying the monthly salaries of many missionaries both in Nigeria and across borders. Some missionaries' children are enjoying scholarships through the ECWA women's fellowship. This has motivated the commitment of many missionaries as they carry out their

missionary endeavors. "This is notable in the establishment of three different missionary schools located in Kaduna, Jos, and Gombe solely for missionary children as a way of reliving their parents' burden of not sending their children to school and to save them from financial incapacitation.

iii. Contributions to Administrative and Institutional Development

Christian Women ministries contribute to the development of theological institution through administration and management. Female staff members serve in registrar offices, libraries, student affairs, finance departments, and academic coordination. Their administrative competence enhances institutional efficiency and organisational growth. Many Theological Institutions in North-Central Nigeria depend heavily on women workers in both academic and non-academic capacities.

Ojo and Ajani (11) note a significant change that has occurred in the status and roles of women in the Nigeria Baptist Convention (NBC) through the appointment of women as heads of theological institutions. In 2021, Esther Ayandokun became the first woman to rise to the rank of a Professor in the NBC. She was appointed as the Rector, Baptist College of Theology, Oyo. Also, Helen Ishola-Esan was appointed as the President of the Baptist Theological Seminary, Eku in 2019. The inclusion of women in the administration of Theological Institutions promotes diversity, accountability, and balanced decision-making.

Enyinnaya (68) asserts that the inclusion of women in theological education increases student diversity and expands enrollment. Female students who receive theological education often become missionaries, educators, counselors, and church leaders. He emphasises that Theological Institutions must pursue holistic ministerial formation that integrates spiritual, intellectual, and practical dimensions of Christian Women ministry.

iv. Contribution to Community Transformation

Theological Institutions influence surrounding communities through social engagement and moral leadership. Christian Women ministries play major

roles in community transformation through education, advocacy, and humanitarian services. Onah et al. (4) observe that Christian Women ministers often organise vocational training programs, health awareness campaigns, and women empowerment initiatives. Such activities improve community relations and strengthen institutional reputation.

Generally, Adedotun et al (16) notes that Christian Churches today have strong women association, such as the Baptist women missionary union, Mother's union of the Anglican Church and the Catholic Women Organization (C.W.O) who have greatly influenced community transformation. Some of these organisations serve as a forum for women to educate, empower and guide each other.

Challenges Facing Christian Women Ministries in North-Central Nigerian Theological Institutions

i. Patriarchal Cultural Structures in North-Central Nigeria

Ojo and Ajani (4) assert that patriarchal culture has been a major factor in the subjugation and marginalisation of Christian women. In North-Central Nigeria, patriarchal culture is strengthened by Christianity, Islam and Traditional African Religion. These religions practiced rituals that restrict women from many leadership positions. They explain that this is because traditional patriarchal culture holds the belief that men are superior to women. Such cultural beliefs limit opportunities for Christian women within theological institutions.

For Morris (19) patriarchal attitudes often discourage Christian women from pursuing theological education. Female students may experience discrimination, exclusion from leadership positions, and limited preaching opportunities. Also, the patriarchal nature of African society assigns no place for women in public space. Women in Africa have been brought up to believe that their place is in the home not in public. Familusi (300) asserts the manifestation of this phenomenon in the preference for a male child over a female one.

Also, in Africa, women are expected to submit to men. They are supposed not to speak in the presence of men. Africans generally believe that a proper woman is one who should be quiet when men speak. Women are not expected to challenge the authority of men in Africa, otherwise it can be regarded as stubbornness or disrespect for the men. A woman dares not challenge any man in the typical African Society. Men who are regarded as first-class citizens are regarded as superior to women who are regarded as inferior second-class citizens (Morris 18). The implication of this is that women cannot be leaders in a group that comprises men.

In the same way, Ebila (146) notes that African society projects marriage as the end goal of women but when it comes to leadership in the society, they have no say. They are placed under the authority of men; they are to listen and not lead. She is expected to follow while men lead; she is being discriminated against in terms of position in society. Naturally a pregnant woman or a nursing mother may not be able to take up certain responsibility in the society especially leadership position (Onyenze and Ebebe 50). This women nature has affected their contribution in the development of Theological Institutions in North-Central Nigeria.

ii. Religious Conservatism

Religious conservatism is one of the challenges affecting Christian women ministries to contribute maximally in the development of Some Selected Theological Institutions in North-Central Nigeria. Some denominations are conservative about scriptural teachings such as 1 Timothy 2:12, 1 Corinthians 14:3, 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 without incorporating contemporary realities. This lack of contextualization has stand as road block to Christian women. According to 2019 Bye-Laws of ECWA, women's ministry is one of the ministries that ECWA shall establish. ECWA women in ministry shall be developed and structured to meet the needs of ECWA women. ECWA shall train women in various ministries in both the church and society. The ministry shall include teaching, evangelism, preaching, church planting, and counseling. ECWA shall empower women to do any church ministry in ECWA,

except pastoring or heading churches. This embargo still limits women's ministry in ECWA.

Nevertheless, the 2019 constitution of ECWA (9) states that "ECWA is an invisible entity and shall be governed in accordance with biblical principles of love and unity." But the denial of women from some ministries contradicts the unity of the church. Likewise, on page 11, it is written that "All ECWA members are equal before God in Christ Jesus and shall be entitled to equal rights in the body of Christ (Galatians 3:28), except where, otherwise, the Holy Bible is definitive about leadership and headship in the church" (Olajide and Oderinde 10).

iii. Educational and Economic Limitations

Many women in North-Central Nigeria face inadequate access to quality education and financial resources. Poverty, early marriage, and socio-cultural expectations prevent Christian women from contributing to the development of theological institutions. Educational inequality in North-Central Nigeria continues to affect women disproportionately. Onah et al. (6) observe that cultural and religious barriers contribute to low female educational participation in the region. This illiteracy has incapacitated many Christian women and made them begin to see themselves as those destined to always depend on men for almost everything. For such women, they cannot contribute to their personal welfare let alone contributing to the development of the church (Onyenze and Ebebe 49). Many Christian women are not financially buoyant enough to engage in certain development programmes in the church (Ojo and Ajani 5).

iv. Institutional Discrimination

Institutional discrimination is another challenge affecting the Christian Women Ministeries in contributing maximally in the development of Some Selected Theological Institutions in North-Central Nigeria. Historically, Badejo (112) notes that while women's auxiliary organisations such as the *Zumunta Mata* and CWO have served as foundational financial and logistical pillars for theological institutions, their presence within formal academic and

administrative leadership spaces has remained limited. Some Theological Institutions lack policies that encourage women leadership and participation. Female lecturers may receive fewer opportunities for promotion, leadership training, and academic recognition. Women in ministry also experience marginalization during theological conferences, ordination processes, and decision-making structures. Such discrimination undermines the development of Theological Institutions by limiting human resource potential. For instance, Smith (15) reveals that “Roman Catholic tradition favors gender discrimination in ministry.

Strategies for Enhancing Christian Women Ministries in Theological Institutions

The enhancement of Christian women ministries within Theological Institutions in North-Central Nigeria requires deliberate, structural, and pedagogical reforms. Turaki (89) argue that enhancing Christian women ministries within the contemporary theological landscape involves moving beyond the traditional paradigm of devout domesticity and shifting toward advanced theological literacy, institutional equity, and specialised skill acquisition. Through implementation of strategic institutional interventions, Theological Institutions can transform women's ministries from marginalised auxiliary units into fully integrated, academically rigorous, and socially impactful leadership bodies.

Another strategy for enhancing Christian women ministries is the institutionalisation of specialised certificate and degree programs tailored explicitly to women’s leadership, gender studies, and community development. Ogli-Habila (14) notes that many seminaries in North-Central Nigeria offered non-degree courses for women which focused primarily on domestic science, basic literacy, and hospitality . To modernise and enhance this model, institutions must upgrade these curricula into formal, accredited theological programs. For example, institutions, the Theological College of North-Central Nigeria (TCNN) in Bukuru have begun integrating specialised

tracks that address gender-based violence, trauma healing, and peace building within their mainstream theological curricula.

Furthermore, another essential strategy is the creation of formal mentorship networks and the deliberate integration of female theologians into core institutional faculties and governing boards. Badejo (121) notes that the absence of visible female role models within Theological Institutions has discouraged younger women from pursuing high-level theological studies. Theological Institutions must implement intentional recruitment policies to appoint qualified women to lecturing positions, academic deaneries, and institutional boards. Establishing mentoring networks where senior female academics guide younger students through the rigors of theological writing, research presentation, and ministry placement creates a sustainable pipeline of female leadership.

Conclusion

Christian women ministries have played a significant role in the development of Theological Institutions in North-Central Nigeria. Through academic contributions, spiritual mentorship, missionary engagement, administration, and community transformation, women have strengthened theological education and church development in the region. Despite cultural, institutional, and religious challenges, women continue to demonstrate resilience and commitment to the development of theological institutions. Their contributions have expanded institutional enrollment, improved spiritual formation, and enhanced community outreach. Theological Institutions in North-Central Nigeria must therefore embrace inclusive policies and theological perspectives that recognise women as valuable partners in ministry and theological development. Sustainable institutional growth requires the active participation of both men and women in theological education and leadership.

Recommendations

The following are the recommendations of this study;

- i. Women should always recognise their worth and position in the quest for the development of Theological Institutions and so should brace up to confront gallantly all the social, religious, economic and political impediments that hold them down.
- ii. Leaders of Theological Institutions should cooperate and give unflinching support to the Christian women in their efforts to contribute diversely to the development of theological institutions.
- iii. All the wrong notions, cultural biases and stereotypical beliefs about women should be thrown overboard in order to fully harness the galaxy of their natural endowments for the development of theological institutions.

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APPENDIX

List of Some Selected Theological Institutions in North-Central Nigeria

S/ N	Institution	Denomination
1	Theological College of North-Central Nigeria (TCNN) (Bukuru, Plateau State)	Interdenominational
2	RCN Theological Seminary - Adullam (Makurdi, Benue State)	Interdenominational
3	Jos ECWA Theological Seminary (JETS) (Jos, Plateau State),	ECWA
4	ECWA Theological Seminary, Igbaja (ETSI) (Igbaja, Kwara State)	ECWA
6	ECWA Theological Seminary, Karu (KETS), FCT, Abuja	ECWA
7	Reformed Theological Seminary (RTS), Mkar (Gboko, Benue State)	NKST
8	Gindiri Theological College (Gindiri, Plateau State)	COCIN
9	Jos Reformed Theological College (JRTC) (Jos, Plateau State)	COCIN
10	St. Augustine's Major Seminary (Jos,	Catholic

	Plateau State)	
11	St. Thomas Aquinas Major Seminary (Makurdi, Benue State)	Catholic
12	Good Shepherd Major Seminary (Kakuri, Kaduna State)	Catholic
13	Petros Christian College and Seminary (Makurdi, Benue State)	Pentecostal
14	Spread the Word Bible College (Gboko, Benue State)	Pentecostal
15	North-Central Nigeria Bible College (Jos, Plateau State)	Pentecostal
16	Baptist College of Theology (Lamingo, Jos, Plateau State)	